

# African Research Review

---

An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 7 (1), Serial No. 28, January, 2013:73-94

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070--0083 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v7i1.6>

---

## **Traditional Values, Beliefs and Reliance on Indigenous Resources for Crime Control in Modern Southwest Nigeria**

**Owumi, Bernard** - Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

E-mail: [bowumi@yahoo.com](mailto:bowumi@yahoo.com)

&

**Ajayi, Johnson Olusegun** - Department of Sociology, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

E-mail: [delight\\_top@yahoo.com](mailto:delight_top@yahoo.com)

### **Abstract**

*Traditionally, people from the southwest Nigeria believe and place high premium on the use of indigenous resources for warfare like some other groups in Nigeria. The sustenance of the belief in these values has largely been promoted by the inadequacy of modern policing system and the rising crime rate in our society. It is against this background this paper attempts to examine the prevailing values, belief and practices among the people of the southwest and its utility in the maintenance of local security personnel. This paper also seeks to investigate the potency and efficacy of these indigenous resources in providing security within the community and the invincibility of community guard. Qualitative methodology was used to draw relevant information from the study population while the data were analyzed by ethnographic summaries and content analysis. The choice of this method was*

*in consonance with the functional and control theories on which the study hinged. The result shows indigenous resources are efficacious in certain respects if they are used with caution and due observance of certain fundamental laws.*

**Key words:** Indigenous resources, Self defence, Crime Control, Charms, Initiation, Return to culture.

## **Introduction**

There is no society that is totally free of crime and criminality but the degree of its presence or occurrence varies from one society to the other and this also depends on the mechanisms put in place to checkmate the trend and incidence. Each, race, or identity group in the world had and have, accepted and collective patterns and methods of social control and conflict resolution. Whereas, in the West for example, the police are the official means, of crime detection and control. Africans depend solely on indigenous values and believes in combating crime and criminals. When we talk of values they are conceptions about the desirable ways of life oriented at guiding actions among individuals or within groups through socialization. It is against this backdrop that this paper is interested in looking at those valued traditional and indigenous resources in the south west for crime control.

Much have been said by the general public in books, the media, and by the academia about the ineffectiveness of the police in handling the crime problem of Nigeria which kept on increasing by the day. Suggestions have been offered and different solutions proffered to no avail. Perhaps, those methods are foreign to our culture. In contemporary Nigerian setup, the foreign system is employed to regulate lives patterns that are mainly alien to the system. This corroborates the view put forward by Cunnen [2000] he observed that in various parts of the world, Europeans have used criminal justice systems as a key colonial tool to dismantle and de-legitimize the social institutions and political aspiration of indigenous people. No the abysmal wonder the failure of most policies introduced to curb crime in Nigeria.

What the policy makers still fail to understand is that the English pattern and system of government, the institution of the courts and the workings of an adversarial system of justice inherited and practiced, amount to a large portion of English culture. Thus, in their various attempts to correct what

they perceived as a rampant injustice in Nigeria of today has further created a greater injustice by forcing foreign culture upon Nigerian peoples. Although traditional methods still exist in so many communities of the globe, but at very narrow scales alongside the injury inflicting police torture in the name of interrogation and confession extraction.

While Europeans try hard on commissions of inquires, constitution and court system of lawyers and judges, Africa used council of elders, king's court, people's [open] assemblies etc for dispute settlement and justice dispensation [Nwolise, 2004]. Alagoa [2004] examined these mechanisms in the South-south zone and maintained that the traditional institutions for social control included council of elders, general assembly of the people, secret societies [e.g. the Ekpe, Obong Ekine, Sekiapu masquerade society]. Braimah [1998] in his study on the traditional methods of social control in African societies before the advent of colonialism found out that citizen diplomacy, joking, relationship [as found among the Tiv and Fulani in the Northern areas of Nigeria] oaths, symbolic diplomacy [peaceful methods] and blood feuding, raiding and warfare [violent method] were prevalent while Onoge [1993] confirms that before colonialism and eventual amalgamation of 1914, social conflicts were monitored, prevented, managed and resolved through established mechanisms generally accepted by rulers, council of elders, age sets, chiefs, ancestral cults, religious beliefs, local deities and others. Individual and group attitudes and behaviors were also controlled through these mechanisms.

The lifestyle of Nigerians seems fundamentally different from that of the English or other Europeans, for this reason, the English social control system introduced and practiced in Nigeria is in a way not very suitable to effectively regulate and control social relations. The observation that the English-based law enforcement system may not sufficiently guarantee a stable Nigeria after independence appears to challenge the country's "modern" status. The understanding or knowledge of this lifestyle and the history of the Yoruba will be a foundation upon which their indigenous methods of crime control is examined and appreciated.

### **The problem**

The control of crime in Nigerian society has remained elusive as a result of ineffective security apparatus. Up till now, the English-based official system of justice in Nigeria, has been unable to guarantee safety to lives and

property of the common people; in addition, it is rather expensive, time wasting, and insensitive to the traditional and indigenous values and beliefs system of the people. The utility of the traditional and indigenous social control mechanisms, on the other hand, has been remarkable and appear to satisfy Nigerians' yens for inexpensive, more rapid and culturally relevant justice and social order [Ajayi et al 2008]. For decades man has been pre-occupied with the arduous task of finding the most effective means of countering the menace of crime and criminals to no avail, security implies a stable, relatively predictable and peaceful environment in which individuals could pursue legitimate ends without obstruction or harm and without fear of disturbance or injury. Security problems remain one of the universal phenomena and continue to take a frightening proportion of man peace and orderly society; its weakness alone could indeed be disastrously provocative.

## Literature

### The Yoruba in Nigeria history

The Yoruba nation forms a part of about 250 ethnic-nationalities inhabiting the Federal Republic of Nigeria. They are indigenous to Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Osun and Oyo states. They constitute 80% of Kwara State and 30% of Kogi State in the Middle-belt zone of Nigeria. They are also found in Delta and Edo states. Indeed, the Itsekiri of Delta State, though a distinct group, regard themselves as kith and kin of the Yoruba nation. The Yoruba are also found in Benin Republic and Togo [The Yoruba Agenda, 2005].

At independence in 1960, Nigeria was a federation of three regions i.e. the Northern, Western and Eastern Regions. The Yoruba populated the Western portion of Nigeria; despite the infiltration of other religions now practiced by the people the traditional religion still has its solid root in Yoruba land. The Yoruba beliefs in *Olodumare* God and other divinities such as *Sango* god of thunder, *Ogun* god of iron, *Oya* fertility god, *Obatala* god of productivity or agriculture, *Osun* the river goddess and *Orunmila* the god of divination. These smaller gods are held as interlocutors between man and God.

In time of need, when in distress or when there is any mishap in the society these gods are propitiated through magic, divinations and sacrifices in order to avert the evil in their midst and to stop further occurrence in the community. They are equally consulted for powers to deal with enemies and to escape from dangers. Thus these religious values and beliefs are well

entrenched in Yoruba culture. It is no wonder then that when there is frustration occasioned by ineffectiveness of the state security, the people fall back on their traditional system as an alternative.

### **Vigilantism and crime control in southwestern Nigeria**

The Yoruba says “*Ore Olopa kii bimo re bi ko bi kumo abi kondo*” meaning “it is patently unwise to be friendly with the police as such will end in club or baton”. This is a statement in Yoruba that paints the police in a negative picture and warns people to steer clear of the police or risk being assaulted. The loss of public confidence in the effectiveness of the police has resulted in the reliance on private or self-help security outfits and local vigilante groups such as the Oodua Peoples Congress of the south-west; the Bakassi Boys of the South-East, the Egbesu Boys of the Niger Delta and a host of others.

In a more elaborate sense, the southwest use of tradition and cultural practice for youth mobilization gained wider local acceptance, the youth are pooled to defend their communities and neighborhoods as the police increasingly failed to control local criminal activities in many parts of Nigeria. The Federal police in Nigeria had long been perceived as corrupt and unable to provide security by local residents.

When economic opportunities became increasingly exclusive and crime rates in Nigeria soared, many communities expressed outrage at their victimization. In response to complaints, the federal government encouraged local government byelaws, which legalized vigilante groups under the control of the *Obas*.<sup>1</sup> From 1986 onwards, vigilante groups began to kill those found guilty.<sup>2</sup> The bodies of those executed were usually beheaded and subsequently burnt, and left lying by the roadside to serve as deterrent [Nolte, 2004].

Sequel to the widespread public support, the police were unable to prevent the empowerment of the vigilante groups; even though at first these were only organized locally and limited their activities to certain neighborhoods of each of the towns. A complaint about vigilante activities in 1996 by the local police commissioner in Ogun state was dismissed by the Remo traditional council with the argument that unlike the vigilante, the police routinely

---

<sup>1</sup> Daily Times, 12 September. 2006

<sup>2</sup> The Guardian, 17 September. 1996.

accept bribes to let criminals escape [Ikenne cited in Nolte, 2004]. Many of the vigilantes called themselves *Ode*<sup>3</sup>, that is hunters, evoking traditional notions of community safety, due to public support and the relatively cheap availability of small arms on the international market [Amusan, 2001] those youths who joined the increasingly well-equipped vigilante groups began to systematically exclude the police from the communities at night. The fear of the vigilantes was based on the belief that they had at their disposal magical forms of detection and protection, which would protect the innocent, a sentiment shared by other Nigerian communities [Harnisehfeger, 2003; Gore and Prattern, 2003; Omololu, 2003].

Among the OPC, magical protection was attained through initiation. Members of OPC also consult oracles regularly to divine the immediate future. While traveling or on assignment or on any particular course of action, the organization asks the oracle to check what might happen and then seek protection and take precaution<sup>4</sup> Such protection becomes crucial in case of violence, by OPC or against them [Adebanwi, 2005]. Members of OPC wear special black clothing and spoke in code language which may be unintelligible to those outside the group [Sodeinde, 2002 cited in Nolte, 2004].

OPC has no code of conduct guiding the crime control initiatives of the organization, in spite of this, the OPC has a militant squad called 'eso' engaged in carrying out combat-style operation and low-intensity conflicts as well as extra-judicial means and procedures of judging crime suspects in their 'illegal' detention centers [Sesay, *et al*, 2003].

According to Human Rights Watch [HRW, 2003], members of OPC were often kitted with occult 'insurance cover' by incisions, '*gbere*', on their bodies with charms. This emboldened them in the discharge of their vigilante duties. The organization gained enormous popularity in the south-west mostly in places like Lagos, Akure, Ibadan and Ilorin where according to Omololu [2003], outlandish stories abound of their bodies being immune to gunshots, of possessing abilities to appear and disappear at will, and of being able to supernaturally separate the guilty from the innocent. Fasheun [2002] who did not offer any better alternative frowned at Adam's methodology,

---

<sup>3</sup> The word *ode* is a Yoruba word for hunter

<sup>4</sup> Sunday Tribune 20 Jan, 2002:15.

saying he relished in engaging in 'darkness and spiritism'. He condemned Adam's faction for oath taking fee, superstitious beliefs and practices as well as submission to black magic orgies.

Omololu [2003] avers that community-based crime control outfit like OPC and Bakassi Boys are successful due to some factors including [i] the perception that members of the group possess supernatural abilities, particularly their famed ability to quickly identify the guilty from the innocent. [ii] Their readiness to confront armed robbers headlong at the risks of their own lives jolted the robbers who were used to police reluctance to do the same. [iii] The swiftness of their operation and the promptness with which they inflict instant punishment on identified criminals. [iv]The covert and overt support they receive from the state governments and prominent groups and associations in the area where they serve.

In bringing crime suspects to justice OPC, according to Breaking News, July 23, 2004 has detention and torture camps that looks like Kangaroo police station, courts and prisons where suspects are arbitrarily interrogated, detained, tried, tortured and summarily executed or fined. There is a shrine and native doctor who uses charms and other fetish means to determine suspect's guilt or innocence in the OPC camp sited in Agbado, a suburb of Ogun state on the outskirts of Lagos state.

In spite of the unorthodox methods of handling suspected criminals, the OPC is said to be preferred to Nigeria Police by the general public, particularly in the south-west [Oyeduntan, 2003]. Residents of Okota, Fasehun's areas in Lagos, for instance, engaged OPC for security services to put a stop to the endemic armed robbery and criminal attacks<sup>5</sup> Ogaga [2003] says, one of the leading obstacles against the Nigeria police is the growing hostility by the public in favor of an increased public invitation now being extended to the primordial groups especially the OPC in the south-west Nigeria for security services. OPC provides security during social gatherings to people in the south-west for example in coronation ceremonies, burials, birthdays, naming etc. It has also been involved in the settlement of disputes in various forms like landlord/tenant problems [HRW, 2005].

According to Roberts and Oladeji [2001], the various ethnic militias were relatively effective in stemming the tide of violent crimes in their various

---

<sup>5</sup> The Monitor, February 12, 2002

communities. They stress that OPC succeeded in endearing itself to the heart of many Lagos residents by forming vigilante group to frontally and physically confront the city's marauders despite their confusing agenda. It was reported in the Punch of Feb.1, 2000:33 that even robbers dread OPC more than the police. The report had it also that certain criminal habitats which the police dared not enter for the past 15 years were courageously entered by OPC members and subsequently dislodged robbers there<sup>6</sup> Roberts and Oladeji [2001] also commend OPC's effectiveness in other parts of the southwest.

According to HRW [2004] a founding member of the OPC said, members of the organization need not carry weapon as the name alone was sufficient threat and deterrent to criminals and even law abiding people in the community. OPC signifies terror, people are sore afraid of them because of their charms, predilection for instant justice and honesty and they do not compromise or take bribe.

Specifically in October 2000, in one of the most serious cases of OPC violent attacks on armed robbers documented by HRW, the OPC apprehended and killed between seven and twelve people suspected to be armed robbers in Ojoo local government area of Lagos. After killing them they set their bodies ablaze opposite the Ojoo military cantonment [HRW, 2004]. On August 16, 2001, the OPC reportedly beheaded four suspected robbers and set their bodies on fire. A crime suspect at the Surulere district of Lagos was also crucified; five alleged bank robbers were given the "necklace treatment"– a tire doused with petrol is put around the neck of the suspects and subsequently ignited.

Akala, a slum in Mushin local government area – known for its criminal notoriety, was flushed out by the men of OPC in 1999. In late December 1999, according to HRW [2003], the Gani Adams faction of the OPC launched an operation also in Akala. It was an attempt to cleanse the area of violent criminals. The OPC burnt down many parts of the area and killed several people. In January 2000, there was further violent attack on robbers in Akala in which the Gani Adams faction of OPC was reported to have killed at least four suspects and injured several others. Police men believed to

---

<sup>6</sup> Newswatch, July 31,2005

have colluded with robbers were given the same treatment they gave to the suspected robbers.

A man living in Sagamu, Ogun State also told HRW, that “we see OPC around. They ensure security at parties, functions etc. They wear red cloth on their heads with ‘OPC’ written on it; they carry rifles, pistols, cutlasses and knives. They carry them openly; they walk around in groups of more than thirty, day and night” [HRW, 2002].

The OPC killed an alleged criminal and two other people at Idimu area of Lagos in December 2000. A resident of Idi-Araba in Mushin area of Lagos said:

The OPC had begun operating here in early 2001 they used to go people’s houses. They accused a Hausa man of buying stolen property. He was not in when they went there, so they took all his belongings out and burnt them. They went around killing people, cutting their heads and burning people in public. Once I saw a dead body of a human Hausa man at the junction of Idi Araba bus-stop. He was an armed robber who had been burnt alive. I saw him roasted with his sticking out. The body was on the street with the flames still burning. He had been left there [HRW, 2003].

Akinyele [2002] noted that OPC has confronted armed robbers and other social miscreants in places like Akure, Ibadan and Lagos, while in operation as night guards at the grass root. Governor Ahmed Bola Tinubu of Lagos state, said, the OPC ‘esos’ had helped punctuate the activities of criminals in Lagos state, while the police increasingly became inefficient and ineffective in their statutory duties<sup>7</sup> Along Ilorin-Jebba highway in Kwara state OPC’s intervention helped in no small measure to stop the prevalence of armed robbery on the expressway. Touts and thugs hired by some politicians to disrupt the 2003 general elections were dislodged from their hiding place on the outskirts of Ilorin metropolis [Nigeria Tribune, Feb.5, and 2003:13]. These were some of the cases of OPC’s violent confrontation with criminals and miscreants in the southwest.

---

<sup>7</sup> THISDAY, June 22, 2001.

To avoid arbitrariness, the OPC made use of traditional means to authenticate their allegation against suspects. The activities of OPC have been strengthened by the inefficiency of the police, who by now have become very weak in maintenance of law and order, thereby engendering lack of public trust in their activities. This general feeling of inefficiency and criminal connivance of the police have aggravated the problem and has given many armed groups freedom to operate according to their own rules with little or no regard for human rights [HRW, 2003].

That militant youths and volunteer groups in the southwest had to take over the job of the police was a clear indication of lack of public confidence in the security organ and the inability of government to guarantee security [Roberts and Oladeji, 2001]. Babawale [2003] observes that the OPC in the southwest literally became a parallel security outfit with its involvement in vigilante services and its running battle with criminal gangs. However in the course of prosecuting this self-help crusade, it severally clashed with the law enforcement agencies as well as factions within OPC and non-Yoruba groups in Lagos and elsewhere [Olukotun, 2003].

### **Yoruba Indigenous methods of crime control**

To many Nigerians an independent modern nation should earnestly pursue social control consistent with the systems and techniques bequeathed to it by its colonialists. In line with this frame of mind, Nigeria's modern social control has to primarily agree with the colonial time British system in Nigeria or its postcolonial adaptation. In any case, this way of thinking argues further, social control in postcolonial Nigeria ought to be mostly, if not entirely, consistent with the imported British type [Okafu, 2007]. He went further to stress that there is nothing universal about a European social control system and that the English system, as an example, developed from the traditions, customs, and native practices [tribal laws] of England. Thus, the English system is perhaps best suited to regulate relationships among the English, not among Nigerians, all its ethnic nations inclusive, he said.

There had been several indigenous and traditional ways of preventing and controlling the incidence of crime in the south west before the advent of foreign methods from the colonial overlords. The people of the south west Nigeria belief and valued some traditional patterns and methods of crime prevention and control not appreciated by the orthodox method, these start from the age grade system. Among the Yoruba of the southwest Nigeria there

is what we call age grade and often there is a particular age grade group that is charged with the responsibility of keeping the society safe and secure for example in Ilogbo-Ekiti this age group are called *Egbe Awere* they are adults of age 20-25years strong and belligerent and are always kitted with supernatural powers to face the most audacious criminal and most dangerous threat to the community. It is generally believed among the people that there is no problem this group cannot tackle no matter the gravity because of the possession of magical power to appear and disappear at will with victory. A shout of the name of this group portends danger and the response is immediate and swift. There is no man that does not pass through this age grade, they are always initiated into the group with colorful celebration accompanied with singing, dancing, winning and merry making with a test of their magical or supernatural powers.

In another way there are people called *olode* who are proficient in the act of guarding the community, sometimes they are hired and paid. Their weapons are mainly magical power, clubs, cutlass, cudgels and local guns. Despite these instruments, the *olodes* are seen as very powerful, effective and efficient means of social control because they are part of the community they guard; they understand the environment, their responses to distress calls are immediate, swift and cheap unlike the alien English method of control introduced to Nigeria by the colonial masters [Ajayi et al, 2012].

### **Theoretical framework**

As plausible explanation of crime control in the contemporary society has always emerged from the synthesis of two or more theories, therefore, in this paper two theories are synthesized to capture the substantive issues there in. First is the structural functionalism, it is used for this study, because it is generally believed that for society to be at peace and orderly, all the various organs must work jointly to promote the structural running of the system. The police force is an organ of crime control; also the traditional system is also part of the system of control, if its cooperation is not sort it is likely to lead to the inefficiency if not a total breakdown of the whole system of crime control apparatus. In other words traditional system of crime control is very functional to the overall peace and orderliness of the society. The labeling theory is also applicable as this is mainly based on the societal reaction to crime itself. The police had been labeled as inefficient and hence they have been behaving to type, as they engage in repeated acts of misconduct that always create a gulf between the agency and the general public. Their

misconduct and inefficiency has led to the society to come up with an alternative means of controlling crime in to keep lives and property secure.

### **Method**

Qualitative methodology was used to draw relevant information from the study population. Focus group discussion and in-depth interview were conducted while participant observation helps to affirm or dispute some of the information obtained from the FGD and IDI conducted. In addition, library books, journals, magazines and newspapers were consulted for additional information while the data obtained were coded and processed using Atlas Ti; a software developed by the centre for Tropical Disease Research (TDR). The choice of this method was in consonance with the functional and control theories on which the study hinged.

### **Findings and discussion**

There are evidences from the qualitative data gathered from the field that the official security agencies particularly the police have not done enough in terms of keeping secure the lives and property of the masses. This has resulted into a return to traditional and cultural patterns of crime control which are generally welcomed by the public most especially because it is inexpensive, fast and easily available. In the various interviews and focus group discussions held for this study, respondents have views that supported the use of and the return to traditional values and beliefs and reliance on indigenous resources for crime control in modern southwest Nigeria. One *Olode* at about 10 p.m. along Ilawe road in Ado-Ekiti interviewed said:

The police have been unable to help us in this community even though we hear their siren all over here. But since we want peace in our community, some of us who are professional hunters have been engaged by the community for keeping the community safe. We have different methods of apprehending criminals; we know when strangers with bad intentions enter into the community. Some before their nefarious actions are carried out are apprehended particularly in the broad daylight, some that comes in the night are caught with the aid of charms that help detect offenders. We use *egbe or afeeri* to disappear

and appear anywhere we want and this is why thieves find it difficult to hide away from us.

Instances of unofficial, indigenous security and law enforcement systems and organizations abound in the southwest Nigeria. In Ilogbo-Ekiti at about July of every year there is a festival called *Ipesi*, youths roll their drums out with singing and dancing in derision and humiliation of those who had misbehaved during the year. Depending on the gravity of the culprit's deviance, woods are fetched from the streets with which the entrance of the residence of the offender is sealed off. Sometimes water is poured in to the house of the offender while their names and what they had stolen or done wrong are mentioned aloud in songs. No matter whom you are in the community the deviants are gravely insulted and made mockery of. As a result of this some commit suicide and some relocate to other far villages. This yearly festival of dancing and singing serves as a means of regulating and controlling human behavior, offenders are punished and this serves as deterrence to others. Hear this from a focus group discussant.

An elderly man in *Odoode* Street, in 1968 was caught in another's farm stealing yams. He immediately fell on his knees saying the person that caught him should cover him up. But because the man has been a perpetual thief in the community, the case was made known to the owner of the farm who eventually took the case to the elders in the community. When the case was settled, the youths pretended as if they were not aware of what happened as they kept mute. At the *Ipesi* festival, the issue came out as usual, and the man house was besieged by the youths chanting in derision of the man his house was blocked with fire woods and branches of trees. Over the night the man committed suicide because of the unbearable shame.

Another discussant says:

a woman of an average age went to the market to buy some condiments, but in the process she stole *tinko* that is dried meat and tucked it inside her wrapper, when she was about leaving the market she was asked to undo her wrapper for a search of some lost meat, she reclined at first but when the pressure became too hard on her she has to forcefully undo

her wrapper and the meat fell down. Apart from the fact that she was severely beaten at that time she was also humiliated at *Ipesi* festival. The shame was too much on her that she stole away in the night and left the village for a far place to live till today.

Most citizens out of their experience and the ineffectiveness of the security agents regard the official organizations as, irrelevant, and different in forms and procedures from the citizens' traditional outlooks, convictions, practices, and beliefs. Among the Yoruba ethnic group of the southwest Nigeria, there is the more prominent Odu'a Peoples Congress [OPC], not religious-based nonetheless, it often uses indigenous African religious beliefs and practices to insure the supernatural powers with which the organizations operate. The organization is widely regarded as an effective public security and law enforcement group. The organization is, over and above the NPF [the official police], the *de facto* guarantor of public security particularly in Yoruba area of the country. The OPC is reputed to be so good that they are capable of identifying a criminal despite attempts to conceal his or her identity. They move from one community to the other, fishing out suspected criminals [mainly perpetual thieves, armed robbers, and murderers], arresting, and quickly judging and punishing the criminals. In an interview conducted with a police officer in Bodija area of Ibadan his idea is put forward thus:

This informal policing happens in cities across Nigeria. The police say the presence of vigilante groups is welcome. They pre-date the police, and they complement our efforts. The police can't get into every nook and cranny, says the police man. The police try to send officers out on patrol with as many vigilante groups as possible, but with one policeman for every 400 Nigerians in line with United Nations prescription is difficult particularly in this our Nigeria. Any vigilantes who kill suspects would face the law, he said.

The punishment is typically death, which is applied swiftly by decapitating and burning the adjudged criminal. In a study conducted by Ajayi et al [2012] people interviewed expressed satisfaction with, and enthusiastically supported, OPCs crime-fighting activities. Their new positions stem from the fact that the various official state governments have, by official laws, at time recognized the organization formally, even though the organization continue

to operate based largely on indigenous ideals of social control, justice, and law. However, president Obasanjo's government strongly opposes the adoption of the OPC and other indigenous law enforcement groups by various state governments in the country. The government has gone so far as to use the official NPF to intimidate, stifle, and break up the OPC groups. Apart from the OPC there are numerous other groups, such as neighborhood watch organizations or vigilante groups in southwest communities. They are still functioning effectively and people consult them on security issues probably because of the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the official law enforcement organizations. In agreement with this submission, a respondent who happened to be the community leader in a focus group discussion in Isaga Suru Lere Lagos has this to say:

Vigilante groups are a well established part of Nigerian society. People trust them more than they trust the police. They are members of the community, and in the past robbers have been released by corrupt police officers and returned to torment the communities who handed them over. Many Nigerians see the rule of law as an alien concept. Some police have been compromised - the robber hands over some money and is released. He will go back and gloat to the people who handed him over." "If they catch someone red-handed, they would much rather exact punishment on them then and there," he says.

The watch organizations or vigilante groups exist to help guarantee security, law, order, and stability to the citizens of each community. Generally, the groups are more active in the night than in the day. Usually, able bodied young men of each community, supported financially and materially by the other community members, are charged with the task of securing the community and enforcing the law, often with the aids of light and simple weapons, such as machetes, bows and arrows, spears, and some guns. The watchers often seek to limit access to parts of the community by erecting temporary, movable obstacles on the roads that would slow vehicular and human traffic. At Alagbaka Estate in Akure a community leader in a Focus group discussion was of the opinion that:

*Se a ni Olopa ni Nigeria ni?* Meaning do we have police in Nigeria? We protect ourselves, sink boreholes to obtain water on our own, repair our roads by ourselves, and buy

generators for the supply of electricity tell me what does the government do for us?

An interviewee who happens to be the Pastor of a nearby Church in Abusoro Community area of Akure the Ondo State capital stressed the usefulness of the community watch group thus:

Now that the pages of the newspapers are daily full of stories by threat and killings of innocent worshippers we have organized the youths of the community to a vigilante group. We have supported them with light weapons to make sure they are not taken advantage of by the robbers at night. In the day we have erected some movable obstacles to slow down traffics. Even our places of worship are not left out we have become so security conscious.

Whatever their limitations, the neighborhood watch groups [vigilante groups] are deliberate, coordinated efforts at control, justice, and law, even if these groups operate outside the official laws. Moreover, it seems that most citizens are satisfied with the groups' activities [Ajayi et al, 2012].

Other, less organized local attempts at social control, justice, and law enforcement are plainly based on mob action which is typically ad hoc and often thoughtless. The persons who seek to enforce the law by this method may take some rash action before thinking through the issues involved. Example, if a person [innocent or guilty] is alleged at a public place in Nigeria, such as an open street, to have stolen another's property, a mob may immediately take brutal action against the accused person, which may result in death. It may later become apparent that the accused person was, in fact, innocent. By then, it would be too late for the accused. Just like a video watched on the internet on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, 2012 four students of University of Port Harcourt went to a friend who owed one of them some amount of money but were violent about it, so since the guy could not pay, they picked his phone and laptop saying when he has the money he should come for his property, as they were about to go out the debtor friend started shouting thieves! thieves!! thieves!!! Before five minutes the community vigilante group gathered without proper investigation clubbed the boys to death and subsequently set them ablaze, it was a gory site. In addition to the obvious undesirability of this result, there are other legitimate concerns regarding indigenous [unofficial] law enforcement. While recognizing that

traditional policing, vigilantism, and mob action may be necessary and beneficial responses to official law enforcement failures, the potential for abuses of traditional policing, vigilantism, and mob action must not be covered up.

One of the key features of indigenous law enforcement is its wide acceptance by the citizens. Members of a society where traditional policing exists generally accept and participate in their indigenous system. In short, the community members own the indigenous system. Being part owners of the system, it is very unlikely that any significant part of the population will be excluded from the system or its mode of operation. For instance Mr Ajaja Onigemo is the chairman of a local neighborhood watch group in Ilesha Osun State - quite normal for a pensioner, one might think. But in Nigeria "neighborhood watch" means taking to the streets with a gun, machete, bows and arrows and possibly lynching armed robbers. At an age where other men are keen to put their feet up and enjoy the company of their family, Mr. Onigemo is a vigilante, prepared to dispense what he calls "jungle justice". "Imagine myself, at 63 I haven't had a full night's sleep in eight years," he says. "But if I don't do it, and robbers come here, my family and I will be maimed." Every night at around 22:30hrs, he and 18 other men strap their ancient shotguns to their backs and walk through their neighborhood banging a large metal bell to let the people in their houses know someone is watching over them, and let the robbers know someone is coming.

Thus, in all the vigilante groups, decisions are made and enforced with members' knowledge and consent. However, as in every human system, there is a danger of abuse of a traditional law enforcement system. This is so particularly where the indigenous [unofficial] and the State [official] policing systems, rather than complement each other positively, collude to abuse the citizens. For instance the governor of each of Nigeria's thirty-six states is often referred to as the "chief law enforcement officer" of the state. But a governor is helpless regarding official police control and actions. The governor does not control the police and the police can, and do, ignore the governor's expressed wishes to secure his/her state. As long as the police comply with the Nigerian president's and Inspector-General of Police [IGP]'s orders and wishes, the police can carry on as they wish. This is so particularly where the governor and the president are political enemies. There are numerous examples in the Olusegun Obasanjo presidency [1999-2007] where Obasanjo, directly by action or indirectly by inaction, has used the

NPF as an instrument of oppression and opposition to governors perceived as enemies of the president, which in well developed constitutional democracies, such as the United States, will constitute an executive abuse of power. Such was the case in July 2003 when Ralph Ige, Assistant Inspector-General of the NPF in charge of Anambra State, led the police to kidnap Governor Chris Ngige of the state. The police, without legal authority to do so, informed Ngige that he was no longer the governor of the state. For hours, the police detained and prevented him from performing his duties. The police and their civilian co-conspirators purported to swear into office the deputy governor as governor of Anambra state. There is no doubt that the police action was a *coup d'etat*, being a forceful, unconstitutional take-over of government. However, Ige, the other participating police personnel and their civilian collaborators got away with their crimes because president Obasanjo approved of their actions: years after their illegal actions, the criminal suspects have not been charged with any crime. Thus is the overwhelming power of the president over the governor of a Nigerian State.

However, traditional policing and mob action efforts at security and law enforcement in postcolonial African societies illustrate the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the official security and law enforcement apparatuses. An interviewee who is the Chairman of the Land Lord Association in *Konkobilo* area Oshogbo attested to this fact as he said:

If not for the vigilante groups in this community we would have packed out of this community because there is hardly a week the hoodlums do not ravage this community. It is the combined efforts of the OPC and other vigilante groups put together by the elders in this community that has been saving us from the onslaught of these ferocious and wicked night crawlers.

A woman leader in Ayetoro area of Oshogbo corroborated this in a focus group discussion thus:

The police have been unable to stretch their protective arm over this community, we have always been in perpetual torment by the hoodlums, it was the efforts of the vigilante groups and other individually employed *olodes* that we have been able to keep the community safe from the street boys and the rascals. We are really thankful to the leaders

and all the adults in this community who gave support to these vigilante groups.

The unofficial, indigenous alternative systems and models of control, justice, law, security, and enforcement are established and maintained principally because the citizens of the communities where the models operate recognize and accept them as preferred alternatives to the official, Western-based models. The wide acceptance that the indigenous models enjoy over their Western-based counterparts strongly attests to the relevance and currency of the indigenous African systems of control, justice, and law even in the modern State. What is missing is the official State adoption of, and support for, the ongoing unofficial efforts to indigenize law enforcement and social control in postcolonial African societies.

### **Conclusion**

Considering the utility of the indigenous systems in the prevailing circumstances, there is an incontrovertible need in Nigeria for each State Government to recognize and promote the relevant indigenous systems of security maintenance, crime prevention, and general law enforcement as complementary body to that of the police. Instead of anti-terror policing tactics, increasing para-militarism, or increasingly expensive high-tech gadgets [though useful and important], the ground-level tactics [reorienting the security agencies to work better with the public] will enhance the detection of crime and extremism, gather intelligence information and build partnership and confidence with the public.

### **References**

- Adebanwi, W. 2005. The carpenter's revolt: youth violence and the reinvention of culture in Nigeria. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 43.3: 339-365.
- Ajayi, J.O. and Aderinto A.A.2008. Crime Wave and Public Confidence in Oodua People's Congress in Lagos Nigeria. *African Journal for the Psychological study of Social Issues Vol.II (2)*
- Ajayi, J.O and Aderinto, A.A 2012. *Oodua Peoples Congress and Crime Control In Lagos Metropolis*. Germany: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing GmbH& Co. KG ISBN3847374974, 9783847374978

Length 272 pages.<http://www.amazon.com/Oodua-Peoples-Congress-Control-Metropolis/dp/>

- Akinyele, R.T. 2002. Social security networks: an analysis of the involvement of the OPC in crime control and management in South Western Nigeria, *Newsletter of French Institute for research in Africa*, Vol. XI, No.
- Amusan, L. 2001. Ethno-religious and environmental conflicts: challenges to human security and development in Nigeria: *perspectives. The Central European Review of International Affairs* 16: 57-68.
- Babawale. T. 2003. The state, ethnic militias and the challenges of democratic governance in post military Nigeria. *Urban violence, ethnic militias and the challenge of democratic consolidation in Nigeria*. T. Babawale Ed. Lagos: Malthouse Press.
- Cuneen, C. [2000]. Restorative Justice and the Politics of Decolonisation. Paper presented to the Fourth International Conference on Restorative Justice for Juveniles, Institute of Criminology, University of Tübingen, Germany, 1-4 October 2000.
- Fasheun, F.I. 2002. *Fredrick Fasheun: the son of Oodua*. Lagos: Inspired Communication Limited.
- Gore, C. & Pratten, D. [2003]. The politics of plunder: the rhetorics of order and disorder in southern Nigeria. *African Affairs* 102. 407:211-40.
- Harnischfeger, J. 2003. The Bakassi Boys: fighting crime in Nigeria. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41, 1:23-49.
- Human Rights Watch, 2002a. *Human Rightst Watch interview*. May 27.
- Human Rights Watch, 2002b. *Human Rights Watch interview*. Sagamu, Ogun State.
- Human Rights Watch, 2003a. *The OPC: Fighting violence with violence*. New York: Human Rights Watch. Feb. Vol. 15, No 4(A).
- Human Rights Watch, 2003b. *The self-determination group to vigilantism*. New York: Human Right Watch.
- Human Rights Watch, 2003c. *The Warri crisis: funding violence*. November, pp 24-26.

- Human Rights Watch, 2004. *Small arms control in Ghana*. Nigeria and Senegal, March.
- Human Rights Watch, 2005a. *Background: attitudes towards policing, History of policing in pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria*. [http://www.org/reports/2005/Nigeria 0705/4.htm](http://www.org/reports/2005/Nigeria%200705/4.htm) Retrieved in 29. 9. 20012.
- Human Rights Watch, 2005b. *Revenge in the name of religion: the cycle of violence in Plateau and Kano State*, May.
- Ikenne Local Government file. 1996.124, 16 October.
- Ikporukpo, C.O. 2001. *The myths and realities of majority groups in Nigeria. The management of national question in Nigeria*. E. E. Osaghae & E. Onwudiwe Eds. Ibadan: PEFS. 116 – 149.
- Irukwu, J.O. 2005. *Nigeria the last change*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Jemibewon, D. M. 1994. *A combatant in government*. Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Limited.
- Ogaga, A.O. 2003. *The historical role and functions of the Nigeria Police. The Nigeria Police and the crisis of law and order: a book of reading*. V.T. Jike Ed. Ikeja, Nigeria: NISS Publications.
- Okafor, N. 2007. *Law Enforcement in Postcolonial Africa: Interfacing Indigenous and English Policing in Nigeria*. International Police Executive Symposium [IPES] Working Paper No 7, May. [www.IPES.info](http://www.IPES.info). Accessed 28/9/12
- Olukotun, A. 2003. *Ethnic militias and democracy: a media perspective. Urban violence ethnic militias and the challenge of democratic consolidation in Nigeria*. T. Babawale Ed. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.
- Nigeria, 1958. *Report of the commission appointed to enquire into the fears of minorities and the means of allaying them*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Nolte, I. 2004a. *Identity and violence: the politics of youth in Ijebu-Remo, Nigeria*. *Journal of modern African studies* 42. 1: 61-89.

- Nolte, I. 2004b. Identity and Violence: The Politics of Youth in Ijebu-Remo, Nigeria. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.42. 1: 61-89.
- Omololu, F.O. 2003. Public-private partnership in policing for crime prevention in Nigeria. a concept paper presented to Nigeria Institute of Social and Economic Research [NISER], Ibadan.
- Onoge, O.F. 1993. Social conflicts and crime control in colonial Nigeria *Policing Nigeria Past, Present and Future*. T. N. Tamuno; I.L Bashir; E.E.O. Alemika. and A.O. Akano Eds. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Oyeduntan, A.R. 2003. *Ethnic militias and prejudicial murder in Nigeria: race, ethnicity and crime*. Ile-Ife: OAU Press.
- Roberts, F.O.N and Oladeji Abubakar 2001. Resurgent identity crisis and security management in Lagos, Nigeria: lessons for West African cities. A paper prepared for presentation to the *International conference on security, segregation and social networks in West African Cities, 19th- 20th Centuries*. Ibadan, 29th- 31st October.
- Sesay, Ahmadu; Charles, Ukeje; Olabisi, Aina and Adetanwa, Odebiyi Eds. 2003. *Ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- Smelser, N.J 1963. *Theory of collective behaviour*. New York: The Free Press
- Willink, H. Commission, 1958. Report of the commission appointed to enquire into the fears of minorities and means of allaying them. London: HMSO.