



NIGERIAN SECURITY OPERATIVES AND THE SECURITY OF LIFE AND PROPERTY OF NIGERIAN ROAD USERS.

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Abstract

The study sets out to examine Nigerian security operatives and the security of life and property of Nigerian road users. To this end, a few objectives were set out, they include: to examine: The state of security of Nigerian road users Reasons attributed for the unwholesome attitudes of Nigerian security operatives towards road users, Possible measures towards curbing the highhandedness of Nigerian security operatives on our roads. In a bid to achieve these, a particular methodology was adopted-the use of secondary data including textbooks, newspapers and the internet and primary data through observation. The major findings suggest that the causes of officers' mistreatment of road users in Nigeria are as a result of the following: poor remuneration and motivation, corruption in the general Nigerian society, sheer greed of officers, wickedness; lack of exposure to international best practices and feelings of disrespect and intimidation. As a solution, it is recommended that the work of men on this all important duty should be taken seriously by the authorities over them to provide them the motivation needed to do their work out of free mind; further, the officers themselves are enjoined to remember God in whatever they do, the authority also is enjoined to ensure that only jobseekers who qualify should be given the opportunity to do this work since it has to do with the life of people; among others.

KEYWORDS: Security of life and property, Bribery, Exploitative attitude, Road users, Road checks

Introduction

Nations all over the world take the issue of protection of life and property of its citizenry as utmost priority. The same seems to be the case with Nigeria as it puts in place mechanisms to ensure that all Nigerians in all their locations enjoy security of life and property. It should be understood here that security as noted above is not to

be provided for Nigerians by nationality alone but everybody within the territory of Nigeria. This need has informed the establishment of security agencies such as the police and the military to ensure that all Nigerians and all other persons in Nigeria at any particular time are safe either in their places of abode, work or business places or on the roads as they pursue their daily activities. It should be noted that the interest of this work is on the security of life and property of Nigerian road users as ensured by the security operatives saddled with the responsibility.

To this end, the Nigeria Police Force deploys its personnel to man the roads to ensure that Nigerians using the roads are able to get to their destinations without suffering armed robbery attacks; that stolen goods are not transported freely on the roads, and also that illicit goods and enemies of the peace of the land are intercepted. This responsibility has been primarily one of the police over the years but things have changed so dramatically in recent years that it has become necessary to co-opt the military into the business of maintaining road security; the idea being that the police being a civil, yet military force of the fully equipped military to be able to curtail the nature of criminality on Nigerian roads today.

Initially, the cry has been that the police are weak, corrupt and brutal in their relationship with members of the public which they are supposed to protect, some reforms had been put in place by the Police Service Commission to curtail these irregularities and inefficiencies of the police but the issue with them seem to defy all remedies. As Nigerians ply the roads day and night, we face cases of extortions (property exploitation) from men of the police on road checks and patrol and also mishandling of commuters which amount to threat to life. More to this is the fact that armed robberies have persisted on the roads leading to the loss of lives and property of Nigerian road users. In some more agonising cases, commuters will be stopped by these operatives at check points and as a way of punishing the offence of the driver or some haughty remark made by a passenger ask them to lie down and accidentally, an unsuspecting truck driver runs into them, struggles to control the wheels but fails and unavoidably crushes these innocent commuters to death.

The problem

The major issue with the situation depicted above is that it was thought that by incorporating the military into the business of securing lives and property on the roads, the menace would be drastically reduced to the barest minimum, however, the agonising truth is that the military had failed to save the situation and had rather joined with the police in perpetrating the condemnable acts that had informed their

call to duty. A few instances will suffice to explain the above scenario: very close to Wukari in Taraba State-Nigeria as one comes from Benue State is a military check point. There it is written boldly **‘BRIBE IS AN OFFENCE, DO NOT GIVE’** but the same men encourage motorists to give them some money but not to take it as if it was a bribe, as the motorist is offering the money, the military man taking would say, ‘You are giving it to me of your freewill ko, I am sure I did not ask you for it?’ but this has turned to be a normal routine and if commercial motorists whom they normally exploit do not oblige in this implicit illicit deal, they are delayed unnecessarily, hence the norm has become for these motorists to offer their ‘freewill donation’ in style and continue to enjoy their pass. It is also no longer news that our security personnel on Nigerian roads select vehicles for checks; if the approaching vehicle does not seem as one they could conveniently harass its occupants, they let it pass without the necessary ‘stop and check’. It is commonplace that the same personnel that have stopped a passenger vehicle in which one is commuting allows an oncoming flashy car to pass without a word, rather, they bow. The irony is that, it is occupants of these flashy cars that turn out to become hoodlums and insurgents as soon as they get a convenient place to operate. Permit me to briefly narrate a particular incident that occurred on the 15th of April, 2014 in which the researcher was involved. There was a very serious boko haram attack on Wukari during the night of April 14th to the morning of 15th before the soldiers were able to contain the situation in the morning. This incident led to the death of over 500 persons contrary to media reports of under a hundred, following the incident, a curfew was imposed on the town immediately to forestall further reoccurrence. As many of us as could access the federal road did and took to flight, making it close to Jootar, a border town in Benue state that is very 10-15 km from the town, we prevented from continuing on our journey by a combined team of military and police officers at a check point very close to Jootar, we were held there for close to three hours until they resolved to take either five hundred naira (₦500.00) or one thousand naira (₦1000.00) depending on the kind of vehicle. Being desperate to move on, and with the level of hostility displayed by these men as they were shooting without caution, we all had to pay as we had no option, because the soldiers whom we thought would be of help were the ones that had also connived with the police to rob us. All these ask for explanation and solution; it to this end that the present work seeks to examine:

- The state of security of Nigerian road users
- Reasons attributed for the unwholesome attitudes of Nigerian security operatives towards road users,

- Possible measures towards curbing the highhandedness of Nigerian security operatives on our roads.

The subsequent sections of work will discuss the following: theoretical explanations on the exploitative attitude of Nigerian security operatives to road users and its implication for the security of their life and property; a narrative on the state of security of life and property of Nigerian road users, the possible causes of their lack of positive attitude toward road users, conclusion and a recommendation suggesting possible measures for resolving the menace.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are said to be an explanation of a problem (Ubwa, 2003). Haralambos, Heald and Holborn (2008) conceive of a theory as a set of ideas that provides an explanation for something. The issue at hand is structural in nature and so deserves macro rather than micro explanation. To this end, the work employs the use of structural functionalism to explain the reasons for the exploitative attitude displayed toward road users in Nigeria by members of the security apparatus that should protect them.

Functionalism

This framework considers society as a system. By that, it views the society as comprised of various part or units which are interconnected or interrelated and also interdependent. It views the society as the basic unit of analysis and parts are understood in recognition of their relationship to the whole. This viewpoint drew inspiration from human biology using the human body which has several organs such as the heart, lungs, eyes among others, these are considered in terms of their relationship to other organs and more importantly their contribution towards the maintenance of the whole, that is, in terms of their contribution to the society. The view point holds that the society, just like every living organisms have some basic needs it must satisfy in order to continue to survive (Haralambos et al, 2008).

These basic needs spoken of above are in the views of functionalists what they call functional prerequisites; among these functional prerequisites in society today is the need for security. It is a major need that must be met if members of the society will live in peace and tranquillity and also for the society to survive and develop. The focus of functionalism has been on how social systems are maintained. This is usually considered in the light of positive evaluation of the contribution of those units saddled

with the responsibility of performing their roles- that is, how well they performed, but such contributions may not always be functional as some other times they are dysfunctional, connoting unintended consequences for the establishment of those units.

These security operatives as identified in this work-the police, and the military including the army, air force and sometimes the navy are established to take care of the security of life (especially) and property of Nigerians. It is in view of the importance attached to this need that the military have been co-opted into the work of maintaining road security in Nigeria. The crux of the matter is that these personnel though have some credit to themselves have over the years largely failed Nigerians in the discharge of the duties to the nation. They have in fact been accused by Nigerians as been as criminal as the hoodlums that torment them on the roads. It is based on this that the functionalist perspective presented by Merton (1938) comes in handy in explaining why Nigerian security operatives would rather steal from and kill Nigerian road users rather than protect them.

Merton (1938) in his 'social structure, strain and anomie' theory of deviance posits that there is what he call value consensus among members of the society-that is to say, all members of the society share the same values. However, an issue that breeds some strain in social relationship crops up. This is in the fact that members of the society are placed in different positions in the social structure (for example they differ in terms of class position), they do not have the same opportunity of realizing the shared values; this situation creates deviance. In his words, the social and cultural structure generates for socially deviant behaviour upon people variously located in that structure (Haralambos and Holborn, 2007:323).

He cited an example, using the USA, which is a complete replica of what obtains in Nigeria. Members of his society share the goal of success, for which they all strive and which is measured in terms of wealth and material possessions. The picture presented is that all members of the society have an equal opportunity of achieving success. He further noted that in all societies there are institutionalized the culturally defined goals. There are in these societies an accepted ways of achieving success and these through educational qualifications, talent, hard work, drive, determination and ambition. The major cause for deviance in this viewpoint is that, in a balanced society, an equal emphasis is placed upon both cultural goals and institutionalized means of achieving them, but the trouble is, in these societies, the reverse seems to be the case as more importance is attached to success, while relatively little is given to the accepted means of achieving success. The social system places some strain on some

individuals as there are no level playing grounds for everyone to strive for success. Hence, as noted by Haralambos and Holborn (2007: 323) “there is a tendency to ‘reject the rules of the game’ and to strive for success by any available means”. It becomes like a game of the cards in which winning is so important that the rules are abandoned by some of the players; and in such situations where the rules cease to control behaviour, a situation of normlessness or anomie results, then a situation of ‘anything goes’ ensues, norms no longer direct behaviour and deviance of whatever kind is encouraged.

Deviance, in the view of Merton (1938) will take different forms; five were actually delineated-conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. The response type that is of importance to this work is innovation. **Innovates** according to him reject the normative means of achieving success and rather turn to deviant means, and crime in particular to achieve the socially cherished goal of success. Merton was of the view that members of the lower social strata are the most likely to select the path of crime to success as a result of the strain posed to them by the system. This makes them least likely to succeed through approved means and so the resort to crime in order to succeed. One finds that these set of persons are the ones who acquire lower levels of educational qualifications and thus end up in jobs that provide low pay and little opportunity for advancement. In Merton’s words “they have little access to conventional and legitimate means for becoming successful”. Because the opportunity to becoming successful is blocked to them by the social structure, they innovate, turning to crime which promises greater rewards than legitimate means.

Looking carefully at these views, one is obliged to agree with them. We find that the majority of the personnel who are assigned to these road duties are those of the lower ranks. They are those with relatively lower educational qualifications, however, the case with Nigeria is a little different here as even university graduates do take up jobs at this level with the hope that the authority will be fair to them and upgrade their statuses with time; and that the most important thing for the moment was to get a placement. This hope, for most of them soon becomes dashed excepting for the few who have well connected god-fathers within the system. It should be noted that every Nigerian has strong drive for success; we all want to build mansions, ride the best of cars, and live a life that is to say the least comfortable. But with very little funds, a take home pay that is actually not enough to take them home, the tendency then is for them to exploit vulnerable Nigerians on the roads by way of extorting property (money) from commuters and motorists on the high ways, and if they would not cooperate, and or vehemently resist, in some extreme cases pay with their lives while

the property is still taken. They do this to the vulnerable Nigerians while the criminals, most of them driving in very flashy cars are allowed easy pass with a bow. These same persons as soon as they get the opportunity they desire; mount road blocks and attack road users. The quest for material wealth is the reason according to this view, why our operatives have paid little attention to the security of life and property of road users.

Further evaluation of this theory will see find fault with the proposition that it is members of the lower socio-economic strata that are the most likely to select the path of crime to success as a result of the strain posed to them by the system. This seems to paint the picture that criminals in Nigeria are the lower status people, but researches in this regard have suggested the contrary, as the rot in the Nigerian security apparatus have tended to have the support of the system. Recently, some big personalities in the Nigerian army have been accused of complicity in the fight against insurgency in Nigeria (Vanguard news, 2014). It should be noted that the insurgents in Nigeria had in recent times mounted road blocks and killed many Nigerians on the roads; especially the incident in Beneshiek, Borno State, and many other incidents (Vanguard news, 2014). But Merton himself was according to Reiner,(1984) also keen to note that there was no upper limit placed on the desire for success, so the rich has not been exempted, so to say from the tendency to commit crimes as they could and some certainly do to get richer.

Data collection

Due to the nature of the work, data have been collected solely through secondary means. Much use has been made of works from textbooks, articles and newspaper publications, especially, online news and a good measure of data were also collected through direct personal observation of the researcher.

The State of Security of Nigerian Road Users

The experience of Nigerian road users over the years has never been very palatable. It has either been unnecessary delays as a result of make-believe checks or extortions, and for some very unlucky ones, the loss of life. Incidences of recklessness and mishandling of road users in Nigeria by security operatives are countless, however, for the purpose of this work, a few instances will suffice.

Writing on a topic, the Nigerian Police Force: How do you view them? Seun (2005) gave several instances of police brutality in dealing with road users in several parts of

Nigeria. Sometimes in May, 2005, ‘in the south- eastern state of Enugu hundreds of truck drivers blocked a major highway to protest against the killing of one of their colleagues who had refused to hand over a bribe of twenty naira (₦20) at a police roadblock. Earlier in the same month in Lagos, a motorist was killed by a policeman during a traffic argument in the city’s Maryland district. A mob quickly formed and burnt a police car in response’. It should be noted that Nigerian road users are in such a sorry state that just a common argument at roadblocks with security operatives could lead to the death of the road user.

In another development, the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN) in an article presented in Nigeria Police Watch of March 23rd, 2014, decried cases of Police harassment, extortion and killing of commercial motorcyclists over refusal to offer bribe across the country. In Rivers state on the date mentioned above, the organization received reports on the shooting by men of the police attached to the Umuebulu division of the state police command of two men: one Mr Uko from Antuk in Abak Iga in Akwa Ibom state who reside and operates within the community; and another, Mr Christopher, a school bus driver that works with Stressed Child International School, Umuebulu. The incident that led to the shooting of the duo was an attempt by the police to arrest a member of the motorcyclists association upon refusal to pay a bribe. It was said that the other members resisted the arrest and what the police thought should happen was to shoot and the two were hit. Mr Christopher was said to have died later in the hospital. When contacted, the DPO’s response was to dismiss the report, and claim that the driver was alive and that all that transpired was a serious accident between the bus driver and the motorcyclist (popularly known in Nigeria as okada riders). In Lagos, on 23rd March, 2014, there was a near confrontation between the police and okada riders at Solomon Durodola Unity estate Idimu. The motorcyclists accused the police of turning them to Automated Teller Machines (ATMs)

In a report on ‘Police Brutality in Nigeria’, Ujumadu (2010) reported the case of a mobile police officer who killed a taxi driver on the 23rd of June, 2010 in Onitsha, Anambra state on account of refusal to offer a bribe of ₦20. He noted that the officer was to be dismissed and charged to court for murder. The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) confirmed the incident and noted that the officer was arrested and was detained at the state police headquarters in Awka. Further, he said the officer will be tried departmentally before being taken to court and also noted that the personnel in question was already on his way out of the force. On the same day, there was a report in the vanguard newspaper presented by Tony Ejike on the killing of a

bus driver and a secondary school student by the police in Enugu. The police officer was said to have demanded for a bribe of ₦40 but that the driver was only willing to part with half the amount. This was enough to have warranted the wanton killing of the two by a reportedly stray bullet fired from the officer's barrel when he got enraged. The disappointing side of the story is that when the police were contacted, the PPRO Mr Ebere Amaraizu denied that anybody died and added that some people only sustained injuries when the bus conveying them had an accident. It should be noted here that a similar defence was put up by a Divisional Police Officer (DPO) in charge of the Umuebulu police division in Rivers state in support of a colleague who committed a similar atrocity. Issues like these make it look as part of the tradition of the police in Nigeria to cover the evils of their colleagues, maybe to save the image of the force or because they are partners together in crime against humanity.

Sometime in early February, 2014, the international community was thrown into some disbelief and dismay as the video of a police officer demanding bribes from some three men in Lagos went public on the internet. The officer in question was one Mr Aniyem Chinyem attached to Ishen division of the Lagos state police command (Nigeria Police Watch, 2014). What actually transpired in this incident was a case of '99 days for the thief but one day for the owner' as is the popular slogan in Nigeria. The fact is that it was 'judgment day' for this officer but it is not as if he is the only one involved in this berating attitude of the Nigerian security forces on such important assignments. That his case was used to show to the international community the rot especially in the Nigeria Police Force is good for Nigeria, as it will make the police authorities to pay more attention to the cries of Nigerians and also save their image.

Further, naijagist.com (2014) on May 12th, reported the killing of a building engineer in Festac town Lagos by the police over bribe. On the 10th of the month, Mr Oyoma Edewor had a mechanical fault on his vehicle in Lekki and got a towing van to get the vehicle home. Some policemen at a particular junction in Festac town sighted him and soon hijacked a bus and went after him. As soon as they got to him, they ordered him and the others out of the car and he was told to sit on the ground. He was asked to settle them and he was just about to explain the situation when sergeant Otene pulled the trigger and shot him at close range. These cases happen every day in Nigeria and one cannot actually document all of them, this being the case, the few cited would suffice.

One would argue over the appropriateness of the use of the concept 'Nigerian Security Operatives' in his work. The truth is that much has not been written on the

excesses of the military on the roads in Nigeria today. But every Nigerian knows that in most cases at the check points, it is a combined team of the police and the military that monitor people's movement. As it is, especially in Benue state, the 'Operation Zenda' a combined team of the military and the work works like this and the military in these teams have almost become as bad as the police whom they were supposed to improve and checkmate. Virtually all states in Nigeria have this kind of arrangement in place to provide support for the police, but as it is, the contagion effect seems to have played out as the disease in the police seems to have also gotten penetration into the military.

Possible Causes of Police Lack of Positive Attitude toward Road Users

Every undesirable situation has a cause. Several reasons have been given for the lack of positive attitude of security operatives in Nigeria to the citizenry who they should protect. Among the reasons that stand out are such as: poor remuneration and motivation, corruption in the general Nigerian society, sheer greed of officers, wickedness; lack of exposure to international best practices and feelings of disrespect and intimidation.

Poor Remuneration and Motivation

Part of the defence put up by policemen as to why they exploit Nigerians this much is lack of adequate welfare for the rank and file of the system. Ameh (2005) was one of a team of correspondents working for the Punch Newspaper in Nigeria. They were travelling along the Onithsa- Enugu expressway in Anambra state when their vehicle was stopped by a policeman who asked for his 'roger' (a term used by the police in Nigeria to refer to bribe) in the ensuing interaction, the policeman got to identify them as staff of Punch, and he told them "Punch, you people have been writing that policemen collect ₦20. Why is your paper so interested in this ₦20 matter? Why won't we collect ₦20? Sometimes, you assume that policemen are receiving so much money from government. That is not true; we do not see the money. In fact, we read it in the papers just like you people also read it. Now look at the patrol van, we fuel it from our own pockets to be able to work. We buy our own boots, uniforms and pay for our accommodation. These are things that are supposed to get us through official funding. If you die your family suffers and if our colleagues die in the line of duty, we contribute money to take care of the burial expenses". Given this narration, one finds that there is very little motivation for the police in Nigeria. We do understand that without motivation, developing right

attitude to work is always slim; and these could make someone have a logical reason to want to use other means to make ends meet.

Corruption in the General Nigerian Society

Bioye (2005) notes that the Nigerian police is only one of the problems we have in Nigeria. He suggests that it will be best if we treat it as part of a larger problem, noting that many Nigerians are corrupt and the we should remember that the police are not another species of people but Nigerians and that the reason why the problem is being amplified is because they have killing weapons. He likened it to the military taking over the executive powers of a country and concluded that corruption is the mother of all these occurrences.

Sheer Greed of Officers

Police remuneration in Nigeria today has improved; the pay package is relative better than what used to be. It has got to a point where policemen should have respected themselves and not covet the hard earned little that poor Nigerians manage to glean. But how would this happen when every security operative sent on road duty now looks at it as an opportunity to enrich him/herself, and get the latest of cars.

Wickedness

The act of stealing from people who earn lower than what one earns can only be described as wickedness, and the policeman who does this is no better than the armed robber he allows on the highways. More wickedly is the wanton killing of innocent road users on account of mere argument over trivial issues like ₦20, ₦50, in fact, whatever amount of money and even a flimsy excuse like disrespect.

Lack of Exposure to International Best Practices

Most of the persons that form the rank and file of the Nigerian Police Force have only acquired basic education; some even had used the certificates of other persons to get the job and so are not abreast with information on international best practices in the conduct of businesses in the force. This could make the man in his own little world think that what he is doing is acceptable, and may even think it a way of using 'official power' by becoming a policeman.

Feelings of Disrespect and Intimidation.

In the views of Enfield (2014), police brutality occurs for several reasons including the officer's psychological state, and his/her perception of the situation. Sometimes

the officer may feel disrespected, even though they know that it is not the legal or moral thing to do, they may act out against the disrespectful individual either to punish the person or to intimidate any other people present. Another factor would be feeling of intimidation. When police officers feel intimidated, they may preemptively strike an individual even if the officer was in no immediate danger. Feeling of intimidation could give the officer the opportunity to claim that he/she felt threatened and had to act for his or her safety therefore making it difficult for authorities to determine use of excessive force.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discourse, one can conclude that the security personnel on road watch duties in Nigeria have fallen short of the expectations of many Nigerians due to their exploitative attitude of extortion of property from road users and even lack of careful attention to the job as they are seen to allow people using intimidating cars to pass without questioning while the poor masses are given serious checks. Some of these persons thought to be respectable wealthy people turn out to be robbers as soon as they get their opportunity. In some extreme cases, road users lose their lives to some trigger happy police officers. The reasons for this behaviour would include: poor remuneration and motivation, corruption in the general Nigerian society, sheer greed of officers, wickedness; lack of exposure to international best practices and feelings of disrespect and intimidation.

Possible Measures towards Curbing the Highhandedness of Nigerian Security Operatives on Our Roads.

In most cases, solutions to problems follow from the nature and character of the problems as they are identified. For example, looking at the issue of low remuneration and motivation as decried by some officers one may agree that they could be tempted to take an opportunity that comes their way to cheat vulnerable individuals. The claim by police officers that they only hear of their handsome pay rise on the pages of paper and the news could be taken to hold some water as the army mutiny in Maimalari barracks Maiduguri, Borno state-Nigeria is partly to be blamed on such an issue (BBC News, 2014). If this is actually the case, the authorities need to actually implement whatever allowances and pay rises they claim to have been approved for these officers, because they are actually entitled to whatever has become a right or privilege that has been publicly approved for them.

On the issue of corruption, the solution would come from Nigerians thinking right and acting right. That monies approved for military and police officers are not given to them is a function of corruption on the part of the authorities over them. If the head be corrupt, then what do we think the others will do? Hence, if we actually intend to solve the problem of corruption, then the cleaning exercise has to start right from the top to the bottom.

On issues of greed and wickedness, security officers need to be morally guided. The authorities in all formations of the military and the Police provide for places of worship to inculcate into these officers the spirit and fear of God, but the fact remains that they continue in a manner to please themselves. The onus is then on the officers themselves to choose to behave well; they should be guided by the injunction that in whatever they do, they should always remember that “there is God oo!” (Jonathan, 2014).

Nigerians on their own part should also learn to treat our security officers to a high level of respect that they deserve. Their lives are actually put on the line for our sakes and the way we can pay them is to give to them the respect due to them. This way, their spirits and morale will be lifted and they will work as happy people. They are already frustrated and we do not need to add to their frustration.

As for the employment of little informed people, it is the business of the authorities to ensure that the best hands are always employed. But this is difficult until the society becomes less corrupt. For example, the experience today is that most of these jobs are sold and if someone comes with the right bargain, he gets it. We also understand that it is not difficult to verify certificates presented by people for employment, but corruption would not let even that happen, leaving us at the mercy of people who do not deserve to be where they are.

Another important measure that cannot be overemphasized is the application of appropriate punishment to erring officers according to the gravity of offences. Situations where personnel commit criminal offences and they are left to go without punishment or just with a mild caution, the tendency is for others to believe that doing those things pay and there will be no form of deterrence for the offender and other potential offenders at all. So, if an officer could offend, then correction should also follow.

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