

THE PROPOSED STATE POLICE AND LANGUAGE: PANACEAS FOR INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

A. O. Fanran, Ph.D.

Department Of English And Literary Studies
Lead City University, Ibadan, NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

The level of insecurity in Nigeria today is alarmingly high. Many heinous crimes are committed in nearly all the states of the federation almost every day, and most of the criminals get away with their crimes largely due to the ineffectiveness of the police. It is for this reason that a State Police Bill was introduced in the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of Nigeria's bicameral legislature. If passed in this House and in the Senate, the upper legislative chamber, and assented to by the President, it will become a law that will give the 36 states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) the power to establish their own police forces. The debate on the desirability or otherwise of the State Police still rages. The present paper argues that the police will be more effective in fighting crimes and tackling insecurity if they serve in their own states of origin and among the people with whom they share and speak the same language.

Keywords: Level of insecurity, heinous crimes, ineffectiveness of the police, insecurity, state police, same language, bicameral legislature, lower chamber, upper chamber.

INTRODUCTION

The Police are an organized group of officials appointed to enforce the laws of a country and prevent and detect crimes (Harber and Paton, 1979: 830). Sinclair (1992:886) describes them in similar terms – they are members of the official organization which is responsible for making sure that people obey the laws. These definitions clearly illustrate the crucial functions of the police: to enforce laws, prevent and detect crimes, and ensure security of lives and property.

Unfortunately, the level of insecurity in Nigeria at the present time is dangerously high. No one in this country seems to be safe anymore. The present paper argues that the proposed state police will enable police men and women to work in their own states or geopolitical zones and among people with whom they share and speak the same language. If this happens, if the police work among their own ethnic groups with whom they share the same culture and speak the same language, they will be able to perform their functions more diligently, more efficiently and more effectively all because their own communities and people will readily cooperate with them and furnish them with necessary information which they need to perform their functions effectively.

Types of Crimes Commonly and Frequently Committed in Nigeria Today

Nigeria has been aptly described as the crime capital of the world (*Nigerian Tribune*, 13th October 2016 P.4). Criminals now prowl the country and kill or maim innocent citizens, steal or destroy or vandalize their property and kidnap them for ransom or for ritual purposes. The

criminals also do not spare public property: they frequently blow up oil and gas pipelines and attack other sources of the nations' wealth. Nigerian banks are routinely robbed with violence, resulting in the carting away of millions of naira and the killing of scores of innocent persons including women, children and policemen. The latest bank robberies were those in Offa, a town in Kwara State, on 5th April, 2018. On that day alone, five commercial banks were violently attacked and robbed. Millions of naira were carted away and 33 persons including 9 policemen lost their lives in the operations. The Boko Haram Islamic religious sect members in the North East also pose a serious threat to security in the region and elsewhere in the country, particularly in other parts of the North. They frequently attack and burn schools, churches and mosques, and kill or abduct school children and worshippers (Abolurin, 2011 Faniran; 2013).

It is estimated that the Boko Haram sect members have destroyed a total of 910 schools in the North East, displaced 952, 029 school pupils and killed 611 teachers in 6 years (*The Punch* 24th September, 2016, P.9). The destruction of educational structures and facilities and the human casualties have continued since 2016. For instance, the Nigerian Tribune of 3rd May, 2018 (p. 7) reported that more than 2,295 teachers have been killed and 19,000 school children displaced by Boko Haram in Yobe, Adamawa and Borno states. It should be noted that religious fanatics have been very active in the North for a very long time, causing very serious religious crises every now and then in the region. For example, in 1980, serious religious riots broke out in Kano, resulting in the burning of several churches, vehicles, houses and the killing of thousands of people. In 1982, religious fanatics struck in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state. More than 500 civilians and over a hundred policemen and soldiers perished in the ensuing violence. Moreover, in 1984, violent religious disturbances erupted in Yola, capital of the then Gongola State, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people and the destruction of property worth millions of naira (Faniran, 1986).

The religious upheavals referred to above triggered an exodus of close to a million southern Nigerians from the North and the displacement of several other Nigerians, especially Northern Christians, who became refugees in their own country. The situation in the North at that time was not very much different from what we are witnessing in the region at the moment: huge refugee camps and suffering humanity. The Fulani herdsmen, too, constitute serious threats to security in the country, as they frequently attack, kidnap or kill farmers, destroy their farm crops and set their huts and houses on fire. Owing to these developments and mounting insecurity, many farmers have fled their farms and farmlands for fear of losing their lives at the hands of the marauding herdsmen. The police and other security agents seem to be completely overwhelmed by these security challenges since they have not been able to do much to checkmate insecurity in the land.

Causes of Insecurity in Nigeria

There is insecurity wherever lives and property are not safe. Akinwumi and Adebayo (2013) opine that one major cause of insecurity in Nigeria is disunity. In spite of all that successive Federal Governments have done to foster unity among Nigerians from different ethnic backgrounds, like the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Unity Schools and the National Orientation Agency (NOA) the different ethnic groups rarely see eye to eye. As Akinwumi and Adebayo (2013) remark, there is no love lost among Nigerians from different parts of the country, and it does not require any empirical study to confirm this.

Another cause of insecurity is mass youth unemployment. Almost all the criminals caught and charged to court by the police are young school leavers. Many of them have

confessed publicly that they have gone into crime because they could not get a job three or four years after graduating from a University. Other causes of insecurity include injustice and corruption. All the militant groups in the Niger Delta region claim that they have been unjustly treated by successive Federal Governments. Their main complaint is that the country's wealth is derived from their region and that in spite of this, they have been neglected and allowed to remain among the poorest and most wretched of the earth. They claim that the money and wealth derived from their region has been spent on the development of the other parts of the country while persistent oil explorations and oil spillages have destroyed their land and sources of potable water. They also complain that they do not have good roads and other economic and social amenities and infrastructures.

Consequences of Insecurity

The consequences of insecurity are many. When the people of a country feel that they are unsafe, they will be afraid to go about their normal business or travel to distant places in the country. Secondly, they will be afraid to send their children or wards to schools because of the fear that the pupils may be attacked or kidnapped by hoodlums. All these are what we are witnessing in this country today, and they are what informed the advice given by the Police in 2016 that senior government officials, politicians and other important people in the country should always travel by air. If they must travel by road, the police advised further, they should avoid night journeys. (*The Punch* 2nd October 2016 P.8).

Insecurity may also compel foreign investors already in the country to close down their businesses and leave the country or relocate them to another country. No business man wants to leave his business in an insecure environment, or in a place where the cost of providing security will be too high, since that will definitely adversely affect his profit. And when investors leave a country, many people usually lose their jobs, their standard of living falls, and poverty level among them rises.

Moreover, insecurity in a country always scares foreign investors not yet in the country, for the same reason. And when foreign investors shun a country because of high rate of insecurity there, transfer of technology into the country will be adversely affected. Again, indigenous entrepreneurs and investors too, may consider leaving the country and relocating their businesses to another country where they think a better business environment exists. Finally, insecurity also has adverse effects on the tourism and hospitality sector of the economy. When foreign tourists come to a country, they will lodge in hotels, hire guides and interpreters and buy artefacts, souvenirs and other things made in the country. They will pay foreign exchange for these goods and services. But no foreigners will visit a country with a high rate of insecurity, a country where their lives are not safe, where they can be kidnapped or killed or maimed.

Why the Police in Nigeria are not Effective in the Performance of their Duties

One reason for the ineffectiveness of the police in Nigeria is that the Federal Government sometimes fails to vote enough money for them to purchase sophisticated weapons to fight crime. A second reason is corruption in the armed forces, of which the police are members. When government votes enough money for the armed forces to purchase sophisticated weapons, the top hierarchies of the army and the police often embezzle the money. The present administration in Nigeria has told the whole world how a large part of the 1.2 billion dollars meant for the purchase of arms and equipment to fight Boko Haram in the North East of

the country was diverted and shared by top Government functionaries, politicians and military officers. The remaining part of the money was spent to buy cheap, outdated military weapons and equipment. That is why armed robbers and other criminals often have more sophisticated weapons than the police and the army in Nigeria.

Another reason, which is no less important than those already discussed, is that many police men and women work in unfamiliar terrains and among people who speak languages other than their own. When this happens, the police face many security challenges, one of which is that they are often prone to attacks in such places. And when they work among people with whom they do not share and speak the same language, they get vital information only from the few who are literate and can communicate in English or pidgin. But, as is well known, very many people in Nigeria are illiterate and can communicate only in their mother tongue, their first language or vernacular (Faniran, 2016). If such people have information that can be useful to the police, they will not be able to communicate it to the law enforcement agents who do not understand their mother tongue. But if the police work among their own tribesmen, all the members of the community, both literate and illiterate, will be able to communicate useful information to the police.

The Proposed State Police

A bill for the establishment of a police force in each of the 36 States of the Federation and the FCT is currently before the National Assembly, Nigeria's bicameral legislature (*Vanguard*, 28th September, 2016 P.9). Sponsored in the House of Representatives, the lower legislative Chamber, the bill has passed second reading. When finally passed by the National Assembly and signed into law by the President, the bill will alter radically the present structure of the Nigerian Police. First, it will decentralize and divide it into 37 separate independent forces, one in each of the 36 states and the FCT. The current ineffectiveness of the police has often been blamed on the over-centralization of the force, and the bill is expected to address this issue. Secondly, it will remove the control of the police from the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Each state Police will now be under the direct control of the Governor of the state. Thirdly, the Police Force in each state will consist only of men and women who are indigenes of the state, officers who speak the same language as the people of the state, and who are very familiar with the terrains of the state.

Unfortunately, the State Police Bill seems to have stalled, since it is still before the National Assembly and has not been passed into law. Debates on the desirability or otherwise of the bill still continues on the radio, television and in the national newspapers. The *Vanguard* editorial of March 8, 2018 (p. 18) makes a strong case for the bill and opined that continued opposition to it no longer makes sense. The amendment of the constitution to introduce state police, the paper insists, is urgently needed.

How A Knowledge of the Language Spoken in a Speech Community can Help the Police to Perform their Functions Effectively in the Community

The languages spoken in each speech community in Nigeria are the mother tongue or first language (L1), English and Pidgin. The mother tongue is the most widely used, as it is spoken by all the members of the community, both literate and illiterate. English, on the other hand, is spoken by only the literate and educated members of the community while Pidgin is used by the educated and half literate members of the community. There are about 250 tribes or linguistic groups in Nigeria (see Achebe, 2013). This implies that the mother tongue and English and Pidgin are spoken in each ethnic group or speech community. So, if

each of the 36 States of the Federation as well as the FCT has its own Police, the law enforcement agents will be working among their own people and ethnic groups, and in the areas or terrains which they are familiar with and know very well. The advantages of these are many, but because of limitations of space, we will discuss only some of them. In the first place, the police will receive greater support and cooperation when they work among their own ethnic group: the people will regard the law enforcement agents as part of them and support and cooperate with them fully. Secondly, the police will be given necessary vital information from all the people of the community, both literate and illiterate. At the moment, the police receive information almost exclusively from educated members of the public. But, as Oyedeji (1977) has rightly observed, Nigeria still has very large illiterate populations.

Oyedeji's observation has been corroborated by the Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education, Alhaji Jibrin Parko, who says that more than 40% of Nigeria's over 170 million people are illiterates, people who cannot read or write, and people who speak and understand only their own mother tongues. Such people often have information that is useful to the police, but they are often unable to communicate the information to the law enforcement agents among them who do not understand their language or mother tongue. Now that the Police will be working among their own tribesmen, the law enforcement agents will be able to receive information from all the people of their states, not from only the literate ones.

The Police need information from all the people of the community in which they work if they are to perform their duties effectively. As Faniran (1986) and Ozekhome (2018) have abundantly made clear, the police cannot be everywhere even in their own state of origin. No State or country can have the money to employ enough police men and women to man every inch of the country that is why the police have to depend on information from the members of the public, people who live in places where crimes are committed.

The proposed State police will also reduce the casualties which Policemen usually suffer during armed robbery and other criminal activities. The national newspapers in the country frequently report attacks on the police and the casualties they suffer. For example, *The Citizen Online* of 10th April, 2013 (p. 5) reported the discovery of the bodies of 10 policemen killed by militants in the Niger Delta; *Vanguard* of 27th May, 2014 (p. 24), reported that 11 policemen were killed by Boko Haram; *Daily News* of 24th August, 2014 (p. 9) reported the missing of 35 police men after an attack on them by Boko Haram; *Premium Times* of 24th January, 2016 (p. 21) reported that a Divisional Police Officer (DPO) and 29 other policemen were killed by Fulani herdsmen; *The Punch* of 30th January, 2016, reported how robbers attacked a Central Bank of Nigeria bullion van and killed two policemen; and *Premium Times* of 18th October, 2016 (p. 30) reported that 359 policemen were killed in two years in Nigeria. From 2016 to the present moment the number of the policemen that have been killed must have been more than triple the above figure, Part of the reasons for the high police casualties can be traced to the fact that most of them work in unfamiliar terrains and among the people whose language they do not understand and cannot speak. It is very easy for the indigenes of a state or members of a community to discuss and plan the killing or kidnapping or abduction or murder of a policeman in his very presence if they know that the policeman does not understand and cannot speak their language. The establishment of a state police force will make this impossible since every policeman will be working among his own people, people with whom he shares and speaks the same language. The establishment of a state police will also make it possible for

policemen to escape from danger and hide among the people. They can also escape from danger and hide in the bush, and later trek until they get to a settlement where they will be received by their own tribesmen who will hide and protect them from danger.

The Disadvantages of State Police

In spite of the advantages of state police already discussed in this study, such a force has some disadvantages. As already stated, state police will be under the direct control of the state Governor, since he is the chief security officer of his state. As everyone very well knows, state Governors are the most desperate Politicians in the country. They do not tolerate opposition and can go to any length to liquidate it. So, the first disadvantage of state police is that state Governors can use them to harass their opponents. Secondly, state Governors can use state police to prolong their stay in office. Some Governors do not deserve a second term of four years in office due to their poor performance. Such Governors may use the State Police to rig elections in their favour. In short, state police in the hands of Governors may become another state Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECS), none of which has conducted a local government election in which the Government in power has not swept the polls.

CONCLUSION

The rate of insecurity in Nigeria today is disturbingly high. Kidnapping, Killing, armed robbery and rape are daily reported in many parts of the country, and many people are afraid to go about their normal businesses. Unfortunately, the police have not been able to do much to combat this menace. The argument of the paper is that the police will be able to perform their duties effectively and tackle mounting insecurity only if they work in their own states of origin or geopolitical zones, and among their own ethnic groups, people with whom the police share the same language and mother tongue. All such people, both literate and illiterate, will be able to communicate useful information to the law enforcement agents, unlike now when only the literate people in each ethnic group, people who can communicate in English or Pidgin, can pass useful information to the Police. Moreover, when the Police work among their own ethnic group, they will easily get the people's support, cooperation and assistance, and they will face less danger in performing their duties. The proposed state police will make all these possible.

REFERENCES

- Abodurin, A. (2012). *Terrorism: Nigerian and Global Dimensions*. Ibadan: Goden -Gem-Gems Unique Multiventures.
- Achebe, C. (2013). *There was a Country. A Personal History of Biafra*. London: Allen Lane.
- Akinwumi F.S. and Adebayo, T.A. (2013). Insecurity as Challenge to Educational Development in Nigeria In Ayeni, A.O, Emetarom, UG, Abdulkareem, A.Y, Undie, J.A. and Okon, J.E (2013). *Managing Education for National Development*. Ibadan: His Lineage Publishing House.
- Faniran, A.O. (1986). *New Certificate English Language Essays and Letters In Model Questions and Answers* Ile-Ife: Ancho-Print Ltd.
- Faniran, (2013). Addressing the Boko Haram sect's Nihilism: An Exploration of the Role of Writers *Journal of Capital Development in Behavioral Sciences* Vol. 117-29.
- Harber, C. and Paton, G (1979) *The Pan English Dictionary*. London: Pan Books. Sinclair,

- J.(ed). (1972). *BBC English Dictionary*
- Ozekhome, M. (2018). Having State Police: The Urgency of Now. *Daily Sun*, Sunday, 14th March, 2018 p. 47
- The Citizen Online* 10th April, 2013, p. 5
- Vanguard*, 27th May, 2014, p. 13380 (online)
- Daily News*, 24th August, 2014, p. 9
- Premium Times*, 24th January, 2016 , p. 21
- The Punch*, 30th January, 2016, pp 6, 7 & 43
- Premium Times*, 18th October, 2016, p. 30
- The Punch*, 24th September, 2016, pp. 10, 38, 39
- Nigerian Tribune*, 23rd May, 2018, p. 7
- The Punch*, 2nd October, 2016, p. 4
- Vanguard*, 28th September, 2016, p. 9