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Sustaining a Tradition of Policing Through Alienation: An Assessment of Recruitment and Training in the Colonial and Postcolonial Nigeria Police

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Abstract

The Nigeria police force is problem-endowed. These problems are structural and institutional. Of these, alienation stands out as the most fundamental. Alienation as a policy of policing in Nigeria dates back to the colonial period. The need for a police force was borne out of the desire to protect the person and property of the colonizing authority and to impress on the inhabitants the might of the occupying power. In the post-independence period, this requirement was slightly modified to incorporate the interests of the indigenous property-owning class. To ensure this, the mode of recruitment and training has retained the traits inherited from the colonial period. This article examines the colonial and contemporary recruitment and training programmes as the basis of alienation. It posits that the recruitment and training programme estranged the police from the public and the public from the police. This has produced a hostile police-public relationship while at the same time ensuring that the interests of the ruling class are protected.

Résumé

Les forces de police du Nigeria sont minées par les problèmes. Parmi ces problèmes, qui sont à la fois structurels et institutionnels, figure celui de l'aliénation comme méthode de maintien de l'ordre au Nigeria qui remonte à l'époque coloniale. Le besoin de mettre en place des forces de police était né du désir de protéger la personne et les biens de l'autorité coloniale et de brandir devant les habitants la force du pouvoir d'occupation. Pendant la période qui suivit l'indépendance, cette exigence a été légèrement modifiée afin d'y intégrer les intérêts de la classe des propriétaires autochtones. Pour ce faire, le mode de recrutement et de formation a gardé les caractéristiques hérités de la période coloniale. Cet article analyse les programmes de recrutement et de formation tant coloniaux que contemporains comme base d'aliénation. Il y est postulé que le

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programme de recrutement et de formation a éloigné la police du public et le public de la police. Ce qui a donné lieu à des rapports antagoniques entre la police et le public tout en assurant la protection des intérêts de la classe dirigeante.

Introduction

The view that members of the public get the police they deserve (Souryal 1997:8) fits the situation in Nigeria from the inception of the institution. While the concept of policing has been present in one form or the other throughout history (ibid.:51), the kind of police bequeathed to Nigeria was an imposition. Policing standards in Nigeria fall below internationally accepted requirements in all aspects including the ratio of police to the population. This situation owes much to the crisis of underdevelopment and to the policing tradition inherited from the colonial authority.

The police created in Nigeria came under a framework that specified that the very nature of a police service must be fashioned by the role that it plays in society (Bunyard 1978:1). The police in modern Nigeria not only prevented, detected and punished crime, they have also maintained law and order, preserved public safety and generally buttressed the existing government, at first British and later Nigerian (Tamuno 1970:xv). From its inception, its role was shaped by the nature of European interests in the country and the reactions of the indigenous people to their activities.

The police was established to safeguard trade and protect the missions and commercial interests. The need to cut costs and maximize local revenue to provide for services compelled the police to perform dual functions of a police and military nature (Crowder 1962:120–1). Their association with military duties produced a force whose actions aroused public suspicion (Tamuno 1970:5). The earliest known manifestation of public distrust for the police was the complaint lodged by Russell that the police force in Lagos had more than once been assaulted by the people (McCoskry 1862; Tamuno 1970:4–5). The police, according to the Acting Governor, were to blame. This unhealthy relationship has been the hallmark of policing in contemporary Nigeria. In exercising the powers conferred on it, the Nigeria police neglected its most fundamental premise that: “the law is lacking in power if it does not have the general backing of the public or to put it another way, the police in using their law enforcing powers will generally be effective with public support and generally less effective without it” (Anderson 1979:11).

The police are weak, lacking in public support and police without the consent of the people. The authority of the force is derived more from the law, and its reputation for alienating the public and its action produced cor-

ruption. Their action is in tandem with the character of the state, which provides their enabling environment and colours their basic mentality, occupational culture and performance (Souryal 1979:5).

The crisis can be located by comparing the calibre of recruitment and training in the colonial and contemporary epochs.

Conceptualizing Alienation

Alienation is defined as a state of estrangement of the individual from the natural environment, social life or the self. The causes of the separation may be either within the individual or with the external world of work, politics, social norms or society as a whole (Sinclair et al. 2002). Alienation also described a state of being an outsider, a feeling of isolation, and a situation in which both the self and the external world seem unreal (Encyclopedia 1998:294). Perspectives on alienation differ as psychiatrists, sociologists and philosophers viewed the concept differently.

While each of the perspectives explained the term as a separation of the self from the environment, Karl Marx's conception of alienation as an explicit social phenomenon that can be explicitly checked supports the context of this study (ibid.:294). Marx conceived of the subject as a situation in which a man's powers of perception, orientation and creation become stunted and crippled by the very nature of industrial organization and by the capitalist economic system. Max Weber's contention of relationships becoming specialized and situational as a consequence of increased bureaucratization also supports the conception of this study. A third view that fits into the study is Georg Simmel's use of the concept to describe the tension within a person seeking to preserve personal autonomy and individuality in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture and of the techniques of life (ibid.).

Alienation, or the pervasiveness of it in the Nigerian condition, can be traced to the coming of colonialism. This is not to say that the phenomenon was not present in the communities that eventually constituted the new state. As a situation of the workplace, that is modern industry, it owed its origin to the creation of these structures in colonial authority's attempt to derive economic resources. It was a production relation that was alien to the indigenous people, that pooled different groups into a mechanical process and that entailed an exchange and relations that were mechanical and impersonal. The condition resulted from the imposition of an 'external culture', a different 'historical heritage', new 'techniques of life' and 'social forces' that questioned the self in relation to a society in a state of flux.

As a work situation condition, a considerable proportion of workers do not really enjoy their work as they are alienated because they feel they have no control over the work process, that it is meaningless to them, that they do not belong to the work community and the work is not an important part of their personalities or lives (Arygyle 1987:4). Indeed, these states of unhappiness in the workplace are most common in the lowest ranks of industry (ibid.).

The case of the police development in Nigeria is of dissatisfaction manifesting in the lower rungs of the ladder from the colonial period to the present. The exercise of police power is not alien to pre-British Nigeria, but in the form it took as an organized body to regulate social order on the grounds that no human society has ever been totally free of deviant behaviour, it was totally new. Thus conferring police power on an ill-motivated, brutalized and unsophisticated society as the legitimate authority of government to regulate the behaviour of the population in order to achieve the common good (Leonard 1980:10), did not accomplish this. What is the common good here referred to those associated with the interests of the British whose idea it was to constitute the police. The need for this institution would not have been possible without the social forces unleashed upon it.

Alienation manifested in the police and the public. The type and calibre of recruits attracted to the force and the training given produced and encouraged non-cooperation between policemen and the public they policed. The public, on the other hand, saw the new men in uniform acting in a new way in the exercise of their new powers as people to be feared and kept at arm's length. The police and the public were cut off from the objective (ISLEC 1982:12) of policing, as neither understood it. This was a situation that was encouraged structurally and institutionally, and the result was friction between the two.

Since we alluded to the state of alienation as common among the lower class of the working population, the situation was assuaged with the new-found police power of carrying guns and issuing orders to the rest of the population. The police were therefore the intermediary (Bowden 1978:18) between the issuing authority and the public. The position of the police is contradictory and even ironical (Alemika 1993:59), as they are harassed by the issuing authority and the public, and are instrument of oppression and exploitation in totalitarian and unjust social systems, yet they are essential to the preservation of justice and democracy.

Alienation as defined and explained in the foregoing is evident in the recruitment and training programme since the inception of the police, revealing a deliberate programme of encouraging this situation in the force to protect the interest of the ruling class.

Recruitment and Training in the Colonial Period

When the various representatives (Tamuno 1970:1–40) of Her Majesty's Government in the area that became Nigeria began to establish the different forces that would form the nucleus of the present Nigeria Police Force, the question of personnel and training did not constitute a serious problem. The need for the police, which was shaped by the colonial preoccupation with commerce (ibid.:1) and a cautious approach on the question of finance (ibid.:2), influenced the choice of the calibre of men employed in the pioneer forces.

The representatives settled on the Hausa elements found in the Lagos area whose circumstances made them available, accessible and amenable to the requirement of the new forces. In a letter to the Duke of Newcastle justifying the choice of the Hausa, the Governor of Lagos colony, H.S. Freeman, pointed out the advantage of an estranged police for the colonial government. According to him, deploying policemen to areas where they were aliens would foster an effective deposit of violence in the community policed (Alemika and Chukwuma 2000:30). Freeman wrote that:

the men (Hausamen recruited into the force in Lagos colony) being from the interior and professing the Mussulman (Muslim or Islam) religion are hated by the natives of these areas who have hitherto only known them as slaves. They (Hausa) are disliked also by the Europeans as being of a more independent character than the Lagos people. They have thus only the government to depend on and if properly managed will prove a valuable resource to this settlement (NAI 1863).

This view was pronounced in correspondence in 1893 in which Governor Deaton opined that:

In our Hausa force we have a body of men dissociated from the countries immediately around Lagos both by birth and religion, and who are as a matter of fact the hereditary enemies of the Yorubas. This is such an enormous advantage in any interior complication (opposition to colonial rule) that I should be sorry to see it abandoned... (Alemika and Chukwuma 2000:31)

The Hausa recruits were disliked by the natives and by the Europeans they were expected to police and only had the government to depend on. The injunctions in both letters stressed the advantages of the approach, indicating that it was a deliberate policy of the authority. The purpose of this practice was to alienate the police from the community they served to ensure that such officials when deployed to execute punitive expeditions would act as an army of occupation (Alemika 1993:187–219; Alemika 1998:161–76; Ahire 1991). Perhaps the focus on alienation was informed by the stage of the development of the colonial enterprise. The wisdom in employing the Armed

Hausa police was demonstrated in their use in bloody encounters in the rural districts close to Lagos colony and at times abroad. In missions described as dangerous the Armed Hausa police showed its mettle (Tamuno 1970:18–19).

Thus the philosophy of policing bequeathed to Nigeria differed from what prevailed in the metropolitan country. In essence, there was a colonial interest in ensuring hostility and violence between the police and the citizens. They were not established, as in the metropolitan country, as agents for promoting the rule of law, human rights and community safety and individual security or for delivering social services (Alemika and Chukwuma 2000:31).

The training provided for these men was in consonance with the role envisaged for them. The training was based on the fact that the exigencies of colonial rule required a much more passive relationship between the police and the public than it did in Great Britain (Clinard and Abbot 1973:216). According to Ahire, the training and orientation of the British police was deemed to be unsuitable for service in the colonies (Ahire 1985:114). Thus all appointments made to the police force (locally and from Britain) were of persons who could show that they had had military training in the armed forces of the crown or that they were ex-officers of the Royal Irish Constabulary (*ibid.*). Indeed, the model for colonial policing was provided by the RIC programme, which had been adapted to the conditions in Ireland with its heritage of rebellion and opposition to British rule. This was summarized when it was admitted that the really effective influence on the development of colonial police forces during the nineteenth century was not that of the police of Great Britain but that of the Royal Irish Constabulary (Jeffries 1952:30).

The job description for the colonial police, which determined selection and training until the 1930s, was for a force capable of ensuring public safety – not against the criminal in the ordinary sense, but against disturbance and unrest among primitive tribes that was less than open rebellion, and of a political rather than a criminal character. It was a requirement, according to Ahire, that responded to the specific state of the Nigerian social formation (Ahire 1985:118).

The Nigeria police standing orders unequivocally spelt out the objective of training that:

... emphasis is put on drill as the means of instilling obedience, discipline and self control. Officers and men are required to model their drill standards on those of the military infantry, as the force is itself a semi-military organization... It is essential that every constable should be able to use his rifle with a fair amount of accuracy, for if a man is totally unable to shoot, he is useless to the force (NPSO 1932:45–46).

The preoccupation on riot drill and paramilitary training for the police lasted throughout the colonial period (Tamuno 1970:267–8) and even beyond (Odekunle 1979:61–3), though it varied from place to place. Thus in the police colleges, established in Kaduna and Enugu in 1922 and 1932, it is observed that in both schools “special attention is paid to the physical development of the recruits, and games and athletic feature largely in their training. The value of these in developing a recruit both physically and morally, and in promoting the team spirit is inestimable” (CSO 1937:8).

The job description of the college was also clear. The Enugu police school was required to train the police of the Southern Provinces and township police in Northern Provinces and to strive to improve their standard of literacy in English. The Kaduna police school was expected to train the men who would perform rudimentary duties in primitive areas (CSO 1937).

The statement suggests that the premium placed on the training programme was aimed at preparing a recruit to perform paramilitary duties. The personality profile adopted by the police also affected the discharge of their duties. The personality type might best be characterized as multi-faceted, and this was attributed both to inherent characteristics and those that came as a result of performing the task, although this would be difficult to determine (Leonard 1980: 68–9). These traits include authoritarianism, suspicion, aggressiveness, masculinity, alienation and cynicism (ibid.:70–3). The extent and degree to which each personality trait is acquired and comes to play a major role in the behaviour of the police officer, in our case, would be determined by the period and the nature of the duties performed.

The traits mentioned were present in the colonial police as they were prerequisites in accomplishing the work. The policy of policing through alienation manifested itself in the areas of the minority in the Northern Provinces. An examination of the colonial record reveals that the authority relied on persons alien to the areas as the pool of recruits to police the place. This was the case in the Benue and Plateau Provinces. This approach in tandem with colonial policy was a source of friction between the people and the police.

In the Jos detachment of the police, the former headquarters of the Plateau Province had an establishment of 207 men in 1932 (NAK 1932). The breakdown by ethnic groups is shown in Table 1.

Of these numbers none can be regarded to be indigenous to the area. The closest to this is the Tiv, with only three men in the force. It is also possible that the column described as miscellaneous might have contained persons indigenous to the area.

The tendency of policing using strangers continued as dominant policy to 1939 (NAK 1932–39). The idea of strangers policing strangers (Killingray

1986:411–37) was extended to the Benue Province as well. The criteria for recruitment disfavoured persons indigenous to the Province, especially the literacy aspect of possessing English language and/or Hausa (NAK 1937–61:32). The result was a police force dominated by non-indigenous persons with few instances of persons indigenous to the area. Table 2 shows the police detachment data for 1934.

Table 1: Police Detachment, Jos, 1932

Ethnic Group	Numbers
Hausa	93
Yoruba	1
Fulani	23
Berberi	23
Bargani	11
Zabarma	12
Bakakeri	4
Arabs	5
Tiv	3
Miscellaneous	26

Source: NAK Josprof 2/25/3A/1933, Plateau Province Annual Report 1932 (Departmental) Police.

Table 2: Police Detachment 1934

Year	Strength	Ethnic Group	Number
1934	152	Hausa	47
		Fulani	27
		Ibo	4
		Yoruba	2
		Miscellaneous	60
		Idoma	2
		Munshi	5
		Jukun	4
		Berberi	10
		Benin	1

Source: NAK Makprof 750 Police Detachment, Benue Province Annual Report 1934–1938.

Table 2 reveals a preponderance of persons non-indigenous to the area because of their possession of the twin criteria of education and not being indigenous to the area. Among the indigenous persons were Idoma, Munshi and Jukun. The trends continued throughout the 1930s (NAK 1934–38)

where records were available but from the 1940s, especially from 1939, the non-indigenous presence began to reduce, particularly among the Hausa, while that of the Ibo increased (NAK 1944–47). The only indigenous group to have witnessed a rise in its representation was the Munshi. They maintained seven persons in the force in the period 1942 to 1944, and in 1946 their figure was nine. The advantages contained in having indigenous persons serve as members of the police were alluded to in colonial correspondence although for an entirely different reason (Rotimi 2001:16–28). Realizing the difficulty of policing the Middle Belt area, a case was made for a person from the area and where this could not be found, a Christian would be more acceptable than a Muhammedan (*ibid.*).

To a large extent colonial policing fell short of expectations.

Recruitment and Training Today: Refining Colonial Methods?

Nationalists blamed the colonial authority for the non-performance and fulfilment of expectations – at least to the Nigerian people – of the colonial police, and the hope was that with independence and with Nigerians steering the ship of state, the delivery rate would markedly differ from that of the immediate past.

However, as in most things, the expectations of Nigerians have been dashed. In the case of the police it was observed that almost four decades after independence, the police were yet to change orientation to a people-oriented police force. Indeed, some would argue that the reputation of the colonial police is far better than that of the police today (Adisa 1999:6).

The situation has been blamed on the fact that the purpose and methods of policing colonial and postcolonial Nigeria are similar because, at fundamental levels, the political and economic structures of both eras are similar. It attributed the scenario where citizens and government are alienated from each other to successive governments since colonial times lacking legitimacy as a result of the absence of democracy (Alemika and Chukwuma 2000:35).

Not even the democracy on offer since 1999 promises a respite from this authoritarian tradition. The government in power since 1999 is, for all intents and purposes, a military one, with the difference being in the change of attire. The party and government in power are composed of ex-military officers and the orientation they bring to bear in governance is couched in the tradition they were trained in. This is demonstrated by their response to crisis and especially by their identification of problems and the solutions they proffered. One of these areas is the Nigeria police. Not only is the problem of the police structural but it is also institutional, and such elements include

the character of laws in society, the nature, extent and scope of police–citizen contact, the quality and quantity of manpower and material resources, police recruitment, training and orientation, police discipline in relation to supervision, corruption and incivility to the public and police accountability (ibid.:46).

Of importance here is the recruitment, training and orientation of the men and women, which determine the quality and quantity of manpower available, and the material resources provided by the government to accomplish the task. The government, in agreeing that Nigeria is under-policed, lifted the embargo on recruitment in 1999 and ordered that 40,000 policemen and women should be recruited annually for the next four years.

The motivation for both the government and the prospective recruits were suspect. For the government it was a populist programme, like others in the period, aimed at winning the regime the support of the people. This is so because in ordering the mass recruitment of persons into the force, quality was sacrificed as the screening processes were flawed and the training centres were not expanded, and neither was the curriculum (*Interview 2004*). In fact, my source (a training officer in one of the police colleges) contended that the training manual has remained largely unchanged since the colonial period. Apart from the lip service given to the question of training by the immediate past administration such as the agreement with the American government to assist in training the Nigerian police in a package to include curriculum development and building a service-oriented force that would rely on the co-operation of the public (*Tell 2003:49*) producing a new partnership, nothing had come out of the intention as at the time the administration handed over in 2007. The same lip service greeted the deal with the American government over the restructuring of the armed forces with the noticeable innovation being the creation of semi-cabinet ranks for the three services in the first administration established in 1999.

The principal police training facilities available in the country are still those inherited from the colonial authority after independence. These included those at Kaduna, Enugu and Ikeja. These facilities are used to train all cadres of policemen until the establishment of the police academy in Kano meant for the officer class. As a result of the mass recruitment exercise the existing training facilities were overstretched and new ones had to be improvised in different parts of the country to cater for the crisis (*Interview 2005*). Different training units emerged in the different parts of the country running programmes that churned out new policemen on the streets of Nigeria in the period 1999 to 2003.

For prospective recruits it was an opportunity to get out of the unemployment market, which was by this time heavily oversubscribed. Two calibres of prospective recruits featured here: the officers' class and the ranks. In interviews conducted with enlisted men of the latter category (*Interview* 2004, 2005), two-thirds of the respondents admitted that the police was the least in their job scale of preference and that they opted for the police to escape joblessness. As one of the respondents put it: 'it is better to be a government guard (police) than one of those employed by the ever growing private security outfits'. Most freely admitted that they paid their way into the force as money was demanded and given (*Interview* 2004). A lot of them admitted that they used false and borrowed certificates while a handful of them admitted knowing ex-criminals and over-aged persons in the service. One of my informants was aware of people from his communities who used false certificates and money to facilitate their entry. Quite a number of them were noted criminals as well (Lumbi 2004). The recent screening exercise that was carried out in the force confirmed the use of false and borrowed certificates by people recruited under the general recruitment exercise ordered by the government. The screening process is an ongoing exercise aimed at sanitizing the force and removing doubtful characters from the service (*Interview* 2006). The cases of criminal elements and certificate fraud is most evident in the recruitment into the rank-and-file cadres of the force (*Interview* 2006) as most of these people paid their way into the force in the colleges.

As for the officer class their motivation, like the ranks, was to get out of unemployment. But in their case the prospects seem rather bright since they belong to the elite of the force. One of them admitted that his prospects were good and that in the space of fifteen to twenty years, he hoped to be a commissioner heading a state command, which 'means a lot in terms of opportunity' (*Interview* 2004). What this entails in the Nigerian context is not far-fetched as the opportunity in question could be the use of this position for personal enrichment and to subvert the cause of justice. Corruption in the top echelon of the force had been behind the strikes embarked on by junior police officers (*Newswatch* 2002:38) and it was this that resulted in the sacking of Mr Tafa Balogun, a one-time police chief. Indeed, one of the aides of the immediate past police chief who succeeded Mr Balogun was allegedly caught with a large sum of money leaving the headquarters, meant for the retiring police boss.

With such motivations informing the choice of the police as a career, it is not surprising that their attitude is determined by their desire, and the consequence is that few members of the public see the police as friends. What is

prevalent is that the sight of police is considered synonymous with trouble (Alemika and Chukwuma 2000:47–8). This is partly because in the absence of a social service dimension in police work in Nigeria, the police preoccupations or routine work revolve around stop and question/search, arrest, crime investigation, detention, prosecution and crowd control, and armed combat against violent criminals and guarding the rich and powerful. In fact, respondents to a survey opined that the sight and smell of trouble excite the police because of the prospect of what they can make for themselves and that there is a competition between the officer class and the ranks. The ranks are willing to settle out of station and at a lower rate since the initiative would be taken away from them on reaching the station (*Interview* 2004, 2005).

The attitude of the police described in the foregoing is the product of the training (Alemika and Chukwuma 2000:46) or lack of it offered them, the welfare programme and the kind of equipment provided (Jike 2003:83–5). It is common knowledge to hear that police are underpaid and that the little they collect is subject to different exactions and irregular taxation in corrupt practices by their superiors and ministry officials (*Newswatch* 2002:38–48). Most policemen stay outside the barracks, and most of the barracks were still those inherited from the colonial authority. The ones built during the Shagari administration are in such a dilapidated state that they are best seen than described. The Petroleum Trust Fund intervention was a corruption conduit for officials who in the name of rehabilitation left the buildings worse than when they saw them. In fact, the colonial structures are far stronger and better-looking than the few ones provided in the post-independence period.

Police are constantly complaining about lack of equipment, a fact compounded by the poor maintenance culture prevalent among Nigerians generally. Operational vehicles, when they are available, have no fuel in them and complainants are compelled to provide money for fuel and materials to register complaints. The various Federal and States' special anti-crime bodies have abandoned their mission of safeguarding the safety of the public to collecting levies from motorists and colluding with criminals. The amount collected varies according to the units. At the top of the scale are the Federal Highway Patrol Teams, equipped with Toyota Land Cruisers, then the Police Mobile Patrol and the Joint Military Police Task Force, in this order while down the scale are the ordinary police who are palpably aware of their status among motorists and can therefore accept anything offered. The amount pegged for the Federal Highway Patrol is non-negotiable for the different categories of vehicles.

The socialization process for new entrants into these extortion rackets begins early after enlistment. It will be observed that stop and search are specifically done at night from 9.00pm and, in the Keffi Area, the new recruits are stationed at the one-track bridge inherited from the colonial authority where they stop motorcyclists and demand money. The class character of the work is revealing as it is the lower ranks who do the stopping while the higher ranks collect the fees, as is the case with the Federal Highway Patrol.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis demonstrates a crisis of alienation produced by the recruitment and training policies during the colonial and contemporary periods. While it was specifically encouraged in the colonial period, the lack of an official policy in post-independence times was exacerbated by government neglect, the poor calibre of recruits, weak motivation and inadequate training and welfare programmes that produced a police force estranged from the public and a public unwilling to co-operate with the police.

Concepts such as community policing and billboards proclaiming 'Today's police as professional and committed' and 'To serve and protect with integrity' remain aspirations whose possibility of ever becoming a reality are reduced by structural and institutional constraints. The future of the Nigeria Police and the Nigerian public will be determined for a long time by the mutual suspicion embedded between them, and rather than becoming partners in the smooth functioning of society, they will be alienated from each other, resulting in further loss of confidence and the resort to alternative policing.

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