

## THE HISTORICAL ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF NIGERIA POLICE FORCE: A POLITICAL ECONOMY PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

*This article examines the historical origin and evolution of the Nigeria Police Force within the context of political economy. It contends that the problems and challenges of the force which has the functions of crime prevention, protection of lives and property and the preservation of law and order cannot be meaningfully understood in isolation from the development of the Nigerian State. It argues that the Nigerian state, as a creation of colonial capitalism, not only imposes order through its agencies and institutions including the police but reproduces a particular form of social order which involves class biases and which differentially distributes opportunity, wealth and power between the different classes and groups in society. Thus, the article concludes that the police is simply an agency that deal in and dispense violence in protection of the interest of the state and the class that controls it, and recommends that the Nigeria Police Force deserves more urgent and effective structural and institutional reforms to be able to overcome its myriads of problems.*

*Keywords: historical origin, evolution, Nigeria police, political economy, colonialism, state, class*

### Introduction

A discussion of the historical origin and evolution of the Nigeria Police Force within the context of political economy challenges our understanding of the methodological significance of the approach itself. Political economy as an approach of study, whether of the Marxian or other variants of it, with slight modifications, is concerned with the social laws and dynamics of the production and distribution of material means of satisfying human needs. It implies an analysis of historical economic relations given specific tools of analysis, namely classes in social action. According to Lenin (1976:36), social class is regarded “as a large group of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determine system of social production, that is, by the relation (most cases fixed or formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in social organization of labour and consequently by the dimensions of the share of social wealth at their disposal and the mode of acquiring it”.

In political economy approach, primacy is given to economic activity because it considers man as he is, not as he should be, and thus makes the fundamental assumption that the physical needs of man come first. Man in the quest for food starts his journey from nature.

Therefore, the first economic relationship is that between man and nature. The structure of our society arises from the way in which we make our living, so that men relate to nature at the same time as they relate to each other. In the course of these complex interactions and relationships, contradictions arise because of the antagonistic inclinations and orientations of interests between interacting social classes. In fact, from the political economy perspective, society may be seen to have been divided into two main levels (economic and non-economic) which relate to each other in a dialectical manner but the economic level being the most crucial and critical level. Thus in discussing the historical origin and evolution of Nigeria police force, political economy approach is assigned a crucial instrumental value, and this is, intended to lead ultimately to a clarification of the class character and context of the Nigeria police Force. The main purpose in doing this is to show, using economic, political and ideological criteria, that the Nigeria Police force as it is today, with all its myriads of problems cannot be meaningfully discussed in abstraction or isolation from the historical development of Nigeria as a country. It is only in this context that the Nigeria police force can be effectively evaluated so that proper attention and sympathy of all stakeholders and all those who sit in judgment over police matters in this country can be drawn to the reality that the Nigeria police Force deserves more urgent and effective structural and institutional reforms.

Unarguably, the most worrisome issue in Nigeria today is the pervasive issue of insecurity of lives and property as a result of the increasing wave of crimes, oftentimes, violent in character. This all important assignment of crime prevention and enforcement of law and order in the society is given to the Nigeria police Force. Unfortunately, however, this duty of the police has become very complex, intricate and challenging to the extent that the Nigerian public would rather prefer a police –less society to having one that is both ineffective and corrupt. Quite recently, Human Rights watch, a United States-based human rights organization in a 102 page report detailed how the Nigeria Police Force made a total of N20.35 billion between January 2009 and June 2010 through the extortion of money from motorists at illegal checkpoints (Tell, August, 2010: 46). Thus, in the court of public opinion, the police is not only seen as being ineffective but also corrupt not minding the fact that the Nigerian society is neck-deep in corruption to the extent that the society absorbs corruption as the order of the day, a normal thing rather than the exception.

But this impression about the Nigeria police force is rather unfortunate as the police work in a most unfriendly environment where most of its actions are misconstrued by members of the public. For instance, their being used as instruments of coercion, oppression and intimidation by members of the bourgeois (exploiter) class against the rest of the society especially the laboring (exploited) class coupled with other inadequacies portray them as callous, ineffective and lack –luster in performing their duties in the eyes of the public. In reality however, the alleged lack-luster performance, corruption and ineffectiveness are greatly determined and influenced by other factors completely outside the control of the police. In this context, the government of the Nigeria State (which has neglected the Nigeria Police Force over the years); a government that is controlled and managed by the powerful and affluent members of the bourgeois /ruling/exploiter class, who control the coercive instruments of state apparatuses, including the Nigeria Police Force, and the means of production thus, determining life and attitudinal traits of the citizenry; and the society at large which is in itself lawless, with a free-rider mentality; are the greatest influencing agents. Thus, it may be argued that the police

are corrupt only to the extent that the Nigerian society is corrupt. It rests within the realm of idealism for anyone to see an incorrupt Nigeria Police Force, especially in a corrupt Nigerian society under a seemingly failed government controlled and managed by an unproductive ruling class. The police are simply paid servants of government, and they are part of and not part of the society. And no man has ever outgrown his society in human existence. The police are simply victims of corruption, and ineptitude that always characterize any failed government/society and not perpetrators of such things. So that the public aggression which often characterize police-public relations is simply a misplaced and transferred aggression on a servant (the police) whose wicked master (failed government) cannot be easily reached (Ibulabo, 2006).

### **Conceptual Framework**

There have been controversies among scholars as to origin and historical evolution of the Nigeria Police Force. These controversies arise partly because of the perplexing confusion thrown up by the basic problem and challenges facing the Nigeria Police Force such as corruption, lack-luster performance and general ineptitude, which contradict their role of crime prevention and enforcement of law and order; and partly because of faulty conceptual framework of analysis. For instance, scholars such as Tamuno (1970, 1977) Marenin (1985) and Agwanwo (2009) would rather lead us to believe that the Nigeria Police Force is an instrument used by and for the elite. In as much as they clearly admit to the sectionality of the Nigeria Police Force, they fail to grasp the roots of the problem. So that within the political economy conceptual framework, not only is it easily seen that the Nigeria Police is sectional, but this sectionality is deeply rooted in the class question.

Like all social formations where the capitalist mode of production is dominant (i.e commodity exchange and property ownership by a tiny minority), Nigeria is dichotomized into an exploiter /ruling bourgeois class and an exploited/laboring working class which is the class dispossessed of property. The exploiter /ruling class therefore controls the means of production and the coercive instruments of the state. This ruling class usually manifests itself in the private and public sectors of the economy. The public sector being charged with the management of property on behalf of the state; and the private sector with property appropriated by the individual. But the line that divides this duality is fluid and thin. The reason is that the state officials and private property owners belong in the same class. This is even especially so for the peculiar type of state that exist in Africa (Ake, 1985:1). For those who own property control the state and its agencies including the police and those who control the state own the property. To be sure, the state itself is merely a means for the exploitation and domination of the exploited class by the exploiter class (Marx and Engels, 1985). What we mean by exploitation is the appropriation of surplus value, which is the difference between the exchange value of the labour of the proletariat (worker) and the value of the product. This goes to the member of the bourgeoisie (the employer) Marx, 1983: 173)

This presupposes that, we speak of property not only in its definite sense as a means of production but also in its other sense as conflict (Christie, 1998). This is necessary in order to debunk the fallacies associated with the consensus conceptual framework of analysis which is often opposed to the political economy approach, and which does not recognizes as valid the disorder and disagreement which is endemic to liberal capitalist society. Within this framework,

conflict is seen as dysfunctional and its existence is accepted only as a justification and advanced as such, for the establishment of the Police Force depicted as a voice of reason in carrying out its mandate in an otherwise disorderly world. Manning (1977:5) expressed police mandate in this way:

*The police role conveys a sense of sacredness or awesome power that lies at the root of political order, and authority, the claims a state makes upon its people for deference to rules, laws, and norms. The ideology of belief system in our society makes this secular sacredness and authority a direct function of the state itself. This belief, or ideology, contains three interrelated axioms: it posits the existence of an absolutistic morality links it with the state and makes them equipment, and it attaches to policing the obligation to defend these two entities.*

This dominant value system built into policing reflects the consensus framework's belief in consensus as an ideological production in a world in which conflict is dysfunctional, even unseemly, arising of course, from the antagonistic relationship between the exploiter class and the exploited class. The exploited class as worker, the exploiter class as expropriator of surplus value and owner of the means of production as well as conflict through the control of state apparatus and its agencies including the police. So that police and its mandate is established to promote and defend the interests of the exploiter class which is directly related to the suppression of the interest of the exploited class. Hence the police in the execution of their core mandate reflect a culture in which emphasis is upon the crimes of the poor and weak and not those of the powerful and rich (Box, 1983, Cohen, 1979) even though the crimes of the powerful entail more loss and greater injury to society (Reiman, 197, Renate, 1974). This mandate and culture of the police is analogous to that which informed the establishment of the Nigeria Police Force, the historical origin and evolution of which is analyzed here within contextual and historical dimensions.

### **Contextual Dimension**

The historical origin and development of Nigeria police force was dictated by the nature of colonial European interests in Nigeria and the reactions of the indigenous communities to those interests. To be sure, colonialism in Nigeria just like the rest parts of Africa was fundamentally aimed at finding new markets and securing sources of raw materials, cheap labour, and investible opportunities for European economies, particularly, those of Britain. This situation was engendered by the emergence of capitalism, which was a direct result of the Industrial Revolution, succeeding slave trade (Fyfe, 1989). Capitalism is an exploitative system of human relations sanctioned by a tissue of religious, philosophical, political and other illusion, a system for maintaining the profits and power of the few at the expense of the many, the laws and court of which are fashioned to favour the privileged and wealthy and the powerful members of the society (Marx, 1983, Cohen, 1979).

According to Asiegbu (1984:179) "the desire for African commodities like rubber, palm oil ivory tusks and the like as alternative to the slave trade which was required for the industrial manufacturing propelled Britain and other European nations into the African interior. And the colonial authority in Nigeria formulated polices that were consisted with these interests. Thus, the method of colonialism as a replacement for slave trade was political subjugation and its objective, economic exploitation". Perhaps, the most important political measures applied to

subjugate Nigerians by imperial Britain were the administrative arrangements which were rationalized by the theory of Indirect Rule. The theoretical premise of Indirect Rule was to rule the people through their own indigenous authoritative institutions in order to minimize their alienation and to save administrative cost. But this system of indirect rule, undermined the indigenous primordial administrative practices and distorted the traditional moral order (Ndu, 2006) thereby creating intra- and inter –communal antagonisms within the Nigerian colony which formed part of the basis or rationale for establishing the colonial police in Nigeria to deal with the people. Now, following the economic exploitation and alienation of the people, the relationship between the indigenous people and imperial colonizing power became one characterized by conflict of interest which in state administration in relation to police and policing work subsists between the government and the governed up till today. As with the rest of the African continent, the founding of the Nigerian colony and state (Tamuno, 1977) contracted the otherwise stable Nigerian societies into a profound crisis on a number of fronts, socially, politically, culturally, etc which were to have far reaching implications for law and order in the community. This perhaps explains why to some mainstream scholars such as Alagoa (1972; 1999) and Aseigbu (1984), colonial Nigeria was simply enacted through military defeat rather than by the introduction of indirect rule which they see as merely a political deceit. Consequently, communities which hitherto exercised full autonomy of action lost their political sovereignties and now forcibly incorporated, as subordinate system into a totally new social reality under a completely alien British Authority.

Besides adopting the political measure of indirect rule arising from the military conquest of indigenous Nigerian communities, the British colonial authority also explored the economic dimension of subjugation through economic exploitation. The invention of machines to replace manual labour was one of the reasons that necessitated the stoppage of slave trade and slavery. Therefore, African colonization was to a large extent a translation of European economic need for industrial raw materials and markets in order to sustain their capitalist industrial revolution. Hence, colonial policies and administrative strategies were ultimately to facilitate exploitation of the Nigerian peoples. For example, the introduction of money, transport system, land and waterways etc. were all aspects of the vast enterprise of exploitation of Nigerian resources and people for the development of British society (Ake, 1985, Ekekwe, 1986). The colonial necessity to integrate Nigerian communities into the expanding system of global capitalism also led to the introduction of legal notion for legitimizing private individual proprietorship over land as a means of production (Screton, 1987). A number of traditional rulers found it expedient to utilize the new capitalist norm of private proprietorship to conserve land for them. Such reinterpretations were to become sources of bitter social and political conflicts within a number of the communities in colonial Nigeria.

Furthermore, colonial economic and cultural practices also led to the creation of two new social classes within Nigerian society, the proletariat and the middle class. The proletariat, a social creation who lived by selling his labour power to the owner of capital was a totally new phenomenon. He was forcibly weaned from his traditional peasant proprietorship mode of existence to become a wage-labourer. According to Renate (1974), the middle class had its foundation in the cultural practices introduced by the colonizer. The middle class were later to lead and mobilize society for national liberation struggles. The two classes (ie proletariat and middle class) lived side by side with the capitalist class whose organizational forms included

merchant houses, finance houses, private and state corporations. With time, the middle class graduated to a capitalist class status, maintaining the social structure engendered and engineered by the colonial policies; leaving the proletariat perplexed and confused in a society devastated by capitalist exploitation. In the opinion of Crowther (1981:13), British attitudes and actions towards indigenous Nigerian laws and customs affected the overall strategic interests of colonial exploitation. According to him “where the customs hindered the overall process of exploitation, they would be deemed offensive to the principles of national law and justice; where they would facilitate the colonial mission of exploitation or would be indifferent to it; they were officially respected and protected” .

Colonialism, nonetheless, has its own culture embedded in a kind of Christianity called Christianity which it sought to promote as a cultural programme. To be sure, christianism is simply the practice of merchandising while advertising the tenets of Christianity, which is most cases, ran contrary to the old things being tactfully displayed by the preacher (Merchant). For instance, it was against Christian ethics to challenge the colonial authority because of the biblical injunction that those in authority should be obeyed and prayed for, simply because, it is the Almighty God who placed them there; whereas in the actual sense, the Authority was exploiting and dehumanizing the people. The new concepts of laws, ethics and judicial process along with Christianity and the western education that came along with it, together with Islam, distorted pre-existing moral order for the worst. Christianity as preached by the ‘Christian merchants’ marked its own contribution to the detrimental changes in societal moral values. With its doctrinal notion of an every-ready forgiving God, it destroyed all the moral-checks which the fear of the traditional deities and divinities evoked in the life of the members of the indigenous communities. So also did Islam unwittingly create the erroneous impression that the fulfillment of the obligatory duties and acts of penance by good works are sufficient for the purpose of getting to heaven. The result of all these was that the enlightened products of these religions as well as the products of colonial education could commit all kinds of atrocities with reckless abandon without any fear or moral implication. For instance, they could steal and cheerfully appropriate other people’s property, break covenants or promises made under oath with brazen indifferences. Thus, the corruption introduced into the indigenous societies through the religion packaged for the colonized society by the British colonizer brought with it an education that deprived the people of legitimacy, a sort of mental colonialism.

Finally, there is the issue of the metropolitan challenges or what is the same thing, urbanization engendered by British colonialism. The provision of social infrastructure and creation of labour and wage at the major marketing centres in Nigeria by the colonial administration, attracted people and private enterprises to move in a manner similar to a mass exodus to the rising urban and metropolitan centres like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Kano and Enugu. The growth of these centres was more of the effect of the economic, administrative and educational activities of the colonial establishment rather than of a conscious policy. As new population concentrations developed to service these activities, the colonial state was compelled to intervene by way of the enactment of sanitation laws and town planning ordinances to regulate habitation of the urban settlements (Evans-Pitchard, 1937). The new urbanism represented village bounds, the heterogeneity of the population and occupational which moved their indigenous personnel across the national territory and encouraged its process of societal scale expansion. The cultural consequences of urban concentrations in

various forms of anomic and criminal behavior increasingly became manifest. In other words, the cultural complexities of the individual human elements in these urban centres translated into challenges to policing (law and order) in a new form. Consequently, Lagos with its strategic position became an urban and commercial centre with the attendant security problems, thereby, necessitating the formation of a modern police force in April 1861, the year in which Lagos was annexed (Tamuno, 1970).

### **Historical Dimension**

The first modern police force in the history of Lagos and in the area that later became known as Nigeria was established in April 1861, when, Governor William McCosky, in order to maintain law and order in the new colony created a consular guard of 30 men (Tamuno, 1970). The Guard was later in February 1863 expanded into an Armed Police Force comprising 100 Hausa men, as part of Lagos Colony's internal defense, and by 1879, it was further regularized under the Ordinance No. 3 of that year, and became known as the Hausa Constabulary (Mbaeyi, 1978, p. 105). And between 1886-1914, the Force was further expanded including Detective Branch (1879), Tailoring Pay and Quarter-Master section (1897), Criminal Investigation Department (1898), Marine Police (1891), Railway Police (1899), Fire Brigade (1901) etc. (Oluyede, 1988, Mbaeyi, 1978, Okuchaba, 1990, Membere, 2012).

Following the amalgamation of the country in 1914, a police Ordinance (Cap 32) of 1917 established the Southern Police Force for the Colony and Southern Province and the Northern Police Force for the Northern Province. And by April, 1930, the Southern and Northern Police Forces were amalgamated and became known as the Nigeria Police Force under the command of an Inspector-General of Police, Mr. C.W. Duncan who was formerly, the Inspector –General of the Southern Nigeria Police Force. Now, following the introduction of the federal principle by the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution, the Nigeria Police Force became a federal force whereby the federal and regional governments were jointly responsible for the maintenance of law and order. This was reinforced by the provisions of the 1960 Independence Nigeria Constitution Order-in-Council, by which the Nigeria Police Force become a unified federal force exercising authority in every part of Nigeria. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1963 when the Federal Republic Constitution of Nigeria came into being, the Nigeria Police Force was again reconstituted under its sections (105) and (106). The constitution also set up two bodies namely the police Council and the Police Service Commission. While the former deals with organization, finance, establishment and the conditions of service of members of the force, the latter deals with matters concerning promotions, appointments and discipline of officers. By 1967, the Nigeria Police Act was enacted which was later modified by Decree No. 23 of 1979. This Act in its section (4) provided that the major goals of the Nigeria Police Force is “the prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offender and preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged and the performance of military duties as may be required of them under laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria”.

### **Conclusion**

From the above discussion, there is no doubt that the historical origin and evolution of the Nigeria Police Force has been characterized by problematic contextual and historical dimensions which included politico-military, socio-economic and cultural aspects. These

problematic clearly illustrate the significance of our conceptual approach in using political economy to understand the evolution of Nigeria Police Force and why it is characterized with the numerous problems it has today as a modern force with enormous responsibility in crime prevention and maintenance of law and order in society. To be sure, the police is a body of men and women organized by the state (government) as a force to enforce law and order and to defend the status-quo (Black, 1980). That is to say that, it enforces the laws, values and ideologies that justify, legitimize and defend the prevailing distribution of power and wealth in the society. The police as an agency of the state of organized to prevent people from making significant advancement in their advocacy for alternative social order. The Nigeria Police Force does not have a dynamic separate from and independent of Nigeria state interest which owing to its colonial origin and creation is characterized by very serious and perverse distortions that manifest in different forms of social ills. The Nigerian state not only imposes order through its agencies and institutions including the Nigeria Police Force but reproduces a particular form of social order which involves class biases and which differentially distributed opportunity, wealth and power between different classes and groups in society. It is therefore interestingly pertinent to conclude our discussion with the words of Manning, an expert in police affairs: "The ineluctable fact is that the police deal in and dispense violence in protection of the interests of the state. They are not autonomous entities. They are inextricably linked to the political status quo and are in effect, duty bound to sustain and uphold it" (Manning, 1977, P.361). In this, the Nigerian Police Force with all its colonial origin and heritage is no exception.

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