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CHANGING PATTERNS OF POLICE STUDENTS' RELATIONSHIP IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between the Nigerian police and students in institutions of higher learning in the country. It is argued that, the character of the Nigerian state has influenced the history of her police as an organization, their roles, and relationship with the students. The paper also shows that whereas Nigerian students have challenged the Nigerian government in the past over unpopular national policy matters, this has changed since the end of the cold war and its` corresponding increased influence of capitalist value preferences on social service delivery in Nigeria. Unlike before, Nigerian students at the moment have become very receptive of repressive state laws by hardly presenting a united view on national policies. Many of them now encounter the police over issues like: cultism, rape, armed robbery and fraudulent practices. This is one of the indicators of how prevailing challenges in our institutions of higher learning have influenced the commitment of the students to a better society. Data for the paper were generated from secondary sources and analysed descriptively. The theoretical thrust is the Political Economy model of social development. Responsible governance is seen as very helpful in making

both the police and students alive and responsive to the roles expected of them in a democratic society like ours.

Key words: *National policies, Nigerian police, Nigerian state, social conflict and students*

Conceptualizing the relationship between the police and Nigerian students

Nigerian government can be described as very insincere in pursuing the demands of inclusive government for the governed. Although peoples` right to freedom of association is constitutionally guaranteed, government can constrain them expressing this right by using coercive apparatus of the state especially the police and the military (Alemika & Chukwuma,2000; Obiajulu,2014).

Associational bodies uniting Nigerian professionals have been variously suppressed by the government at different times. This includes: Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU); Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC); National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS),etc.

Conflict suppression was extensively used by the British to entrench and pursue colonial rule in Nigeria. Successive post-colonial regimes in the country did not make any significant departure from using the same approach in dealing with those perceived as breaching the `peace`. The problem of this study stems from the fact that the police established, trained, maintained and oriented towards ensuring cordial social milieu that will enable people actualise their potentials, have records of brutalising defenceless civilians including university students. Very remarkable is the fact that most policemen implicated in extra judicial killing of the students, tend to go unpunished because of the variables associated with the use of police discretionary powers.

Many scholars have explained the tendency of the police to repress students on variables like colonial rule (Tamuno,1970; Nnoli,2012),university administrative policies (Onyeonoru,1996) and proliferation of institutions of higher learning

under military rule(David,2013). This study intends to show that the objective circumstances that make Nigerian students take a collective action against unacceptable policies of the government have changed. This is associated with collapse of communism in the early 90s, reduction of the commitment of the government in social service delivery and the governments` success in politicising the educational sector including the students` umbrella body – the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS).

The powers and functions of the Nigerian police as contained under section 214 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Section 4 of Police Act stipulates that the police should be employed for the detection and prevention of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged. They shall perform such military duties within or outside Nigeria as will be required of them under the authority of this or any other act Ehindero (1986;Eme & Ogbochei,2014;Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2014).

By their training, members of the police force know that by putting on police uniform they symbolize coercive authority of the state. They know that in this capacity, they can compel members of the public to do their biddings as well as bear the brunt of unpopular legislation by the state. This is usually the case when members of the public demonstrate against unpopular state policies(Ananaba, 1980; Beckman, 1985; Albert; 1999 Olusegun,2014). As a result, the police tends to relate to the policed with caution, and even mutual suspicion.

A hostile work environment, “tends to unite the police and heighten their group cohesiveness” (Alderson 1979:65; Olusegun, 2014). This culture is usually dismantled in times of cordial police-public relationship (Alemika & Chukwuna, 2000). Police culture is sub-cultural, and like most subcultures, thrives on secrecy. This secrecy helps members of the police, to present the image of the force as a unified and disciplined entity characterised by ‘cohesion, discipline,

hierarchical command structure, nationalism, puritanism and esprit-de-corps'. This secrecy curtails the flow of information between the police and the public (Lundaman1980). This affects negatively, the goodwill and co-operation which the police require for the effective performance of their roles. The police and public hardly share meaning on crucial issues in the state(Alemika & Chukwuma,2000).

Police discretion often results from “ambiguity of the law or overt recognition by law of the need for police to determine when, where and how, they will exercise their powers” (Ramsey 1971; Sutherland and Creasy 1978:390; Mitchell 1974:22; Akintola,2010).

Most of the complaints brought against the police, have a bearing on how they exercise their discretionary powers. Clinnard and Abbot (1973) had argued that the use of police discretion is a function of factors like the social status of the police and social milieu of policing. Otwin Marenin(1985) had also identified demands, personal characteristics and work situations as very influential factors on the manner of using discretionary powers by the police. The exercise of discretion by the police in Nigeria, is criticized along such lines as corruption and brutality (Umeagbalusi,2010) .

Conceptualizing Nigerian Students:

Nigerian students in this discourse, refers to students in institutions of higher learning. Nigerian students vary in their courses of study, year count, and ethnic affiliation, material condition of existence, courage and subordinate occupational roles. These are influential factors on how students behave even when their umbrella body demands a collective action that may appear confrontational to constituted authorities (Onyeonoru, 1996; David, 2013).Also it is important to note, that some students have joined the police force upon graduation. Similarly some police officers have become students in their quest for cognitive

development and upward occupational mobility. This also is important in appreciating why police can be very cooperative with the students. It is not correct to see the police and students as performing very disparate roles as social actors.

Theoretical framework

Nigeria is a dependent capitalist economy. This is sequel to her history as a nation. She was colonised by Britain. Both the Nigerian police and the country's education system evolved from this historical development. To achieve an enhanced exploitation of Nigeria's economic resources, the British used strategies like Divide and Rule (Nnoli, 2012), conflict suppression (Albert, 1999), to rule.

Political economy is essentially about the relationship between the state and the individuals. It is about the allocation of limited resources by the state in its bid to govern. It is about the ideology that informs the manner of resource production and distribution of scarce values as it concerns the state and the individuals. The Nigerian government has been criticised on her approach to common good out of reasons like: inept leadership (Achebe, 1980, 2012); executive corruption (Obiajulu, 2000), identity politics (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005), conflict suppression as opposed to politics of mutual inclusion in matters of state policy and direction (Onwuzuligbo, 2009).

Both the police as an organisation and Nigerian higher institutions are affected by the above developmental challenges (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2000; Omorodion and Okpabe, 2014). The manifest reasons associated with student's unrest in the country showcase how the students define their objective conditions of schooling as Nigerians. Arogundade, a former president of NANS, remarked that from 1983 to 1999, Nigerian students were driven by the ideological position of the progressives in world politics. For this reason, they kicked against

capitalist, anti-people and corrupt policies of the Nigerian state (Arogundade, 2015). Some of their roles in this regard include protest against the commercialisation of education, introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), attack on people's fundamental human rights etc. He saw these as some of the push factors that contributed to the exit of the military in 1999. Students were able to fund the activities of NANS because the economy of Nigeria in the 80s was not as bad as it is at the moment. Moreover, administration of the organisations' fund was very transparent (Arogundade,). The end of the cold war in the early 90's and the corresponding rise of capitalist influence in the global economy, led to students being described as radicals to be silenced by the state (Arogundade, 2015). Education became commercialised, government in keeping with International Monetary Fund (IMF) recommendations, opted for decreased funding of public utilities including the educational sector.

Ogu (2008) avers that some of the market forces facing Nigerian education are: Joint Admission and Matriculation Board JAMB; infrastructural shortcomings and matching education to job demands. In specific terms, about 80% of candidates seeking admission into the university get disappointed every year. This has led to the proliferation of private and state owned universities. Infrastructural shortage explains why the laboratories are ill equipped, the libraries stuffed with journals and books bought in the 70s when Nigerian economy was buoyant. The university graduates emerging from the system are unemployable in the emergent world market. It is on the basis of this development that ASUU has been compelling the government to improve the funding of the universities. Very often the police is used to suppress those making the demand. Some private universities are owned by some past military heads of the country, who prefer to have their own university than properly funding existing public ones. At the moment, Nigeria has forty federal universities established between 1948 and

2011, forty state - owned ones established between 1980 and 2013 and sixty one private universities established between 1999 and 2015 (Fapohunda, 2015). NANS is the national organisation of the students enrolled in these institutions at the moment.

Method of Study

Data for this study was gathered from secondary sources. This involved use of relevant archival records, published materials especially books, journals and magazines. Analysis of data entailed use of tabular presentation of incidents of some violent encounter of the police with the students. In the reconstruction of materials consulted, much emphasis was placed on police-encounters that led to policy shift on the part of the government and/or university management, loss of life and property and ability of the students to take a common stand on issues raised.

Results

Table 1: Chronology of key instances of Police encounter with Nigerian students before 1989

EVENTS	ISSUES INVOLVED	LOCATIO N	OUTCOME
1944 Protest by students of Kings College Lagos	Intention of the colonial masters to use the school to house the West African frontier force	Lagos	Colonial masters had their way. The students were moved to Obalende.
1960 protest by Nigerian students	Students objected to the proposed Anglo-Nigerian defence pact	Ibadan	The proposal was abandoned.
1965 protest by the students of the University of Ibadan	Students objected to the rigging of elections results by Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP)	Lagos, Ibadan	The police were used to move the students back to their campus. Many were taught bitter lessons by the police.
1973 students' protest	Students protested over the introduction of National Youth Service Corp (NYSC)	Ife, Nsukka, Ibadan	The military had its way and the policy remained.
1978 students protest	Arbitrary increase of boarding and feeding fees in the university by the federal government	Ibadan, Ife, Lagos	About 8 students lost their lives. The military had their way
1981 student's protest	killing of a students by unknown assailants	Ife	Police confronted the students and four students lost their lives
1986 student's protest	Students were commemorating the 1978 anniversary of their encounter with the police	Ahmadu Bello University, ABU, Zaria	The police was invited to handle the situation. Many students were brutalized.
1989 students unrest	Students were protesting over the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)	Jos, Lagos, Ibadan	The police confronted the students, The students gained public support in places like Jos, Ibadan. The military stood its ground.

Source: Madunagu (1980); David (2013) ; Odu (2013).

Sources: Ogbo (2012); Ebegbulem (2013); David (2014); Oladeinde (2016); Mark (2016)

Table:2 Police-Students relationship since 1999

YEAR	INSTITUTION	ISSUES INVOLVED	OUTCOME
July 1999	Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ife	Cult activity sponsored by the vice-chancellor	8 Students were killed and the vice-chancellor was removed
2012	University of Ilorin UNILORIN	Some students of the institution were arrested for armed robbery	Students involved were detained
June 2013	University of Benin (UNIBEN)	Extra judicial killing of a student of UNIBEN for alleged armed robbery	The Divisional police officer involved and her orderly were transferred. Body of the deceased was exhumed for autopsy .The case file was sent to director of public prosecution for advice.
October 2013	UNIBEN	Cultism	Police arrested suspects
2013	University of Uyo UNIUYO	Four of the students protesting increase in bus-fare by the university were shot dead by the police.	University was closed.
April 2014	University of Calabar UNICAL	Police killed a 300 level student of Accounting for alleged involvement in armed robbery	Eleven police men implicated in extra-judicial killing were dismissed.
October 2014	University of Maiduguri UNIMAID	A 29year old student was arrested for stealing eight cars.	The arrested student was detained.
August 2015	Lagos state university LASU	Students were protesting mass failure after semester examination.	Police were invited by school authorities.
August 2015	UNIBEN	Cult activities	Police arrested 3 students .
2015	University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN)	Final year student was arrested by members of Special Armed Robbery Squad (SARS) for armed robbery and cultism	The student was arrested.
2016	University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT)	Students protesting hike in school fees	The school was closed for 1 month by its senate.
2016	University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID)	Police was used to detain a student for 1 month by a more influential person for non-payment of debt owed .The students car was also impounded by the police.	Court ordered police to release both the student and her car. Police only enforced the former.
September 2010	University of Jos (UNIJOS)	Students were protesting hike of 10,000 naira development levy	Police arrested students' union government officials.
March 2016	JOS	A student of UNIJOS was shot dead by police in the place of his attachment in the Ahmadu Bello way	Students protested and demanded for the prosecution of the director of states security DSS involved in shooting

In most of the instances stated in Table 1 above, students were reacting to what they see as objectionable policies of the state at both the national and institutional levels. Most of their actions were organised and issue-based. In most

cases, they had the support of members of the public. Even when the police was used against them, the students never gave up making legitimate demands on the government.

Students have every reason to do this. They come from families that bear the brunt of unpopular state laws. Some of them have their occupational interests outside formal schooling. Their predominant occupational role of schooling exposes them to demands of responsible governance. Many of them can make a comparative analysis of social structures and institutions across cultures. It is the inability of the government and university administrators to appreciate this that is part of the problem. `

It can be seen from Table 2 that police encountered students over cult-related activities in Universities like: OAU, UNIBEN, UNN, etc. At UNILORIN and UNICAL, the encounters were associated with student`s involvement in armed robbery. The students of LASU protested over their mass failure in their semester examination.

Changing patterns of police encounter with Nigerian students

A close look at table 1 will show that students were able to present a common front against perceived unacceptable national policies. In this way they stopped the introduction of the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact in 1960. Students challenged the introduction of the NYSC in 1973, hike in school fees in 1978 and introduction of SAP in 1989, using their national body. Arogundade (2015) avers that students at this period were extensively influenced by the leftist ideological framework which frowns at neo-liberal capitalist exploitative tendencies of the West.

Most of the issues raised in Table 2 were localised and never received the involvement of their national body. Both Kolawale and Arogundade (2015) agree that the ideological collapse of the Leftists` camp in the early 90s influenced the emergence of the objective conditions that characterise university education in Nigeria today. With the triumph of capitalist value preferences and needs, the Nigerian state succumbed to policy formulations and intentions of the agents of foreign monopoly capital especially the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Shrivastava and Shrivastava (2014) captured the effect of this development on university education to be: inadequate funding, infrastructural decay, loss of autonomy, falling academic standards, politicisation and privatisation of the education sector. The state resorted to conflict suppression in dealing with those clamouring for responsible governance. Cultists were used to silence vibrant student union activists. In OAU Ife a serving vice-chancellor was implicated in this.

Discussion of findings Nigerian students have used organised protests to challenge unpopular laws made by the state at different times (Etadom, 2013). This is not peculiar to them. Lipset cited in (Akintola, 2010) remarked that President De Gaulle was rattled by student`s protest in 1968. He also avers that prime minister of Burma for 26 years had to step down because of students `unrest that lasted for 2 months (Akintola, 2010). Students` protest is and should be seen as one of the components of political participation by members of the civil society. Protest is a social expression of discontentment by those involved. Very often, students` protest when issue-based tends to receive public support and approval. Little wonder that during the era of decolonisation of Africa the students featured prominently as a rebellious social movement (Arogundade, 2015).

Apart from neglecting proper funding of government-owned universities in Nigeria, the military politicised the institutions. When NANS challenged governments` decision to impose fees on the students barely a year after Nigeria

hosted Second World Black Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977, the military banned the body. The banning is an expression of conflict suppression. To Alubo (1996), the banning has a disruptive effect on the students' cohesiveness; it equally challenges them to alternative ways of meeting their social affiliation needs. The proliferation of secret cults in Nigeria's institutions of higher learning is partly a result of this development (Alubo, 1996).Ugwulegbo (1999) avers that 50 out of over 60 secret cults in Nigerian universities at the moment are male-dominated. Ajibade (n:d) avers that most of the heads of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, take to authoritarian and undemocratic leadership style in relating to the students and their demands. This often creates conflict situations which the university invites the police to handle.

Akintola(2010) is of the view that since the late 1980s,the collective identity of Nigerian students has changed dramatically. The effectiveness of their mobilisation has waned. NANS as a body is factionalised. Analysing how the body has succumbed to the politics of co-optation in the country, Abati (2005;Bakare,2015) narrated how students under NANS were part of Obasanjo's third term bid, how they bestowed Defender of Democracy on the ex-leader and how he appreciated their support with the sum of five million Naira. Violent encounters between the police and Nigerian students have been attributed to variables like: inability of the police to understand students' psychology especially, youthful exuberance (Alemika,and Chukwuma,2000);administrative high handedness on the part of university management(Onyeonoru,1996);personality make up of both the police officers enforcing the law and student activists (Akers and Sellers, 2009). From this perspective, not only do social deviants lack pro-social attributes and values, they equally have a proclivity for sadism, vengeance, displaced aggression and violent role processes. To Bandura (1974;Sutherland, 1949;Obarisiagbon, 2014). It is a behavioural process that is learnt during social interaction. In effect,

both the tendency of the police to use conflict suppression on students' protests, and the tendency of the latter to express their discontentment through conflict expression, are all learnt from the social structure having the two bodies.

Both Alemika and Chukwuma (2000) aver that the police is very important in creating the enabling environment for people to go about their legitimate business. They equally argued that but for the police, violent expression of discontentment by students can be very inimical to the entire social system. Because of the challenges involved in policing, the government equally employs strategies like persuasion, co-optation, propaganda and gratification to rule the civil society (Alemika and Chukwuma,2000).

Indeed, police violent encounter with the students is just one of its kind in a society where the government uses coercion to rule. While the colonial rule used the police to consolidate and use their state power, post-colonial Nigerian state did not make a significant departure in excessive use of state power to suppress the governed.

As a conflict group the police is oriented to upholding and defending the normative values of the government as enshrined in its laws (Sellin, 1938; Sutherland and Cressey 1978; Ojedokun and Aderinto,2014).When the ideology of the state upholds capitalist values, it is normal for the police to define students clamouring for better funding of social services as threatening the peace of the society. Law and order in any society is never abstract and classless (Beckman, 1981).

Ibeziako (1963:22) observed that "police powers in Nigeria are the powers in the hands of the government of Nigeria, at any given time, to dispel disorder, chaos, disaffection or dissatisfaction among the citizens and the security of the state". Perhaps for this reason, the police officers implicated in the shooting of defenceless students, tend to go unpunished. For example, for shooting to death

five students of University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), the officer implicated was not punished. Also unpunished was ASP Dankalo, who led the police encounter that killed Kunle Oshinowo of Lagos state university, protesting fuel price hike.

David (n:d) avers that the number of tertiary institutions in Nigeria rose from 211 in 1999 to 363 in 2011. He attributed the increase to the Deregulation of education sector by the Obasanjo, Yar'Adua and Jonathan led administrations. It was a development that led to the creation of more universities, polytechnics and colleges of technology by both the federal and state governments as well as private individuals and religious bodies.

More than ever before, the admission of new students into these institutions received parochial and primordial considerations at variance with evolution of national consciousness that characterised students unions of old. In many of the institution, very unqualified students gained entry as they benefited from parochial policies like Vice-Chancellors` list, catchment areas, Staff child etc. Many of the institutions accommodated more infiltration of the students` body by very unqualified students who cannot appreciate demands of vibrant student`s unionism. Many of them were created for political reasons. Budgetary allocations to the institutions did not make sense when viewed with their carrying capacities.

The students` body became politicised and so, lost its` historic role of being the conscience of disadvantaged segments of the society. Ascending the position of student union officials became the preserve of those who could be sponsored by the university management and of course the political class who are also important stake holders in running the university system.

It should not be surprising therefore that the police which exists to ensure peoples` compliance with directives of the government has witnessed reduced instances of violent encounter with the students at a time when the students are

highly disorganised as a social group. Arongudade (2015) has rightly observed that NANS has become a pawn in the chessboard of the political class. Its members have abandoned the ideals, vision and mission of the organisation. Today, the body has more than four secretariats with each clamouring for recognition and patronage from the political class. This docility of NANS is evident in Table 2 above where most of the issues raised were localised.

Conclusion

The Nigerian state in running her dependent-capitalist economy, uses coercion by the police to ensure compliance to its` will and policies. At a time in Nigeria's history, university students united to challenge some of the state policies. They recorded some successes. Kolawale (n:d) and Arogundade attributed this to the influence of socialist ideological framework in world politics. In the early 90s the influence of this ideology in Nigeria started to wane following the end of the cold war.

Nigerian leaders, in keeping with the prescriptions of the agents of foreign monopoly capital started disassociating the government from funding social services. The education sector was not spared. Students who protested were defined as deviants. The students` body, NANS, became politicised just as the universities lost their autonomy. The government was able to use coercion, propoganda, reward and co-option to achieve this aim. Many of the leaders, who could not fund government-owned universities for lack of funds, now have their own private universities.

People in authority should learn that social conflict is not always a negation of unity. It is a dialectically propelled world. Essentially for this reason good governance is not possible without constructive criticisms. Economic and social security entitlements of policemen should not be trivialized. Unserious and

mischievous university administrators should be visited with severe sanctions since their roles are capable of leading to students` unrest.

When it is necessary and possible police officers, who are alumni of a higher institution in conflict, should be actively involved in quelling such riots. This also implies that such policemen can be helpful in nipping campus violence in the bud.

All told, responsible governance in Nigeria will definitely have a perforating effect on campus violence which the police is usually used to suppress.

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