



POLICING THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY THROUGH THE COMMUNITY POLICING STRATEGY: THE ROLE OF THE CITIZEN

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Abstract

The seeming helplessness of the Nigerian police to maintain law and order and ensure the safety of the lives and properties of Nigerians in many parts of the country has elicited harsh criticisms of the force as well as suspicion and hostility from the people. This state of affairs has also motivated people from all walks of life to propose wide ranging reforms of the police force. Recently, on 21st November, 2018 the president received a report from a National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies research group on internal security, which leaned heavily towards community policing. Other Nigerians, including private citizens as well as the National Assembly have persistently called for a reform of the force to decentralize it and constitutionally mandate the establishment of state police formations. This suggests that there is something wrong with the structure and efficiency of the Nigerian police. The objective of this paper is to interrogate the essence of citizenship and examine the relationship between the Nigerian police and the Nigerian citizen with a view to suggesting reform options that will best serve the Nigerian society and the police force itself. The method adopted for the study is descriptive analysis of materials obtained from desk survey. The study is then built around the contingency theory of organisations as popularized by Paul Lawrence and Jay Lorsch. It is expected that the paper will contribute significantly to the growing body of research on policing in Nigeria towards improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the police in serving and protecting the Nigerian society with integrity.

Keywords: Citizen, Community, Community policing, Nigerian society, Public confidence.

Introduction

There appears to be a total agreement in all areas of the Nigerian society that the Nigerian police is not living up to expectations. In fact, pessimists would assume that the Nigerian police force is a colossal and irredeemable failure. Hence, the cases for the establishment of parallel police institutions such as neighbourhood watch, national guard and/or state police have been made emphatically at several quarters including the 8th National Assembly as well as the 2014 National Conference. That the National Assembly and the confab have considerable leverage in any



attempt to alter the constitution speaks volumes to the imminent possibilities for an alteration of the nature and character of the Nigeria Police Force.

As the title of this work suggests, the place of the citizen in the society has significant implications for the performance of the police. Hence we reason that the lack of cordial relationship between the police and the citizen is at the root of the failures of the police. The citizen in the community does not feel a sense of belonging or ownership of the policing institution. Curiously, the citizen is worse for it because an inefficient policing institution means more danger and less safety and orderliness of his life in the society. Yet the citizen in some cases might even wish for the police to fail in their duties so as to vindicate his judgment of the police as incompetent. This is a dangerous trend that requires very urgent attention if Nigeria is to be saved from tipping over the cliff in terms of security of lives and properties.

So far, there is evidence everywhere that both the police and the citizen alike do not place adequate worth on the life of the Nigerian. Everywhere, from the north of the country to the south, from east to west, there is colossal loss of lives and properties on a regular basis as a consequence of criminality. From traffic accidents to armed robbery; from kidnapping to cattle rustling; from farmers/herders clashes to Boko Haram insurgency; from ethno-religious crises to secessionist threats, etc. there is serious cause for worry about the security situation in Nigeria, and the police appears to not be equal to the task of providing security to the people against these threats. There is, therefore, an urgent need to make the Nigerian police work. The thesis of this paper is that the relationship between the Nigerian police and the citizen should be at the center of any reform effort aimed at making the police efficient and effective in policing the society.

The citizen and the community

The citizen is the most basic element of the community. Citizens jointly make up the community and the community belongs to its citizens. Citizenship has been defined as equal membership of a political community from which enforceable rights and obligations, benefits and resources, participatory practices and a sense of identity flows (Kostakopoulou, 2008).

Recent developments in the international community, especially those pertaining to globalization, multiculturalism and diversity have raised the political stakes and highlighted the centrality of citizenship to contemporary politics. Increasing internationalization, particularly as an effect of European integration has come to challenge the notion of national citizenship (Bussemaker, 2005). However, the notion of citizenship continues to be firmly rooted in the idea that citizenship and the nation-state are closely linked. For a long time, the nation-state has been viewed as the one and only provider of citizenship rights. The French revolution, for instance, astounded the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie and gave many ideas on popular sovereignty,



consent and natural rights common political currency. It also gave the idea of citizenship a boost by liberating the individual from subservience to monarchy and privilege, bringing about a comprehensive list of civil and political rights.

Having a historical pedigree of over 200 years, national citizenship which continues to be the dominant paradigm, reflects the relationship between rights bearing individuals and the territorial state, which has been conceived as the embodiment of a nation, that is, an association of compatriots endowed with sovereignty (Kostakopoulou, 2008). When the word citizenship is encountered in everyday conversation, it typically refers to polity membership. A person is described as having, for example, German citizenship if he or she is formally a member of the state of Germany. Indeed, as Van Deth (2007) wrote, the fact that, today, a person is ordinarily described as being a citizen rather than a subject of a certain country is not coincidental but intended to convey the notion that he or she enjoys full membership in the polity and an associated bundle of legal rights. Citizenship, therefore, involves a paradox encapsulated in viewing it as the right to have rights. That paradox consists in our rights as citizens being dependent on our exercising our basic rights to political participation in co-operation with our fellow citizens. For our rights derive from the collective policies we decide upon to resolve common problems, such as providing for personal security with a police force and a legal system (Bellamy, 2008).

Citizens often show a preference for the wellbeing of their fellow co-nationals over that of non-nationals. The idea of having special obligations to the members of one's community stems from the we-feeling of the nationals and the concomitant sense of shared identity. Citizenship has, therefore always been associated with participation in public life. Indeed, as Aristotle famously opined, anyone who cannot form a community with others, or who does not need to because he is self-sufficient is either a beast or a god. Of course, citizenship also comes along with rights, benefits and privileges as well as duties and obligations. The rights, benefits and privileges include the right to life, property, security, freedom of movement and association, etc. while the duties and obligations include obedience to the law and respect for the rights of others. It is the duty of the state, through its law enforcement agencies, to ensure that these rights and duties are enforced.

While it is necessary to recognize the variations in the political thoughts of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau – the leading protagonists of the idea of social contract – it is important to note that they were agreed on the need for government as an agency that would ensure the security of lives and properties of citizens. In fact Hobbes famously and emphatically opined that the whole essence of the state is to provide security as life in the state of nature was that of a general disposition to war of every man against everyman, leading to perpetual fear and strife which



consequently made life in the state of nature solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short (Shaapera, 2015). On his own part, J. J. Rousseau used to say that what he wrote was intended to unite what right allowed and what interest demanded so that justice and utility do not at any stage part company. According to him, the community represents the ultimate expression of the nature of man. It is therefrom that he derives his desire for happiness, the idea of ownership, the power to communicate with other men, to bargain with them, to make agreements and to make a government that will give the agreement force....From it individuals get their mental and moral faculties and by it they become human; the fundamental moral category is not man but citizen...for men really have no moral qualities outside a community (Sabine and Thorson, 1973). Unlike a race which beyond the mere likeness of kind creates no real union, a community is a moral person arising from a real bond uniting its members....All our ideas, even of self-interest are drawn from the community in which we live. Self-interest is not more natural or innate than the social needs that draw men together in communities, and we begin properly to become men only after we have become citizens. A community thus has common possessions and a common interest and well-being, which is not a sum of private goods but the source of them (Sabine and Thorson, 1973). The citizen in the community therefore has an inherent interest to preserve the order and common good of the community as his humanity and all that gives his life meaning derives from it. No person or agency has the better interest of a community at heart more than the citizens who are co-owners of that community.

The Nigerian Police and Policing

There is ample evidence that there existed a variety of civil policing institutions in different parts of Nigeria before the advent of colonialism, such as age grades, secret societies and palace guards (Kuteyiyo and Rotimi, 2010). But the Nigerian Police Force as we have it today is essentially a colonial creation, being descended from the Royal Niger company/Hausa constabulary through the centralized Nigerian constabulary, the Native authority police to the unified Nigeria Police force as it is today.

During the colonial era, the police was utilized to protect the interest of the empire. The benefits of the colonies were seen mainly in terms of their ability to support profitable trade in colonial commodities as well as provide markets for redundant European capital. Accordingly, economic considerations significantly guided the process of the development of policing in almost all Western European colonies (Mawby, 1999). This was evidenced in the role of concessionaire and chartered companies in the policing of colonies, such as was the case of the Royal Niger Company in Northern Nigeria. They were established to protect colonial economic interests in specific areas of influence, particularly after the Berlin Conference of 1884 – 1885 mandated that



a colonial power could claim territory only in areas where each had uninterrupted presence, influence and trading activities. Their duties were to administer and defend the colonial territory in return for the fiscal advantage of running lucrative trade monopolies. In order to defend their colonial territory and maintain law and order, the chartered companies had the power to establish armed guards, private militias or para-military police forces. The role of such forces was to secure recognition for Britain's claim to the monopoly of trade in her area of influence in the Nigerian hinterlands, prevent encroachment on British area of trading activities by French and German traders, expand British area of influence and ensure that Britain's claim to effective occupation was not threatened by the natives themselves. Consequently, the Royal Niger Company's constabulary took active part in the signing of treaties of protection with the 'chiefs' and also in wars against deviant native traders and businessmen – an activity that brought the vast hinterlands of the middle belt under British protection in the late 19th Century (Dike, 1956; Flint, 1969).

The link between colonial policing and colonial political economy cannot, therefore, be over-emphasised, for the fundamental basis of all colonial ventures is economic imperialism. Colonial empires were essentially markets and trading centers that operated for the benefit of Western European economies. In practice, the majority of European colonial possessions, particularly those in Africa were basically factories run on principles of efficiency and productivity secured, if need be, by force (Newitt, 1981). It is no wonder then that crime control was generally secondary to maintenance of security and public order (Mawby, 1999).

For the natives in the pacified protectorates, colonial policing signified the invasion of an alien force representing an unquestionable political authority. Hence, Cole (1999) opined that fear, intimidation, oppression and control were, for many pacified communities, the trademark of colonial policing in both times of peace and war. In much of Nigeria, the activities of the Native Authority police forces earned them the distrust and outright hostility of the indigenous people, leading to their social isolation.

Today, the Nigerian police has retained much of its colonial character. Police corruption, brutality, inefficiency and isolation are problems of policing today that could be traced to the colonial experience. The colonial public image of the police as agents of unquestionable government authority persists and this has enabled police officers with an inclination towards abuse of power to do so with impunity (Cole, 1988). Moreover, the police in Nigeria today seem to be serving, not the entire public but their paymasters, as top government officials and other VIPs that can pay for police services are given elaborate security cover while the rest of the population and the nooks and crannies of the society are neglected. Members of this preferred segment sometimes appear to be shielded from criminal investigations by the same police that



are supposed to serve and protect the entire society with integrity. Apparently, this methodology has produced the same policing problems that characterized the colonial era.

After a research carried out by the Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN) between March 2001 and December 2003, in partnership with the Nigeria Police Force, it was agreed that community policing would be a panacea for the challenges of the traditional reactive police culture. This point of view has been corroborated by the United Kingdom's Directorate for International Development (DFID) as well as the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) in 2004 and 2018 respectively.

Let us now look at the meaning and nature of community policing and examine the prospects it has for effective policing of the Nigerian society.

The community Policing Alternative

Community policing is a style of policing that requires the police to reshape their forces into community change agents in order to work with citizens to reduce crime at the neighbourhood level. Many countries of the world have adopted this policing strategy to cope with the increasingly complex security challenges of today. The successes of the American, Israeli, British, Dutch, Polish, German and Danish experiences easily come to mind (Travis, 2002). In community policing, the police are expected not only to serve the public but also to learn from citizens, to involve them in crime prevention and, in the end, to be accountable to the community.

Community policing as a strategy and methodology in policing the society was embraced by Nigeria with the enactment of the Police Reform Act of 2004. Hence, Okiro (2007) opined that the global community is transiting from the traditional form of policing to a systematic and formalized community policing. It is based on the concept that police officers and private citizens working together in creative ways, can help solve contemporary community problems relating to crime, fear of crime, social and physical disorder and neighbourhood conditions (Trojanowicz, et al, 1998). It also requires the police to react quickly to urgent demands, engage and empower communities to deal with their own problems and collaborate with the community to address their concerns.

The central premise of community policing is that the public should be seen along with the police as co-producers of safety and order (Skolnick and Bayley, 1988). It emphasizes non-



emergency services, increased accountability to the public and decentralization of command. Such principles, according to Skolnick and Bayley (1988), describe a police role that is broad in objective and function and that derive authority from and requires collaboration with the community.

Community policing as a philosophy and a strategy emphasizes certain keywords, including change, collaboration, corroboration, partnership, participation, consent, transparency and trust. Hence, it represents a paradigm shift, from old ways of doing things, which requires the collaboration, corroboration, partnership, participation, consent and trust of members of the public. It also enhances transparency of the police activities and, therefore, accountability to the people.

Gone are the days when the work of the police is kept a closely guarded secret that leaves stakeholders in the dark and in doubt about progress of work in such activities as criminal investigation such that in the end, the investigation and prosecution would inexplicably turn a victim into an accused or adduce inadequate or irrelevant evidence that would lead to easy acquittal of criminals in the court. This sort of circumstance makes members of the community to be thoroughly disappointed with the police and, ultimately, lead to the people perceiving the police as an enemy, keep vital information from the police or, in any case, being overtly or covertly hostile to the police.

By their very nature, the police interact with the communities they serve. The community relies upon the police to help in emergencies, to prevent and solve crimes and protect the lives and properties of people in the community and to curb disorder. On its part, the police relies on the community to report crime and provide important information that is necessary to address community concerns and solve crimes. This suggests that the police and the community must actively work as partners. Without this partnership, the police cannot be effective and efficient in its work. Partnership between the police and the public can take the form of co-opting informal policing institutions such as vigilante and neighbourhood watches in police operations. It may also involve established and legitimate community leaders, elders as well as youth leaders and religious leaders in police activities as well as reporting progress of work on police operations to such leaders. In Nigeria, this form of partnership has hitherto not been fully exploited.

Although traditional notions of police organisations are grounded in a closed-model perspective, emphasizing the autonomy of the police from the community, there is a growing recognition that police organisations are increasingly open systems receiving inputs from their environments, processing those inputs and delivering appropriate outputs into the environment which elements in the environment consider and react to in relation to their suitability or the lack thereof. Where there is no congruence between the organization and its environment, the organization will not



succeed in accomplishing its objectives. This is the position famously advanced by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967). In a seminal work, Cordner (1978) also contended that such an open model as the contingency model is more appropriate for explaining the dynamics of police organisations.

Particularly under the Nigerian situation of paucity of technological innovations that can aid police operations such as in criminal investigation, crowd control, counter-insurgency and general maintenance of order and peace in the society, there is emphatic need for the police to substantially modify its strategies in line with the principles of community policing. Of course, the citizens and the communities need to be sensitized (eg. by the media or the National Orientation Agency) to be able to function appropriately within the context of community policing, and the initiative of community policing itself will be led by the police. Then the necessary collaboration, feedback and accountability must be arranged for the citizens and the communities to endorse police operations and volunteer their support for the system. This is different from posting policemen to their communities, local governments or states of origin.

Regardless of the obvious advantages of community policing for the Nigerian society and the initial efforts after the enactment of the Police Reform Act in 2004, this strategy of policing has not been implemented by the Nigeria police Force due mainly to resistance against the community policing concept itself by officers and men of the force as well as lack of confidence in the police by members of the public. The perception of the police by members of the public is very negative in Nigeria, leading to its complete lack of legitimacy. According to Dambazau (2007), corruption and dishonesty are so widespread within the police engendering low level of public confidence, failure to report crime and tendencies to resort to self-help policing. Moreover, due to corruption and lack of good intentions, police officers are reluctant to share information about their operations with members of the community. Sometimes, they even collaborate with criminal elements in the community to the extent of divulging information to them regarding the sources of their information about activities of the criminals. They may also give information to the criminals about progress of investigation activities. This certainly would upset members of the community who then begin to see the police as enemy who should not be assisted to succeed.

Other impediments to the implementation of the community policing strategy include selective enforcement of the law as a result of cronyism and corruption, police brutality and extortion of members of the public as well as criminal tendencies of some officers and men of the force. There is also the issue of ethnicity and nepotism as well as inadequate manpower and poor funding by the government which seriously diminish the capacity of the force and the morale of the officers.



Concluding Remarks

The role of the citizen in policing the Nigerian society is conceived within the context of community policing which Nigeria is eager to embrace but which has remained elusive. However, emphasis on the citizen is made in recognition of the primacy of the individual as a legitimate full member of his community and the nation in a liberal democratic setting. The police, and indeed the entire public service is there to serve the private citizen as the welfare of the citizen is the ultimate goal of government.

It has been noted that in Nigeria, members of the public are not satisfied with the services of the Nigeria Police Force, and there is widespread agreement that a reform of the force is necessary. It has also been noted that dissatisfaction of the people with the police stem mainly from the conduct of officers and men of the force. Such conducts consist in the culture of corruption within the force, criminal tendencies of some officers, brutality and extortion of members of the public by police officers, etc. In fact, there can be no end to expressions of disillusionment of members of the public with the police force and this has resulted in a legitimacy deficit which is a huge problem for the force and the society at large. However, the community policing strategy has the potential to diminish this confidence and legitimacy deficit. But the most important obstacle to the adoption of the community policing strategy is that officers and men of the force are not willing to embrace it. The necessary reform therefore needs to be led from outside the force.

Since the token effort that has been made by the leadership of the Nigeria Police Force since 2004 has scarcely gone beyond recognition of the necessity of community policing, there is need for the nation to go beyond mere mention of the strategy as a policy option. The National Assembly should enact the community policing alternative into law and compel the leadership of the force to follow it. Such an Act of the National Assembly should be comprehensive with a provision of guidelines for its implementation. The Act should give ownership of the police department to the citizen and the community, and there should be provisions to mandate accountability of officers and men of the force to the established and legitimate leadership of their host communities and disciplinary measures to deter noncompliance.

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