

Historicizing Police–Public Relations in Nigeria 1861-2015

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Abstract

Focusing on the Nigeria Police Force, this paper argues that from its inception, the colonial Police Forces; the Hausa Guard, Lagos Constabulary, the Royal Niger Constabulary, and the Oil Rivers Protectorate Police which later metamorphous into the Nigeria Police Force, based on the purpose of their establishment, lacked a cordial police-public relationship. While the Police saw the public as not cooperative, the public regarded the Police as exploitative and oppressive machinery of the colonial administrators-a dreaded evil. Here, the paper attempts a historical analysis of the nature of the contemporary Police-Public relationship, tracing its origin to the colonial background. Drawing examples from the nature of policing in the Western world with particular reference to Britain, the paper argues that the motive behind the establishment of Police Force and their roles in the colonial territories, Nigeria in this case, differed from policing in the metropolis. While acknowledging the role the Nigeria Police Force has played in the development of the Nigeria nation, the article submits that much is still needed to be done in its relationship with the Nigerian public. For effective security and development of the country, the paper suggests that the Nigeria Police Force, having been independent of colonial influence should also purge its system of the antagonistic Police-Public relation which characterized colonial policing.

Keywords: police, policing, colonial, law enforcement, security

Introduction

The nineteenth century witnessed the expansion of the British Empire and the consolidation of her control over her colonies within and outside Europe. The task of imperialism and later colonialism was not an easy one as the aborigines did not easily

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acquiesce to British imperialistic expansion without resistance. To maneuver their way, the British, like other expansionists, employed many diplomatic tools ranging from the so-called ‘treaty of friendship’ (which entailed cajolement and deceit) to a fiercer method- the gunboat diplomacy. After the successful conquest of territories, Britain and her agents did not go to sleep as events in the colonies constituted thorns to their imperial ambitions and threatened the success of her political control. In spite of her relatively small original territory, Britain was determined to maintain her external territories, imperial power, and influence, thus chose the continuous use of coercion to compel cooperation from the indigenous people (Adebisi, 2018). Hence, the evolution of the idea of colonial policing!

It would be noted that the idea of constabulary in British Commonwealth was first developed in a colonial territory but not in England itself. While as early as 1814 a form of ‘colonial policing’ was established in Ireland and later reformed to be more coercive in 1822 (Hill, 2015), Police service emerged in London in 1829 taking a different method of operation parallel to that which was in operation in the colonies (Sinclair, 2008,175). Interestingly, the London police system was not the model to be introduced to the subsequent colonies-no, it was too moderate for the imperial economic and colonial political order characterized by consistence ‘disturbance’ and ‘restiveness’ from the ‘non-compliant’ aborigines. The Irish constabulary method was replicated in other colonies, including Nigeria (Soniyi, 2020).

Although the practice of modern policing, referred here to as ‘professional police’ was introduced into the territories now referred to as Nigeria by the British (Arisukwu, 2012, Tamuno, 1970), the idea of policing is not alien to the people (Vaaseh & Ehinmore, 2011; Meek, 1950; Elias, 1956). For instance, no meaningful nation building process, such as the construction of physical structures that suit contemporary standard, expansion of territorial boundaries, positive development, and empowerment of

its human capital would be successfully carried out without peace and security. Territorial expansion for instance, which more often than not, is carried out through military expeditions, were not unknown in Africa (Olushola, 2023, Smith, 1976). It is common knowledge that territorial expansionism could not be successfully carried out without the prior security of lives and property within the original territory. The necessity of internal security informed the idea of traditional policing or vigilante in the various regions making up present day Nigeria long before the evolution of 'paid' or professional policing (Audu, Ogazi, Eweka, & Ilekeni, 2023, Tamuno, 1970; Meek, 1950).

Traditionally, it was the responsibilities of every adult to take active part in the policing of the community (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000) as even women also took part in policing through various methods in their respective societies (Tamuno, 1970). There were familial and communal ties among the traditional police or vigilantes and the community as they were, first, husbands, fathers, uncles, and brothers, before becoming members of the policing groups. Thus, operating within their environment, they could not act outrageously against the members of the society-the public which were equally their kith and kin. Even in some societies where slaves were employed as palace guards and police, such as the dogarai in Hausaland and the ilari in the Yorubaland (Oyo) (Vaaseh & Ehinmore, 2011), they were not tools of oppression used openly by the traditional rulers against their subjects. Rather, they were used for the maintenance of peace and stability such that were necessary for the progress and development of the society.

This paper, however, does not intend to pretend that there were no cases of altercations between traditional police and the indigenous people or that there was the absent of mischievous people among them who in one way or the other, subverted the purpose of traditional policing. Whatever problem that might have existed was aggravated by the introduction of colonial policing and where there was none, the new and modernized policing system

created many fatal ones. This was so because with the advent of the imperialists cum colonialists came the end of Africa's communal system. Thenceforth, individualism, partial loyalty, and political bigotry, became entrenched and well pronounced against the existing collective responsibility and patriotism; the indigenous sociopolitical order has been overthrown! Hence, the method and purpose of policing was replaced with a combative and exploitative one.

It would be observed that the general disposition of the Police Force in every nation is directly determined by the character of the society. Accordingly, Alemika & Chukwuma (2000) observes that "in a totalitarian and economically inequitable society, police role will be more to defend the status quo of political oppression and economic injustice." Similarly, Robert Reiner's position that the "police are the specialist carriers of the state's bedrock power: the monopoly of legitimate use of force. How and for what this is used speaks to the very heart of the condition of a political order" (Reiner, 1998) gives insight to the nature of police-public relation under imperialism and colonialism bearing in mind the primary motive behind the arrival of the imperialists and colonialists in Africa.

From the foregoing, this paper argues that from its inception, the colonial Police Forces; the Hausa Guard, Lagos Constabulary, the Royal Niger Constabulary, and the Oil Rivers Protectorate Police which later metamorphosed into the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), based on the purpose of their establishment, suffered the lack of a cordial police-public relationship. Here, the paper attempts a historical analysis of the nature of the contemporary Police-Public relationship, tracing its origin to the colonial background. Drawing examples from the nature of policing in the Western world with particular reference to Britain (Dave, 2021), the paper argues that the motive behind the establishment of Police Force and their roles in the colonial territories, Nigeria in this case, differed from policing in the metropolis. During the 2015 general

election, Nigeria witnessed several cases of misuse of the Police Force against the masses which consequently widened the existed divide in police-public relations in the country.

The clarification of the concept of police and policing has been extensively and repeatedly treated by many scholars and specialists in the field (Rogers, 2016, Reiner, 2010, Miller, 2023, SU, 2014) as such, should not detain us here. Briefly, however, while police has been a term used to describe an organised, state owned uniformed organisation responsible for the maintenance and enforcement of peace, law, and order in the society, policing on the other hand is the consciousness and actual participation of the members of the society in the security and maintenance of peace and order in the society. Although police as a law enforcement agency is relatively recent, policing as a practice has always been in existence throughout the history of the human society.

Police–Public Relations in Colonial Nigeria 1861-1960

The nature of police relations with the public throughout the colonial period, especially at the initial stage of its formation was more antagonistic than cordial. Although T. N. Tamuno in his book *The Police in Modern Nigeria 1861-1965*, published in 1970, observes that there were many instances of cordiality where the ‘police had many contacts with the public and most of them helped to establish and maintain an atmosphere of friendship’ and that some of such cordiality must have happened without being recorded (Tamuno, 1970, 249-252), we understand that the nature and frequency of frictions with varying degrees of police brutality outweighed the few known instances of cordiality and cooperation between the police and the public within the period of present discussion. Again, as much as one can argue that some cases of friendly relations between the police and the public occurred unrecorded, one can also argue and forcefully so, that much more combative and antagonistic confrontations between the two took place without being recorded, especially those that would have

raised much international disapproval notwithstanding official excuses.

The argument here is that while the colonial police forces from their establishment were promptly armed and trained to attack their fellow indigenes and nationals in defence of the British imperial and colonial interests, the London police force was established, trained, and organised as civil police. They were to “police by consent” (Joyce, 2010). In spite of the fact that the metropolitan police was established in 1829 (Bloy, 2013), some three decades before the approval for the establishment of the first kind of modern police force in Lagos was given in 1863, officers and commissioners trained in London style policing were not desirable for the colonies neither were the indigenous police officers sent on a course in London but in Ireland where a ‘suitable’ colonial policing style under the name ‘Peace Preservation Force,’ had been developed as early as 1814 (Sinclair, 2008).

The British imperial police force in Ireland took a more open militaristic disposition, especially, beginning from the formation of the Irish Constabulary in 1822 (Sinclair, 2008), and was to become the model for the subsequent police forces in the British Empire, except the metropolis; a training depot for officers from the colonies and a reservoir of Commissioners and Inspectors for the various colonies, especially, those known for consistance commercial rivalries and political agitations termed ‘disturbance’. The Irish style colonial policing was imported into the various areas that later became Nigeria and consequently informed the series of events that characterised police-public relationship in the region.

The police, in their relations with the public during the colonial period in most cases lacked human feelings and sympathy not even for an unarmed group agitating for inclusion in the management of their economic resources. For instance, the case of bombardment of the Enyong community and its neighbouring villages by the police force of the Oil Rivers Protectorate on March 9, 1890, following a

commercial rivalry in the Old Calabar region between King Andem Eno (the king of Enyong) and Annesley (the Acting Consul in the Oil Rivers Protectorate) (Tamuno, 1970). There are similar cases of police brutality in the history of British colonial policing in Nigeria with recorded tolls of casualties ranging in severity from serious injuries to dead (Anaekwe & Oli, 2024). Among these was the gruesome murder of the women in the East during the 1929/1930 women demonstration against a perceived taxation of women. Thus, the police were simply an arm of colonial administration employed for the preservation of the exploitative tendencies of the colonialists. Corroborating this position, Marenin asserts that the police "... is repressive if the opportunities, conditions, and powers of social groups are unequal" (Marenin, 1985).

The duties for which the colonial police were employed influenced the choice of officers, thus, informing the ethnic composition of the first set of police in the Nigeria. Accordingly, the Hausa Constabulary (Onoja, 2016) were used in policing Lagos and the adjoining Yoruba regions while Yoruba-speaking officers were used in policing the Southern non-Yoruba speaking ethnic groups (Tamuno, 1970). In Nigeria, the colonial policing style was a case of 'strangers policing strangers' (Rotimi, 2001) consequently breeding the tradition of hatred, non-cooperation, and antagonistic colourations that defined police-public relations in Nigeria. Such disconnects between the police and the policed was visible such that H.S. Freeman, the then colonial Governor of Lagos, reporting on the newly formed force in Lagos in 1863 revealed that "...the men being from the interior and professing the [Moslem] religion are hated by the natives of these parts..." a discord the government utilised to its advantage as Freeman himself concluded "... they thus have only the government to depend on, and if properly managed will prove a valuable resource to this settlement" (Tamuno, 1970). Freeman's optimism was given credence by the activities of the members of the Hausa Constabulary in the discharge of their duties in August 1864, when 60 of them were sent to arrest an

Ajido Chief, Hunkan Abujoko, accused of robbery and violence by the colonial secretary, he was instead shot dead (Tamuno, 1970).

Meanwhile, about same time in Britain, Police Officers were drawn locally from among the members of the community within which they served and they operated in a civil manner, and were friendlier with the people in order “to dispel the impression that [they] would be the agent of the government.” To win public support and cooperation, the police “were encouraged not to pursue a more active role within the community” as such actions were “regarded as an unnecessary intrusion in people’s live” (Joyce, 2010). More significantly, the Police were unarmed! Ironically, in the colonies, it was believed that in the absence of co-operation, coercion would succeed in strengthening British jurisdiction in the various colonies hence, the colonial police officers were promptly armed with various weapons including Lee-Enfield Carbines, Snider Rifles, Field Artilleries, and Maxim guns; heralding the beginning of police-public loggerheads.

In as much as the intention here is not to blame the police entirely for the frequency of the frictions between them and the public, as Tekena Tamuno has noted in what he called “the two-way traffic of police-public relations” that “the sources of friction did not lie in one direction”(1970, 252), it is the position of this author that the frequency of the frictions and its accompanying brutality and casualties suffered by the public, who, in most cases were unarmed, was encouraged by the arming of ill-trained groups of trigger excited policemen who became violent and combative in their relations with their fellow countrymen and women—the exploited civilians; the very reason for the avoidance of which, arming of policemen in the metropolis was discouraged!

In accordance with the primary purpose for the armament of the colonial police force in Nigeria, the colonial government, as was elsewhere including Sierra Leone in 1926 (Seddon, 2002), repeatedly used the force to suppress workers’ demonstration and revolts against Capitalists exploitation and racial discriminations.

Accordingly, there were cases of police repressions against workers' strikes including the 1947 Burutu Strike and the 1949 Colliery Strike in Enugu where about 23 miners were killed and about 100 wounded (Seddon, 2002). The use of violence method to suppress workers agitations was widely protested against by members of the Legislative Council and the indigenes as a whole, thereby expanding the already existing gap between the police and the public. Similar cases of violent suppression by the police were witnessed in the 1953 communal riots in Kano, and the 1959-1960 Tiv uprising "resulting in deaths and destruction of property" (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000).

A mere sight of the police was frightening that people usually took to hidings, deserting their homes and communities at the sight of a group of policemen (Tamuno, 1970). It therefore became a practice that women could quell the recalcitrant cry of their children by warning them of the presence of the police. In his writing on the nature of relations between the police and public in the colonial period, Ojie (2006) captures the situation more comprehensively as he observes "the presence of the police, therefore conjures up images of surveillance, inconvenience, embarrassment, frustration, and indignation as well as prospect of coercion and violence." In reprisal, the police also recorded attacks from the public once the environment was 'conducive' and 'favourable' for such retaliations (Tamuno, 1970). On the other hand, police-public relations in Britain proved the ideal principle that the "police are the public and the public are the police" (Nagle, 2014). The metropolitan police were in practice a police service, always very civil in its relations with the public only employing occasional use of force when other methods have failed. Hence when few abnormalities (in the British standard) was spotted in the operations of the Metropolitan police in the later part of the twentieth century, it was advised "that without... reform, the British police run the increasing risk of being viewed more generally as a force rather than a service" (Brewer et al, 1996).

Notwithstanding the various stages the Nigeria Police Force have pass through, namely; the Hausa Guard, Lagos Constabulary, the Royal Niger Constabulary, the Oil Rivers Protectorate Police, Court messengers, it has always performed both military and civil responsibilities, like in other colonial territories (Sinclair, 2008) with the former being performed more frequently and brutally thereby building in the public the age long distrust, disaffection, and non-cooperation with the police.



Fig 1: *Officers of the NPF Source: The Lawyers Chronicle <http://www.thelawyerschronicle....>*



Fig. 2: *British Police Officers. Source: Kelly, J. 2012 Why British police don't have guns BBC News Magazine. <http://www.bbc.com/news/maga...>*

Cases of Police-Public Relations, 1960–2015

At independence on October 1, 1960, Nigeria inherited the colonial militaristic system of policing unlike the Irish Republic which had, since her independence in 1922, disbanded the Royal Irish Constabulary (the British colonial police in the colony), and replaced it with an unarmed civil police service, the Civic Guard later renamed Garda Síochána (Sinclair, 2008). Instead of adopting a civil police model at least following the introduction of a republican system of government in 1963, the NPF was increasingly militarised by the successive administrations and used in terrorising political opponents. In 1979 for instance, the Shehu Shagari's regime, J.B. Adekanye observes, "turned the police force into second army... arming it with sophisticated equipments including armoured tanks" (Adekanye, 1989). Consequently, the NPF maintained its original position as "an elite corps of servicemen" when its British counterpart enjoyed the popular public perception "as the men in the middle, uniformed but unarmed" (Brewer et al, 1996).

The contemporary NPF has repeatedly been blamed for torture, brutality, extortion, extra-judicial killings, corruption, and intimidation (Hills, 2008, 219). In 2012, the Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Abubakar lamented that the "investigation departments cannot equitably handle matters unless those involved have money to part with. Complainants suddenly become the suspects at different investigation levels following spurious petitions filled with the connivance of the Police Officers" (Owen, 2014). None of these accusations can be logically refuted as the police have frequently demonstrated same in their relations with the various individuals in the society including the students and motorists. Their political involvements and cooperation with criminals, in most cases, have repeatedly created lasting impressions in their public image resulting in the habitual public non-cooperation with the police and its consequential negative impact on national security.

Police-Students Frictions

The post colonial Nigerian state has witnessed several incidents of police-students frictions often beginning with peaceful demonstrations by the students and later turning out to be bloody, claiming lives and property at the “intrusion” of the police. For instance, the 1971 students’ peaceful protests in the University of Ibadan against poor services within the school turned bloody at the arrival of the police and claimed the life of Adekunle Adepeju. Similarly, in 1978 police interference in peaceful students’ protest in the Ahmadu Bello University, sparked a wave of violent clashes between the students and the police across the country claiming the lives of many, including university staff, villagers, bystanders and 29 students (Carter & Marenin, 1986).

In 1986 police assault on the Ahmadu Bello campus resulted in the killing of at least 5 persons, maiming, raping of several others (Mohammed, 1986) and a spillover effect across the nations tertiary, secondary, and primary schools, where students revolted against the police and government, burning many police stations and attacking government property. This time, many professional bodies, and women associations were drawn in, culminating in a nationwide arrest and detention of many students, officials of the Nigerian Labour Congress, and other associations. These and similar frictions during the Ibrahim Babangida’s regime won for the Mobile police the name “KILL-AND-GO” (Mohammed, 1986).

At the time where Nigeria police was seriously engaged in the suppression of civil demonstrations which deepened the existing rancor between the police and the public, the British police was still enjoying the fruit of the sound civil foundation laid from its inception. Thus, in 1972, 96 per cent of adult respondents indicated that they were “either satisfied or very satisfied with the force” and 90 per cent confirmed that they trust the metro police. In 1980, the British public in a poll, rated the Police Officers second to the doctors in terms of honesty and ethical standards; 90 per cent had fair or great confidence in the police in 1981; and in 1983, 75 per

cent commended them for their good works, in addition to 54 per cent of non-white respondents who expressed satisfaction with the police service (Brewer et al, 1996).

Police brutality of students was again recorded in the twenty-first century in the University of Uyo, when the Engineering students on June 12, 2013 peacefully protested against inadequate transportation system within the campuses. The nonviolent students' demonstration suddenly turned bloody at the interference of men of the mobile unit of the NPF, claiming the life of one Kingsley Udoette, a 200-level student of zoology who did not even participate in the protest, and the convulsion of about 3 asthmatic female students in their hostels from the effect of tear gas thrown into the hostels by the mobile squad. In the heat of this police-instigated violence, the officers of the force went into the male hostels and rounded up the feeble students who, out of fear had sought protection for their dear lives inside their rooms behind closed doors, and locked them up in police cells.

Police-Road Users Frictions

Instances of police abuse of the road users including the motorists and pedestrians are well too known in Nigeria to detain us here. Worthy of our attention however, is the level at which officers of the NPF profiteer from various state of insecurity in the country by seizing such opportunities to extort money from the law-abiding citizens. For instance, writing on the 1986 Anini saga, Marenin observes how the police in Benin City harassed citizens including old women on the roads ordering them out of their cars, turning their pockets and hand bags inside out, all in search of Anini. It was such that "the Benin people became more apprehensive of the police than the robbers" (Marenin, 1987).

Apart from harassments there are other human rights violations which have painted the Nigeria police in a bad light (Onwunyirimadu, 2022). For instance, the officers of the NPF are known for extra-judicial killings which they most often dismissed

as accidental. Many of so called “accidental” discharges of firearms have claimed the lives of innocent motorists and other road users. Accordingly, O. K. Ukegbu accounts for such killings to include the Ugehlli incident in 1983 where 6 lives were lost; 6 in Apo in 2005; over 20 in Afiesere-Ughelli in 2006; and the gruesome murder of one Mrs. Idongesit Ekpo in 2015 following her husband’s attempt to evade “settling” a policeman on the latter’s demand (Ukegbu, 2019). In 2005, I witnessed a similar incident which claimed the life of one Mr. Joseph, a struggling young motorcyclist in Atai Essien- Ibiono, Akwa Ibom State. While attempting to escape a police officer who demanded 50 Naira from him, Joseph zoomed off his motorcycle but the enraged officer of the NPF threw his baton into the motorcycle wheel, causing a fatal accident that claimed the life of poor Joseph on the spot!

Police Fraternizing with Criminals

The Nigeria Police Force has a history of cooperation by some of its men with some criminal groups. During the first few years of its establishment, there were complaints which indicated the willful cooperation of the officers of the Lagos police with thieves (Tamuno, 1970). In the post-colonial period, cases of similar nature are not uncommon within the police force. For instance, Lawrence Anini revealed at his arrest and trial in December 1986 that one George Iyamu, the then Chief Superintendent serving in Benin, was not only providing the weapons with which Anini and his gang used for robbing, but was also running a criminal gang of his own (Marenin, 1987). This adversely affected the level of trust the public had on the NPF in a period when the British police was voted second in honesty and professional ethics.

Police Involvement in Politics

While the NPF already has its inbuilt weaknesses which pose many challenges to cordial police-public relations, the problem became aggravated with the politicisation of the force. The NPF

suffers the effect of being influenced by the powerful political elites especially the ones driving the affairs of the country in general and the states in particular (Omeni, 2022). O. S. Afolabi (2018) gives a comprehensive study of police involvements in almost every election conducted in Nigeria since independence. The 2015 general election, particularly, requires a special attention at this point. After the successful declaration of the All Progressive Congress' (APC) presidential aspirant, Retired General Mohammed Buhari, the winner of the March general election thereby turning the incumbent party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), into an opposition party at the federal level, the PDP elites in Akwa Ibom State determined to maintain their control of the state, Used the police to arrest and placed under detention, every notable member and supporter of APC in some local governments, on the day of the gubernatorial election, until the following morning. The situation in Rivers State was more bloody culminating in the death of some police officers and members of the public.

The above highlighted points are few of the many frictions common between the police and the public since independence in 1960 that have contributed to the continual police-public mutual distrust. Consequently, "most Nigerians now prefer reporting crime to their family members than the police" while the police officers on their own part "feel misunderstood and not respected by the general public and are deeply aware of being stigmatized" (Owen, 2014). This resentment informed the non-cooperation of several police personnel to the philosophy of community policing when it was introduced in 2004 as they conceived it to be a threat to the status quo from which they greatly benefit (Ibrahim, Magaji & Jamilu, 2016).

However, these myriads of frictions and antagonism between the police and the public notwithstanding, it would be erroneous to conclude that there are no instances of police-public cooperation and cordiality since the evolution of the NPF. A few examples of such instances would suffice at this point.

Police–Public Cordiality Since Establishment

Though the rampant cases of frictions which characterize police-public relation in Nigeria have succeeded in blinding many to the cordial relations shared between the Nigeria police and the public, we admit to the fact that there exist certain instances where the public willingly cooperate with the police force to tackle insecurity and render other related social services in the country. Like frictions which could be traced to the colonial period, there were cordial police-public relations recorded during same period. Accordingly, Tamuno observes how in the 1930s, some police officers with active support of the public, distinguished themselves in life serving engagements in Atimbo and Lagos among other places (Tamuno, 1970).

In the postcolonial Nigeria, many citizens often use the services of the police when there are threats to life in arresting the suspect and making him or her to sign a surety should anything dangerous happens afterward. Also, some sincere and peace-loving officers in the force are known for their roles in dispute resolutions as some of them prefer peaceful settlement of cases to prosecution (Owen, 2014).

Third, and more significantly, cordial police-public relations could be seen on the traffic where most road users, including motorists as well as pedestrians, often depend on the presence of traffic wardens to ensure a successful crossing and free passage where the road is locked by heavy traffic, especially in busy areas of the country.

The Nigeria Police Force has in recent years help in the security of the Nigerian societies against hoodlums and other clandestine criminal groups including kidnappers and cultists which has consequently made about 15% of Nigerians express trust in the police (Oresanya, 2025). For instance, in the university environments especially those noted for high level of cultism, the inhabitants of the environs usually depend heavily on the police for security of lives and property to which the cops has distinguished

themselves to be competent in such responsibilities. As Iwuamadi, Nwanguma & Aguguo (2025) rightly observes, if left unchecked the effects of cultism, especially in the tertiary institutions, will not only affect the direct individual victims of cultism but will result to value disorientation which targets the very foundation of the society and threatens the peace of many generations unborn. Police suppression of cultism dates back into the 1930s where they succeeded in the suppression of the Egbe Enumenu cult group notorious for rape, robbery, and murder in the Agege district, their suppression of the man-leopard cult in the Eastern province in 1940s and overpowering of the Odozi Obodo secret cult in Abakaliki in the 50s (Tamuno, 1970).

Finally, Olly Owen (2014) observes that there are some Divisional Police Officers who used their personal money to pay for medical reports of child-rape victims and officers who interact with the public with courtesy and concern. Yes, there are a handful of others who consider themselves as part of the community within which they live and also lead cordial relations with the civilians.

Conclusion

This article has attempted a historical overview of police-public relation in Nigeria since the evolution of modern police force in the region. Attempt was made at assessing the nature of police-public relation in Britain within the period covered by this paper. It is evident that while the British colonial administrators established a militaristic police force in Nigeria, a civil police service was established in the metropolis. Consequently, while the colonial police in Nigeria laid the foundation for antagonistic police-public relations, the British metropolitan police were established and trained to “police by consent” exercising their discretionary powers in a friendly and cordial manner.

Historicising the police-public relations in Nigeria is more or less an attempt at historicising the state of Nigeria’s public security under various systems of administrations including,

colonial, authoritarian-military, as well as democratic-civilian regimes, therefore, giving credence to the assertion that “African police forces evolve, not in the sense of a linear progression towards a western model of catching criminals and being publicly accountable but through adapting to political development and accommodating regimes” (Okunola, Ikuomola, & Adekunbi, 2013). It should be emphasised that, while the Nigeria Police Force has witnessed many organisational and structural reforms under various systems of administration since its establishment, the force has failed to disassociate itself from the combative method of colonial policing, hence, the paper concludes by making following recommendations.

Recommendations

- The Police Act especially the part which provides that the police “...shall perform such military duties within or outside Nigeria” should be reviewed and amended, such that the police constitutional responsibilities would be purely civil, especially within the country.
- The police force should be granted a considerable level of independence in the practical sense of the word. Free from political control and abused by political elites.
- Third, the NPF should purge itself of every corrupt elements and incriminating tendencies by prompt investigation of suspicious officers and dismissal of those found guilty while encouraging those with integrity and strength of character through due promotion.
- The officers of the Nigeria Police Force should be trained on the proper use of arms to avoid the incessant cases of the so called “accidental discharge” as well as deliberate miss used by some trigger-happy officers accounting for most of the police brutality cases recorded in the country.

- Finally and more importantly, the officers of police force should be determined to enforce the principles of rule of law in their dealings with the citizens with no regards to the socio-economic and political status of the concerned people.

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