



LASU JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES (LASUJOH)

Vol. 16, No. 1 | January 2023 Edition

ISSN: 978-274-384-4

A publication of:

Faculty of Arts

Lagos State University, Ojo

Lagos, Nigeria.

Email: dean-arts@lasu.edu.ng

LASU Journal of Humanities (LASUJOH)

Volume 16, No. 1 | January 2023

© 2023 Faculty of Arts
Lagos State University, Ojo Lagos,
Nigeria

ISSN: 978-274-384-4

Produced by

FREE ENTERPRISE PUBLISHERS LAGOS

HEAD OFFICE: 50 Thomas Salako Street, Ogba, Ikeja, Lagos.

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Journal Address: LASU Journal of Humanities

c/o The Dean, Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, Ojo
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Amotekun Corps Operations in Southwestern Nigeria: The Prospects beyond the Controversies

Oladejo, Olanrewaju Abdulwasii, PhD

Abstract

From the pre-colonial “Niger Area” and post-independence Nigeria, the people and their geo-political identities have evolved in diverse ways. Thus, have witnessed several attendant challenges; some are mild and tractable, others are severe and enduring. Scholars have adjudged such development as evolution challenges of a society in transition. Part of the apparent challenges bedevilling Nigeria lately is insecurity; a situation with signposts of severe impact on all spheres. Despite efforts of the Police and evolving measures at arresting the fast degenerating internal security situation, crimes and criminality have not abated significantly; hence, the public outcries for community policing. Surprisingly, the laudable initiative of southwest Governors to establish the Western Nigeria Security Network codenamed Amotekun Corps, in support of the Police, was greeted with resistance-cum-controversies. The study therefore interrogated issues hovering around the resistance, the controversies and the prospects of the initiative as a possible measure in augmenting efforts of the Nigeria Police Force in offering effective internal security in the region.

Introduction he crave for security is a fundamental desire of all people, little wonder it is recognized, the world over, as one of the fundamental rights of man which must be protected. It is in cognizance of this important principle that drafters of the Nigeria Constitution considered it a priority; as such, captured it in the supreme document that the welfare and security of the people shall constitute the primary responsibilities of government. In other words, security is a social contract between the citizens and the state, needless to claim that government is

expected to superintend over state agencies mandated to undertake provision of security for its populace irrespective of status, creed or social affinity. From this viewpoint, security embodies the mechanism put in place to avoid, prevent or reduce threats in a given society. Security, no doubt, is a vital tool for national cohesion, peace and sustainable development (Abel, 2014). It is equally a multi-dimensional and all-encompassing phenomenon which could be viewed from diverse perspectives.

However, the rising security threats in Nigeria in recent times clearly suggest that people are not fully at peace; hence, the protracted public outcries. From the North to the South, the West to the East, the cries of insecurity are too loud to be unnoticed. Some of the recent sources of insecurity in Nigeria today are internal insurrection, banditry, kidnapping, terrorism and lately, the most noticeable is the incessant farmer-herder violent conflict and ritual killings in the South-West. To worsen this disapproved state of the nation, each of these security threats is now alleged to have political undertone; a situation which has arguably fueled crisis beyond all reasonable expectations. In the word of Hammed (2018), criminality has persisted in Nigeria due to complicity of people in power. He stated further that it could somewhat also be driven by factors such as inequality, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. In the absence of security, development is unattainable because insecurity destroys economic, human and social capital. For instance, the Boko Haram insurgence in Northern Nigeria has almost crippled all economic activities in that region (Adagba, 2015). Similarly, sometime ago, activities of the Niger Delta militants posed serious threat to the economic health of the country Nigeria, from which it has not fully recovered.

The recent security threat in South-West Nigeria is also destroying existing infrastructure and preventing peaceful coexistence for the development of further infrastructure and safe environment for economic activities. Indeed, no nation or region can achieve sustainable development in an environment of uncertainty. Unlike in Northern Nigeria, where terrorist operations have continually threatened peaceful co-existence of the Northerners and other dwellers, the South-Western Nigeria which once appeared as though it were immune started recording cases of incessant kidnapping, farmer-herder face-off as well as native-settlers' violence; a situation that has gradually become perennial. Apparently, most of the efforts; kinetic and non-kinetic by the Federal and State Government to address the menace seem to be proving ineffectual and insufficient to the Nigerian public leading to trust deficit syndrome between government and the led. Of course, in Nigeria, security architecture is controlled by the Federal Government owing to the centralized statutory control of the Police and all state-owned security agencies in the country as the right of absolute superintendence over the Military, the Police

Force and all paramilitary agencies is encapsulated in the Exclusive List of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

It was obvious since 2018 that the menace of insecurity in the South-West has assumed unpredictable dimension; as such, has attracted unprecedented public condemnation, from within and outside the region. Compelled by public outcries, the South-West governors propelled an initiative which eventually culminated in the establishment of the Western Nigeria Security Network codenamed Amotekun Corps. Despite having earlier created the Neighbourhood Watch, Lagos state was in full support of the other five states in the region viz; Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo in the creation of the agency to help tackle the protracted cases of insecurity. It is expected to complement efforts of the Police Force in tackling the rising spate of threats in the region. On the one hand, the launch of Amotekun Corps by governors was described as a laudable and welcome development likely to bring an end to security challenges in that part of the country (Adamu, 2019). At the same time, expression of apprehension and resistance as observed in some quarters is speculative of certain animosity that requires thorough investigation beyond speculations. It is premised on these concerns that the study investigated the precipitating factors that led to the decision to establish the Western Nigeria Security Network; cause(s) of resistance and controversies as well as the prospects of the initiatives through the lens of an objective observer.

Literature Review

Considering the inestimable impact of security on a people, it is no doubt a necessity to ensure adequate measures are provided to secure welfare and protection of their livelihood. According to Abiodun, Akinlade and Oladejo (2021), the concept of security as understood by all is the most important human need and its absence renders people ineffective in every sphere of life. This is indicative of a fact that safety of citizens is of utmost importance in creating a thriving society. At the same time, building sustainable communities that are inclusive, secured and sensitive to the needs of citizens will continue to be a mere dream without security. Beyond the surface, commitment to ensuring safety and justice for all citizens seen as moral rights and intrinsic to development culminate as security. Effective policing, targeted social interventions and efficient judicial system are needed to help the nation thrive. In accomplishing this mission, prevention is the first imperative of justice and crime prevention, however, it is a multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary and integrated endeavour.

The Nigerian police is by law saddled with the responsibility of preventing and detecting crime, preserving peace and order and enforcing all the laws and regulations. Nigeria, known as the giant of Africa has been witnessing unprecedented insecurity which has continually given the police sleepless

nights. A historical exploration of policing in Nigeria and concept of internal security is indeed required to situate the context under discourse in the right perspectives.

An Overview of Policing in Internal Security in Nigeria

The historical evolution of policing in Nigeria is expressed in three phases and x-rayed to create background for adequate comprehension relating to how the exigency of policing could be adequately understood. We have the pre-colonial policing, policing in the colonial era and the post-colonial era policing.

Precolonial Policing

Like in many typical traditional African societies, many settlements in Nigeria had internal security nuances with apt law enforcement structures wherein erring members of the communities were appropriately sanctioned. Usually, the king or clan heads adjudicated over matters concerning their subjects and kinsmen before penalties were meted out. Also, prior to the white men incursion called colonization, the African traditional settings took care of the need of the individual community dwellers; their lives and property inclusive. For instance, it was interesting to note that even at a time when Africans were considered “uncivilized” human rights were solemnly protected as severe penalties were meted out for wilful abuses. Interestingly, rituals were held from time to time in local communities to connect with deities to wade off evil omen to which criminality and threats to security was attributed.

The prevailing cultural patterns at the time also suggested that though some of the methods in use among the traditional societies were embedded in secrecy and in most instances, gender biased, the relatively cultural homogeneous status of these societies likely accounted for the success of the traditional policing institutions. This is most especially when viewing it from the perspective that the existing beliefs were commonly held and shared, so everybody in the community perceived life from similar sense of commonality. There was a degree of variation between the indigenous community policing system and type of policing system regarded as nation-state policing brought to bear during colonial era and the impact of such variations was by no means easy to determine. This is viewed in terms of what role it stands to play in the effort to institutionalize the strategy of community policing. However, considering the culture of impunity and allegations of pre-judicial abuses now mostly associated with operations of the formal policing institutions in Nigeria, one is left with no option to admit that the pre-colonial traditional policing system must be commended.

Policing in the Colonial Era

Having briefly examined the precolonial indigenous methods of policing in Nigeria, it is important to also examine the introduction of policing in Nigeria under colonial Britain. British colonial authorities ensured that various aspects of British cultures and traditions including politics, economy and health as well as policing were introduced into their captured territories as a way of establishing dominance. The introduction of modern and state-based policing apparatus by colonial Britain marked the era of variations in policing from the pre-existing pattern among the indigenous population (Butler, 1996). In 1851, the British, with the aid of naval apparatus at their disposal, bombarded Lagos into submission. In 1861, the occupation was formalised and Lagos was proclaimed a British Colony. Due to unpredictable nature of security situation of the area at the time, Consul Foorte then requested for the establishment of a Consular Guard of one hundred men to be permanently stationed in Lagos (Onyeozili, 2005; Alemika and Chukwuma, 2011).

However, the proposal was not approved by the Foreign Office but it nevertheless marked the beginning of the idea to have a police force in colonial Nigeria. Following the demise of the Governor of the Lagos Colony, Consul Foorte in 1861, Mr. McCoskry was immediately appointed the Acting Governor. Though, the whole exercise was a well calculated one which predated 1861, it was the acting Governor that started the major move to establish the colonial police (Tamuno, 1970; Onyeozili, 2005). Alemika and Chukwuma (2011), argued that the British colonizers carried out their colonial projects by employing elements of violence and deceptions which resulted in the occupation of different societies that currently constitute Nigeria and this actually began in 1861 from the territory of Lagos. According to this view, as at 1903, they had colonized almost all the hundreds of ethnic nationalities in the country. In a related development, in April 1861, according to Tamuno (1970), the British Consul in Lagos obtained permission from London to establish a Consular Guard comprising 30 men. The Consul, the then Acting Governor of Lagos, Mr. McCoskry organized and established the nucleus of the first police force, which marked the starting point of the modern police institution in the history of Lagos, and by extension, in the history of what later became known as Nigeria (Tamuno, 1970).

The Guards were augmented to one hundred men to form the armed Police Force in 1862, following the movement of a battalion of the West Indian Regiment from Gambia to Lagos to complement the newly formed police force. Mr. Henry S. Freeman assumed duty as the substantive first Governor of Lagos on February 22, 1862 with the setting up of four different courts. The courts were staffed by police personnel charged with the responsibility of settling less serious cases; a commercial court handled cases of debts and breach of contracts. The commercial court was under the exclusive jurisdiction

of the British merchants, underscoring the vested interests attached to it. The criminal court chaired by a stipendiary Magistrate assisted by two relatively unlettered British merchants as assessors, handled very serious cases. The slave court, structured in similar manner to the criminal court, attended to cases deemed related to slavery (Ahire, 1991). As argued by Onyeozili, (2005) the implications of these judicial arrangements were that first, there was no representation of the indigenous people and second, the colonial government was deeply concerned about the vested interests of the private British businesses. In 1863, the numerical strength quickly rose to six hundred known as armed Hausa

Police Force because the body comprised mainly of Hausa speaking ex-slaves from Sierra Leone (Ahire, 1991; Onyeozili, 2005). Two years later in 1863, this small body of men became known as the Hausa Guard (Nigeria Police Force, 2011).

The operational structure of the British colonial administration, with particular reference to security, suggests that the police at the time were structured to perform military functions rather than the need to address conventional safety concerns of the indigenous people. Cole (1999) drew attention to the historical dimension of this trend and which determined the various approaches adopted by the colonialists. Cole (1999) stated that though there was impossibility in generalizing on the form of colonial type of policing, nevertheless there were identifiable differences in the structures and functions of colonial police forces. Fundamentally, policing activities in the colonies were informed by desire for global expansion of capitalism in the nineteenth centuries (Cole, 1999). According to Cole (1999), the Portuguese and Spanish occupation of Central and South America and the British and French settlements in North America, New Zealand and Australia in the fifteenth centuries. While civilian policing model was designed for the “settlement” colonies of North America, Canada and Australia, the para-military policing was used on the “pacified” colonies of Africa, Asia, Central and South America (Cole, 1999). The motivating factors to establish policing in the pacified protectorates were reaction to the local resistance or acceptance to colonial government, protection of colonial economic interests and preservation of colonial political authorities. Onyeozili (2005), stressed that where the Africans were slow in accepting the new ways of doing things, the Whites made it as a point of duty to deal with them militarily. This seemed to reflect the deliberate subjugating policy of the British colonial project at the time under review. How this method however has impacted on the future of policing in Nigeria is better imagined.

In the Northern parts of the Country the Royal Niger Company, which was granted a Royal Charter in 1886 by the British Government, set up the Royal Niger Constabulary in 1888 with Headquarters at Lokoja to protect its

installations along the banks of the River Niger (Nigeria Police Force, 2011). The Royal Niger Constabulary played an important role in British campaigns against Bida and Ilorin. When the British Government in 1900 following the transfer of administration from the Royal Niger Company proclaimed protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria, the Royal Niger Constabulary was split into the Northern Nigeria Police Force and the Northern Nigeria Regiment. In the South, the Lagos Police Force and part of the Niger Coast Constabulary became the Southern Nigeria Police Force in 1906 with Mr. C. E. Johnstone as the Inspector-General. The bulk of the Niger Coast Constabulary formed the Southern Nigeria Regiments (Nigeria Police Force, 2011). According to the Nigeria Police Force (2011), after the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorate in 1914, both Police Forces continued to operate separately until 1st April, 1930 when they were merged to form the present Nigeria Police Force with Headquarters in Lagos, under the Inspector-General Mr. Claude W. Duncan.

As was stated much earlier, prior to the annexation of Lagos as a British Colony in 1861 and the subsequent establishment of a Consular Guard to protect British officials in the territory that later became Nigeria, traditional rulers like the Obas, Emirs, Atas and Chiefs enforced laws and customs with the help of voluntary forces in their respective areas of jurisdiction. After the formation of the Protectorates in the North and South in 1914, both the Royal Niger Company and the Niger Coast Constabulary produced Northern and Southern Nigeria Police respectively. In 1907 the Police Re-organization Scheme enabled the colonial government to consolidate its administration over the provinces by relying on the Traditional Rulers for the maintenance of security (Chiranchi, 2003). The establishment of policing institutions in colonial Nigeria was a reflection of the indirect rule policy to reduce the running cost of administration. According to Tamuno (1970) as cited in (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2011) assertion, The Native Authority Ordinance of 1916 conferred on the Native Authorities the responsibility for maintaining order in their respective areas. Under it, they were allowed to prevent crime and arrest offenders by employing “any person” to assist them in carrying out their police duties. Along the same line, their police powers were enhanced under the Protectorate Law (Enforcement) Ordinance 1924. For instance, in the Northern part of the then colonial Nigeria, policing was a major preoccupation of the Native Authorities. The British adapted the pre-existing *dogarai* system of policing to work side by side with the government force.

In Kano the policing of the Emirate through the *Dogarai* was considered imperative for the collection and payment of taxes, the arrest of criminals and to enforce judgement native law courts. The rents and taxes for the running of native administration were remitted to the Emir’s treasuries *Beit-el-Mal*. Out of this, the Emir of Kano was placed on monthly salary of 400 pounds, his

waziri 100 pounds, *Alkali* (native judge) 50 pounds and the *dogarai* 1 pound per month as cited in Olaniyi (2011). It is important to note that the legacies left behind by the Nigeria colonial policing experience are enormous and significant. A deep understanding of these legacies speak volumes of the nature and dimension in the system of policing in contemporary Nigeria. There are indications that in the process of colonial enterprise, the British colonial government established a policing structure with military colouration, primarily meant to preserve political and economic interests. The methods adopted by Britain suggested that Kingdoms and Empires in the colonised territories were captured piece-meal. Elements of force were employed where there were perceived signs of opposition or resistance. Moreover, the people of colonised territories believed that British colonial principals were tactical, deceptive and subjugating in their approach and with very little interest in the natives. As a result, the seed of hatred and inherent lack of trust was sown between the public and the Police leaving an indelible mark throughout the colonial era.

Postcolonial Period

The attainment of independence in 1960 established the Nigeria Police Force as a Federal Force under the 1960 constitution. The constitution also set up two bodies, the Police Council and the Police Service Commission. The Police Council was given the responsibility of appointment and promotion of personnel into the senior ranks. In 1963, when Nigeria became a republic, the constitution also retained the status of the Police as a federal force. Chiranchi (2003) also stated that even with the establishment of the Nigeria Police Force as the superintending state agency in charge of internal security in the country, Nigeria continued to operate a dual, local, and national police system. The Local Government Police Force in the Western and Northern Regions were established in 1943. Nigeria's Constitution authorized establishment of such forces as long as the native population were employed, but only within the areas under the jurisdiction of such Local Government. In contrast to the perceived contributions of Local Government system to the community development agenda of the Federal Government at the centre, the Local Government Forces used the privileges of the Local Government powers to victimise and maltreat political opponents and these tendencies informed removal of the structures (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2003).

The idea of removing the system of dual policing as a national policy in the post independence Nigeria was hatched under the military regime of Major General Aguyi-Ironsi, in line with his unitary policy at the time (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2003). The idea was relatively short-lived by his assassination in the coup d'état of July same year. It would be recalled that military as an institution had an entrance into Nigeria politics through a coup of 15th January,

1966 which brought General Aguyi Ironsi to power as the Head of the Military Government. Barely three months later after assuming power, what was called a Working Party on Nigeria Police, Local Government and Native Authority and Police and Prisons was formerly set up to carefully look into the feasibility of the unification of the Nigeria Police, Local Government Police and the unification of prisons in Nigeria (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2003).

The intention of the military under Aguyi-Ironsi as regards the doing away with the multiple policing institutions within the Federation was revealed at the inauguration of the Working Party. In his public speech as cited in the Report of the Working Party on the Police and Prison Services in Nigeria cited in Alemika and Chukwuma (2003), the Head of State raised a range of concerns relating to risk factors responsible for producing a distorted image of the machinery for police administration in the minds of the Nigerian public and formulate concrete proposals for correcting any deficiency. At the same occasion, a call was also made on Local Authorities to concentrate their respective focus on development schemes that are of immense benefits to the wellbeing of their various communities rather than spending resources maintaining organisation for police and other similar security outfits. After the assassination of General Aguyi-Ironsi in the coup, General Yakubu Gowon assumed leadership of the Federal Military Government. Contrary to the expectation of the populace that the end of the previous regime would mark the end of the policy of unification of the criminal justice institutions, the recommendation of the Working Party Report was accepted by the Gowon regime, which led to dissolution of the local government police forces across the federation. According to Alemika, (1999), Tamuno (1970), as cited in Alemika and Chukwuma, (2003), the decision for the adoption of the report in favour of such dissolution was largely premised on the fact that the local police force was dominated by ill-qualified, poorly trained and poorly behaved personnel.

Further to these are the perceptions that the local police institution was used by the traditional rulers, local government and politicians to torment and harass either their real or perceived enemies. In the Western Region of Nigeria, political thugs were recruited into the force, in the process innocent citizens who were adjudged as political opponents were largely arrested by the native authority police. This could be as a result of their mere tendencies for holding private meetings to discuss political matters, but more often than not, handcuffed, chained and marched on the streets in order to deter others who might be making similar efforts. These actions and inactions were carried out without regards to the fundamental human rights of those involved (Ohonbamu, 1972).

Rotimi (1986) as cited in Alemika and Chukwuma (2003) suggested that it was a case between the native authority policemen and the public in the

Western Region because the policemen also capitalised on their status to oppress their fellow citizens through the instrument of bribery, blackmail and intimidation. The native authorities and their colonial mentors applauded the policemen for their “good” work. They only frowned at misdemeanours such as misappropriation of taxes and brutal treatment of culprits occasionally (Rotimi, 1986). The situation is not entirely different even in the Northern part of the country, as the unconventional use of local police apparatus was apparent. For instance, when party politics started in Northern Nigeria the way members of opposition parties in the 1950 were maltreated was a source of great concern. According to Ahire (1993) as cited in Alemika and Chukwuma, (2003), native authority police forces earned notoriety by using undue coercion and intimidation to enlist support for the ruling party; deny opposition parties permits for rallies; disrupt meetings of opposition parties and generally enforce what was considered as obnoxious “unlawful assembly” laws against politicians perceived to be in the opposition. The overzealous and untoward conduct largely accounted for the Nigeria Police Force’s loss of reverence and public appeal.

Community Policing in Nigeria

There is a prevailing belief that conventional methods of policing could hardly put the trend of crime and insecurity under desired limit. Perhaps, this accounts for the UK-Department for International Development partnership project to commence the police-public of the policing institutions in Nigeria (UK-DFID; British Council and SJG, 2010). According to the claims at the instance of the Nigeria Police Force (2010) significant progress has been made in the area of trying to reform the police organization in line with the global tenets of facilitating intelligence-led principles into the practice of policing in Nigeria. One of these efforts was through the implementation of a community policing strategy. In this context, the practice of community policing balances up the reactive responses with the proactive problem-solving techniques centred on the causes of crime and largely preventive. It requires police and citizens to cooperate as partners in the course of both identifying and effectively addressing crimes and related challenges.

Dickson (2017) has claimed that the official adoption of community policing strategy by the Nigeria Police authorities in 2003 was aimed at keeping crime and criminality to a minimal level. In the view of Dickson (2017), since 2002 and 2004, community policing programme embarked upon by the government of Nigeria has its goal aimed at transforming the culture of the Nigeria Police and its organisation through community-based policing and partnership. The project’s point of emphasis was to engender what is termed as a culture of excellence in service provision, a deep sense of accountability on the part of individual officers in terms of effective service delivery and

regards for human rights. As presumed by Brogden (2005), community policing cultural transfer in Nigeria was largely a process of modernization rooted in the Western societies of Britain and America. The ultimate goal being improved safety of life of the people as well as the security of their valuable property. In similar stead, the US Department for Justice 2012 stated that community policing is a philosophy and strategy of proffering solutions to the problems of crime and social disorder through effective community-based police services. This perspective of police service delivery includes traditional methods in the enforcement of law, the prevention of crime and community engagement in identifying the causes of crime and effectively addressing these issues.

Nigeria Police Reforms Attempts and Community Policing

Hills (2012) is of the view that the need to systematically and comprehensively analyse the dynamics of police reform in Nigeria and Africa generally should be taken as a matter of emphasis in relation to assessment of the drivers and effects of reform and change. This need, in the perspective of the author is imperative even though the realities suggest to the contrary, considering the prescriptive and normative approaches often adopted by stakeholders. However, the fact still remains that the necessary data to aid such cutting-edge analysis are usually politicised and coveted. Consequently, what is left at the door step of the potential analyst is incomplete and partial knowledge which invariably does not aid approaches in contemporary analysis of security problems (Hills, 2012). According to Taylor (1998) as cited in (Yero 2012), there are problems ranging from lack of holistic approach to insufficient research on community policing proposals by the Nigeria Police to carrying out evaluations on specific programmes. In addition, there are indications of flippant generalisation in terms of community policing policy implementation by government and other stakeholders in the security system and problem arising from implementation proposals. This is consequent upon the fact that community policing appears to constitutes more of a paper discourse than action. Even, in some quarters, the relationship between community policing and crime has proved difficult to handle most especially when looking at the former from the background of cultural complexities.

Hills (2012) contended that community policing is an embrace of policing plural cultures to address inter-communal and religious conflicts as well as where and when other forms of crimes abound. In this case, members of public who are supposed to partner with the police could also be a party to the crime, or that there are tendencies on the part of police to be influenced by the community values in a way which affect a range of decisions. Under these scenarios, community policing faces complications of public acceptance whereas the fundamental requirement of community policing is a

decentralised neighbourhood-based structure embroiled in trust. The Nigeria conventional policing experience is no doubt, a victim of society's displeased perception which must be addressed before community policing issues could be experimented. It has been noted over time that Inspectors General of Police and members of command team often acknowledge this. Little wonder, the Nigeria National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS, 2004) policy statement prescribes for change in the orientation of the police to improve the quality of service an increase in the use of scientific methods in policing. The scientific methods require forensic education, digitization of operations and investigations as well as sustainable partnership with relevant professionals bodies to have sociologists, psychologists, criminologists support Police operations.

As presented by Austin (2010), the Nigeria Police Force developed a Community Policing Project Plan in 2004 with the aims to facilitate the development of community policing throughout Nigeria; to examine the policies, strategies, structures and organisation of the model with a view to secure approval and introduce the core values of the initiative in its Codes of Conduct. The Project Plan comprised of six cogent elements to enable functional institutional mechanism for proper implementation of the community policing strategy. However, from one government to another, the proposal has not seen light of the day and the security situation keeps getting deplorable by the day with severe consequences. It is a truism that the recent phenomenal wave of armed banditry, kidnapping and general eruption of insecurity in Nigeria has inexplicably put the populace in direly helpless situation. There is hardly a passing day without harrowing tales of attacks and wanton killings nationwide. In the last ten years in Nigeria, the high and the low are attacked, maimed, robbed and seamlessly killed in unresolved circumstances. The most disheartening aspect of this disturbing development is that despite commanding unwavering authority of state, each administration engaged in blame game rather than deal decisively with either the cause(s), the actors or both. Sometimes, blames are hinged on possible sabotage, fundamentalism, anti-democratic forces without actual introspection of the issues from a comprehensive viewpoint. What this portends is that the government has not expressed enough commitment towards the issue of safety of life and property in Nigeria. The haphazard response to the assaults and contradictory explanations coming from different government quarters pertaining to waves of attacks were both demeaning and displeasing.

Egwu (2001) observed that the primordial tendencies of various ethnic groups towards violence, the perennial rise of various ethnic militias and the preponderant religious fundamentalism (crises), given expression to by some sects of the dominant religious establishments in Nigeria, have contributed to the aggravation of insecurity in the country. Furthermore, colonialism has been

implicated for the contemporary insecurity in the country. This is because colonialism was characterized by violence against the citizenry which translated to insecurity of the citizens who had to live in constant fear of the colonial state. Ibeanu and Momoh (2008) demonstrated that the penchant for the colonial state to maintain “law and order” and to surmount its legitimacy crisis in the face of exploitative tendencies of the state was one of the biggest sources of insecurity in the colonial era; a condition many African states have not succeeded in relinquishing. Meanwhile, Nigerian government tends to have adopted various measures and created sundry apparatus to manage the security challenge in the country. At the forefront of the strategies deployed to address the insecurity problem is the use of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and occasional deployment of the military where the Police fails. The management of internal security in Nigeria has been the preserve of the Police. For instance, Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution provides for the establishment of the Nigeria Police Force while Section 215(3) provides how the Police can be deployed to tackle security issues in the country. Specifically, the section states:

The President or such other Minister of the Government of the Federation as may be authorized in that behalf may give to the Inspector-General of Police such lawful directions with respect to the maintenance and securing of public safety and public order as he may consider necessary, and the Inspector-General of Police shall comply with those directions or cause them to be complied with.

The implication of the above is that the Nigeria Police Force conducts its operations at the whims and caprices of the President as the symbol of government at the centre, and by extension an instrument of political institution which controls the state. However, it is mind-boggling to note that the communities are usually alienated from management of security even when it actually concerns their personal lives and property. In fact, studies have shown that in most cases, the state use the police and other security apparatus of the state to repress the masses and unleash violence on the people for egocentric reasons thereby worsening the country security situation (Ibeanu 2008). The inability of the conventional security apparatus to address insecurity problem in Nigeria and the growing feeling of alienation by the masses in the administration of their safety are largely responsible for the rising crave and attempt by community members to participate in the management of security in their domain as advocated for by the principles of community policing.

Theoretical Assumptions

The study leans on the policy transfer model. According to Dolowitz and Marsh (2007), policy transfer reflects a situation whereby the knowledge about a particular policy, administration or related institutional and ideological

arrangements in a particular political system whether in the past or at present, is employed for good elsewhere. The scholars argue that policy transfer of a particular idea can either take place between political cultures or within the same country. In this case, the focus is on the potential evidence of policy transfer of community policing strategy from developed climes to Nigeria, even though we have earlier affirmed semblance of same in the traditional precolonial African settings. The transfer of any policy from one sociocultural entity to another may involve some complications. It is posited that this type of policing strategy requires that all elements in the community, whether official or non-official, are conceived for common good. According to Hubert (2019), this is in addition to joining the various forces to produce a sociocultural climate and an environment conducive for orderliness and mutual happiness of all the people within it when the “what”, “when” and “how” of the transfer processes are cognizance of the prevailing circumstances. Further stated, the modality for analysing the process of policy transfer involves addressing different but interrelated concerns, which hover around the policy to be transferred; key actors or figures; the geo-locations; motives and degree of transfer; the prevailing facilitators or restrictions as well as relationship with success or failure of implementation.

However, it is warned that each policy transfer comes with its challenges and constraints, so importing or domesticating a scheme such as community policing should ordinarily come with attendant challenges. Moreso, Lee and Haider (2011), had confirmed that community policing is an alternative to the top-down, coercive, non-accountable, paramilitary policing. According to this postulation, community policing could help to put in place elements of social change and good governance and the key to instil democratic norms in a liberal system which accommodate non-conventional approaches for common good. Meanwhile, transplanting a western-oriented model without attention to indigenous cultural conditions, customary values, legitimacy crisis of the state police establishments as well as local sociolegal structures may not bring forth the desired results. The study interrogated the triggers of the agitation and investigated prospects beyond the resistance and controversies.

Methodology

The study adopted the qualitative method and descriptive research design with data obtained from both primary and secondary sources. In each of the six states in Southwestern Nigeria, two in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with government officials and one key informant interview (KII) with a willing representative of the referred agencies except Lagos State where officials of the Neighbourhood Watch constituted the respondents. Furthermore, one focusgroup discussion (FGD), held virtually, was conducted in each of the designated states. In all, a total of 12 IDIs, six KIIs and six FGDs were conducted within a field period of six weeks. To ensure validation of the

qualitative instrument of data collection, the interview guides were subjected to item analysis verification and were certified fit for the intended purpose after minimal corrections. Specifically, data on the precipitating reasons for the desire to establish the community policing strategy as well as the inherent controversies were sourced using the IDIs and KIIs, while the FGDs were used to obtain data on prospects and all data were content-analysed.

Results and Discussion

Causes of agitations for community policing

As regard precipitating causes of the agitation to have a regional security agency, it was evident that the security tensions in the south-west resulted in general apprehension of insecurity among the populace. Specifically, from the crosssectional examination of respondents, it resonated clearly that the rising spate of kidnapping for ransom, ritual killings and more affirmatively the menace of incessant herdsmen attacks in the suburb settlements of the region were inadmissible reasons the political leaders resorted to the idea of a regional security agency. It was hinted that the idea was literally foisted on the governors by the growing agitations of the people to resort to self help when the expected help from the Police and their respective representatives could not rescue them from the looming threats. It was alleged that the governors in the region were initially lethargic to respond perhaps, on account of some political permutations, and that took a long while leaving people to their fate on the claim that they were consulting.

The situation according to many of the respondents' captured a trend that before the governors' resolution came, people were already subtly giving in to some sociopolitical grievances with a typical assumption that the security threats had ethnic, political and religious undertone. A situation considered capable of spurring uncontrollable vexation particularly among the youths. The presumption here holds similar view as Salisu's (2019) claim that insecurity in Nigeria had taken a new turn lately and until a drastic intervention was employed, there was a high propensity for escalation. For instance, the indisputable sense of regional marginalization manifesting in the South-East and ravaging spree of inadequate security in the South-West were foreseen as recipe for disintegration; hence, the governors needed to act to safeguard their respective states and the region in general. An instructive excerpt from a respondent is captured below:

No doubt, one cannot experience perfect security because individuals and states do not reserve rights to absolute security either, but experiencing varying degrees of insecurity for a long time can lead states to precipice.

It was admitted that at the level of community, security was a function of perceptions that members of the community have about their environment and

the government. Insecurity remains a major challenge to Nigeria's rise among comity of nations as the situation in the country is characterized by incidence of political violence, armed robbery, kidnapping, cult activities, insurgency and terrorism leading to consistent loss of lives, destruction of property and image denting. Not only has the continued state of insecurity threatened the very fabric of national integration in the country and created the ecology of fear, disquiet and anxiety, it has also dealt a deadly blow on the country's quest for industrial development (Aremu, 2014).

It was acknowledged that collapse of the functionality of the state police led states and regions to begin the contemplation or outright desperation to seek alternative security services. Respondents claimed that prior to the decision on the establishment of *Amotekun* Corps, in the South-west, individuals, private entities and the local communities have subtly begun to patronize the services of local hunters, the vigilante groups, the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) and such other groups to provide independent security services. However, their operations were non-official and strictly restricted in operations and reach, limiting their corroborative impact to mitigate the rising insecurity. Meanwhile, the incessant infiltration of some specific non-westerners into the region, their continual indulgence in criminality, subterranean motives of alleged expansionism-cumterror on purpose which exposed the apparent inefficiency and incapacitation of the Nigeria Police Force in internal security provision birthed the idea of a regional security outfit by the South-Western governors to complement efforts of the Police. Surprisingly, rather than applaud the initiative, it was greeted with animosity and reservations both from the corridors of power and out outside of it raising dust of controversies.

Respondents were unanimous in their affirmation that the initiative to establish the Western Nigeria Security Network code named Amotekun Corps was sternly criticized in some quarters. Notwithstanding, on Thursday, January 9, 2020, six governors of southwest states of Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Ekiti, Ondo and Lagos, launched the Network in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital. Governors Seyi Makinde of Oyo, Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti and Rotimi Akeredolu of Ondo were present at the flagoff. Other governors—Gboyega Oyetola of Osun, Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos and Dapo Abiodun of Ogun—who were not physically present expressed total alliance.

The claims of these state leaders stemmed from the constitutional responsibility bestowed on them as enshrined in Section 14 (2) of the Nigerian Constitution, 1999 as amended, which emphasizes that their statutory responsibility is the security and welfare of citizens. Surprisingly, the launching of the outfit attracted outcries mainly from the North and federal government, particularly from the Offices of the Attorney-General of the

Federation and Inspector-General of Police hinging their claim on section 214 of the 1999 Constitution as amended, which states:

There shall be a Police Force for Nigeria, which shall be known as Nigeria Police Force and subject to the provisions of these section no other police force shall be established for the federation or any other part thereof.

However, the claim on the side of the South-West governors was that the Amotekun security outfit did not, in any way, intend to create a parallel police force but just a replica of what Hisbah and Civilian Joint Task Force already were in the North. To them, establishment of the outfit did not constitute any constitutional breach as protection of lives and property of their people was a priority of all times. Meanwhile, to address the apprehension of the Attorney General of the Federation and the Inspector-General of Police, the states agreed to a midpoint agreement that the Amotekun will not operate as a regional security institution as earlier proposed but one owned on a state-by-state arrangement. To consolidate this, each state thereafter approached its respective state houses of assembly to promulgate necessary legislative provisions to legalize the outfit and its operations as a state-owned security agency. In his view Oladejo (2022) averred that security is everybody's business and a cardinal call which beckons at all and sundry for their contributions to ensure safety of lives and property. Consequent upon approval at state assemblies, though at different times, five of the six states of the South-West region now operate the outfit independently but with same name; Amotekun or Western Nigeria Security Network. Lagos State Government had earlier established the Lagos State Neighbourhood Safety Corps by an act of the State House of Assembly in 2016. Clearly resonating from all the six states was a pledge that Amotekun Corps will strictly operate within the ambit of its enabling legislation and in collaboration with the Nigeria Police Force. Amotekun is a Yoruba name for leopard and in this instance, it symbolizes fearlessness and readiness to take, head-on, any adversary threat. The logo of the outfit in all the states are the same featuring the image of an angry leopard in full flight. The slogan of the corps is "zero tolerance to crime." According to the six governors, on whose behalf Governor Oluwarotimi Akeredolu spoke at the inauguration of the security outfit in Ibadan, the overall objectives of the Amotekun are encapsulated in its mandate thus:

- i. Prevention of activities capable of threatening the safety and security of the community
- ii. Apprehend perpetrators of crimes thereof and handover to the Police to bring them to justice.
- iii. Prevention, combat and investigation of crimes iv. Help maintain public law and order

v. Gather intelligence to complement efforts of the Police and Nigeria Security and

Civil Defence Corps vi. Offer services to protect and secure inhabitants and their property vii. Render first-hand service to victims of crime at the core community level viii. Collaborate with communities leaders in preventing and controlling crime.

Resistance and the controversies

Across respondents' responses, a legion of controversies were identified. The major criticism about operation Amotekun stems from the fact that it was a regional security outfit which could amount to usurpation of the jurisdictional powers of the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) capable of constituting a constitutional breach on one hand and throwing up needless rivalry on the other. This was already debunked as the outfit was said to have been restructured to be state-based and not regional based as earlier intended. Another seemingly genuine agitation was the possible abuse of it by politicians; it was feared that the organisation may be commodified as an instrument of political oppression by political elites (the governors in particular) against their opponents.

It was also argued that unlike other climes where real community policing is successfully practised, the hope to have the legislature to institute laws to regulate their activities designating in specific terms (recruitment modality, structure, roles, and mode of practice) with a view to ensuring minimum operation standard, independence and total dedication to intended aims and objectives, may with time be a mere wish. Again, the query of whether the initiative not going to be an extension of the societal wrath wherein the personnel of the Corps will prioritize private executive security service (as Police is currently known with the VIP special service) over and above service to the common people and state institutions. Another of the resistance-cum-controversies was hinged on the presumption that the Corps would soon match the lackluster police-civil relations as commonly acknowledged in Nigeria. Other reservations as highlighted by respondents hover around legitimacy of the agency and with concerns over danger of multiplicity of security providers; possible lack of coordination; its potential for intra-communal division; fear of misuse of arms and mob-justice.

Prospects

The reservations raised above may appear tenable and somewhat appealing to some sentiments but on a whole, the prospects acknowledged in the study contends that despite all odds the establishment of the corps portends huge potentials than its absence. Respondents did admit that the corps would complement efforts of the available police personnel in the southwest. Securing the citizens remains one of the primary duties of the government (at

all levels) and in consonance with the provision of section 14 (2b) of the 1999 Constitution as amended and provoked by the compelling security situation, respondents agreed that the establishment of Amotekun in southwest is considered both necessary and defensible within the purview of the law. After all, those who can afford special security service for personal protection are not constitutionally denied.

Similarly, Amotekun as an indigenous security outfit would operate in partnership with the community more harmoniously. This was a method of policing which has the capacity of combating crimes more decisively at the grassroots. It is not new at all; the practice is very similar to the age-long arrangement in some localities where the services of different vigilante groups are usually employed to beef up security. Again, considered from another worldview, recruiting thousands of able-bodied men and women across states in the southwest is a huge relief-leap; the community youths, the local militiamen and hunters would benefit from this type of arrangement, which would obviously reduce unemployment, poverty and hunger which according to Akinyetun and Ambrose (2021) did affirm has linear correlation with criminality (and possibly violent crises and insurrection in many instances).

Same way, respondents concurred that the corps as a grassroots security group, if its structure and operations are adequately monitored and regulated, it has the potential to serve the interest of the common people, which is laudable. Noting that security of one's life and property cannot and should not be an exclusive responsibility of the federal government. The men of the Amotekun would serve more in the area of intelligence gathering; using the advantage of their knowledge of the community settings, cultural experience and closeness to the grassroots to collect information for the Police to process and act accordingly. Another credible prospect of the initiative was the ease with which the Corps personnel could engage community dwellers as security stakeholders and win their hearts and mind. It is a kind of win-over capable of spurring genuine commitment of the locals to be active participants in the security affairs of their communities; hence, enthused to support with financial commitment. Such a gesture should ordinarily take-off some financial responsibilities from the state and by extension from the federal government. This, no doubt, is a significant prospect of the Amotekun initiative.

Sure enough, security is a shared desire of all times, respondents felt that operations of the Amotekun will not only benefit the descendants of the Oduduwa race but everyone in the south-west irrespective of affinity. The large, medium and small-scale investors as well as those non-residents in the region but have relations, friends and loved ones are potential beneficiaries. They held strong views that the impact of the operations of the Corps in the region cannot be overemphasized in the area of eco-tourism and related

matters. It will once again instil security assurance in prospective visitors to the region. A respondent recalled with nostalgic ecstasy, thus:

Recall that the South-West region prides itself in several geographical landscapes and tourist attraction centres, such as Idanre Hill in Ondo; Ikogosi WarmSprings, Ekiti Erin Ayonigba Sacred Fish River in Ekiti, Erin Ijesa Waterfall in Osun, Olumo Rock in Abokuta Ogun state, the Suspended Lake at Ado-Awaye in Ibarapa area of Oyo state and several others which make the region visible on the global tourism map, but the spate of insecurity in the country lately would have scared away potential tourists.

It was apparent respondents were hopeful that an effective operation of Amotekun would restore peoples' confidence and these places will regain their reserved places in the hearts of tourists and other adventure seekers. Further opinion this important The multiplier effects of a vibrant tourism industry include an increase in hotel bookings, air and road travels, restaurants, fun rendezvous, increased gate-takings at tourist attraction sites, and retail trade alongside the investments and employment opportunities that will be created. Thus, the value chain which includes the hotels, transportation system, technological support, community participation and tour guide operators create a great synergy to drive the growth of the tourism industry in the region and by extension, viability of the respective states.

Conclusion

Obvious from the foregoing, it is apparent that failure or incapacitation of the police and other state security agencies in combating the fledging insecurity in the South Western region of Nigeria and by extension, their inability to command the trust of the citizens in dealing with the problem of criminality, coupled with perceived docility of the government at the centre necessitated the establishment of the Western Nigeria Security Network otherwise known as Amotekun Corps. The six governors of the region were adequately supported by their respective Houses of Assembly in ensuring legislative backing for the initiative after initial threats by the federal government through the offices of the Attorney General and Inspector General of Police. They affirmed their resolve and political will in common partnership to address crime prevention and criminality, taking crime as a social rather than a security matter and the need to involve the whole community. In their affirmation, it resonates clearly that in the past crime prevention was a main responsibility of the police, but not anymore; it is now the joint responsibility of all stakeholders with individual members of the community, the police and the state as lead-actors in proactive policing. It was therefore concluded that beyond the resistance-cum-controversies surrounding the establishment and operations of the corps, therein lie indisputable prospects for common good in the initiative.

Recommendations

Effective surveillance and intelligence gathering are important chores that could distinguish the personnel of the Western Nigeria Security Network from what the Nigeria populace already know of the conventional policing system. The methods and approaches largely used by the Nigerian Police Force which have not yielded satisfactory results over the years should be avoided or improved upon if the new outfit will have its mandate actualize in good time.

To attain this, it is important to deploy psychological testing which will address the innate readiness and personal competences of the personnel and prospective intakes. Besides features such as physical stamina, vision and hearing strength, allergies and aptitude, more fundamental elements such as propensity to indulge in crimes or not, factor of residency, psychological readiness, courage, self-efficacy as well as resilience coefficient need be prioritized.

Unlike the conventional Police, the Amotekun should not be licensed to offer VIP special services as this will constitute distraction. Rather, majority should be specially deployed to the suburbs where threats of farmer-herder violent conflict, kidnapping for ransom and ritual killings abound.

It should be noted that the assignment of community policing is domiciled at the grassroots; it is expected that recruitment are done from the local communities of operations and regular assessment conducted to ascertain the worthiness of personnel.

By the provision of sections 272 to 275 of the Criminal Code, only the Police has the right of both arrest and prosecution, though, every individual Nigerian has the power of arrest but with a caveat to hand in the arrested person to the Police immediately for prosecution. A formal security outfit cannot lack such power and be strong; hence, it is recommended that right of prosecution should also be accorded Amotekun to be viable enough for its statutory mandate.

Regular training and re-training should be conducted for the Corps with a view to instil and sustain in them competences professional community police to effectively undertake due diligence in criminal investigations and crime prevention.

Provision of welfare and logistics packages to personnel of the corps should be prioritized. This should not be taken as privileges but be provided as a matter of necessity as these are bound to affect personnel's efficiency and effectiveness. States yet to set up Security Trust Fund model should take a cue from Lagos and Oyo states to have a steady fund flow to sustain the laudable initiative and the necessary associated encumbrances. Nonetheless, members of the communities should be sensitized on the need to take ownership of the management of security in each of their localities or communities and engage more regularly with operatives of Amotekun. The provisions of welfare and

logistics to the corps should not be left for government alone, rather, community should also have community support fund to contribute own quota at all times.

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