

Redressing Security and Crime in Nigeria through Traditional Yoruba Social Values and Cultural Practices

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Abstract

Security to lives and properties in Nigeria at the moment is frustratingly appalling. The situation is so tense that citizens sleep with their eyes open praying for day break as each day passes by. No one is sure of the next victim of bomb blast or criminal attack by hoodlums. The future of the nation looks bleak because of these disturbing problems. The pre-colonial traditional societies were peaceful despite the different Kingdoms that existed irrespective of their cultural and social values and crime control mechanisms were effective, this could be attributed to the strong adherence to social and cultural values in place. Within the Yoruba indigenous communities, hard work which was highly esteemed was inculcated through socialization process and societal norms and values were communicated through indigenous music, myth, folklores and taboos. The parental practices of grooming children to embrace hard work as the key to success are gradually waning if not dead already. No doubt Nigerian governments have made some effort to redress crime and security problems within the society, but are the measures really effective? Hence this paper attempts to provide an appraisal of the Yoruba indigenous traditional social and cultural values as antidote to security and criminal problems in Nigeria.

Keywords: Security, Crime, Bomb blast, Indigenous communities, Social values

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian society is characterized by all forms of insecurity issues which have placed her citizens in fear and disorder. Human lives and properties are treated with less or no regard at all. The insurgence of boko haram terrorism has aggravated the situation for the Nation. Nigerian logo now seems to be pictured as a territory of horror and terrorism where citizens lose their lives and properties at will. Would one then attribute criminality and insecurity to changes and development? Having looked at the historical past of the Nation where traditional social control mechanisms were put in place, criminal activities were properly managed and citizens properties were protected even by none owners. In recent time, things have changed. Communal ways of life have been replaced by extreme individualism.

The importance of security over life and properties in every human society cannot be over emphasized, be it traditional or contemporary society. In response to this disturbing issue of insecurity and criminality in contemporary Nigeria, government and societal members tend to seek for measures which signify the inevitable necessity of social control mechanisms especially for the preservation of order, safety and social relations. In spite of all efforts made towards providing security and controlling crime, our society is still porous with insecurity problems over lives and properties.

THE YORUBÁ PEOPLE

The Yorùbá people constitute one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. A large part of them occupy the southwestern part of the country. A greater percentage of the Yoruba are located in Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Osun, and Oyo States, while some occupy parts of Kogi and Kwara States. Some of them also reside in the Republic of Benin, Cuba and Brazil (Atanda, 1996). There are so many Yorùbá people in Diaspora who are either living outside Nigeria for greener pasture or as a result of the 18th century Trans-Atlantic slave trade that displaced so many Nigerians off their ancestral societies.

THE YORUBÁ CULTURE AND SOCIAL VALUES

According to the Webster dictionary (2012), culture is defined as the sum total of the attainments of any specific period, race or people including their implement, handicrafts, agriculture, economics, music, arts, religious beliefs, traditions, language and story. This implies that culture encompasses both material and non material attributes of a given people and society. In a much broader exposition of culture, Udu (2002) explains that: For human beings to build houses, cultivate farms, construct bridges, dams or electricity generating plants, manage successful formal education, manage successful business or organization, control population growth, prevent or cure sicknesses and diseases, ensure social trust, good governance, law and order etc, they need an established albeit critically receptive body of ideas and beliefs, designs, techniques and methodologies, rules and

regulations; that is culture. This however explains culture as the totality of man and his activities. The Yorùbá traditional society is culturally endowed in all sphere of the societal structure.

Values are akin to every aspect of human life. All human endeavours in any society are guided by principles known as values. These values cover every aspect of human activities within the society. Social value therefore as defined by Erinosh (2008) is the widely shared principle and standards in a society. The Yorùbá people are guided by social values which seem to be the bedrock of their culture because it covers all range of values such as religion, economics, and politics, moral and so on. The Yoruba social values like all African social values are humanistic, hence makes them remain unshakable irrespective of the invasion of the foreign values. The attributes of the Yorùbá social values include sense of good human relations, sense of community, sense of hospitality, sense of respect for authority and elders, sense of extended family and sense of religiosity which signifies the attributes of African social values as presented by Kanu(2011).

The Yorùbá human relation is guided by the principle “live-and- let-live” which implies that they recognized the worth of every member of their community. Bearing in mind that every member of the society has a role to play within the society no matter how small or irrespective of the social class and status, every member of the society relates together as one thereby describing them as brother’s keeper. A Yoruba person is identified by his or her community. Onwubiko (1991) pointed that the African ideas of security and its value depend on personal identification with and within the community. The community instills in every individual the spirit of oneness and hard work. Laziness is not encouraged by the Yoruba community such that the community make available to its members adages that nurtures them. Such adage is exemplified below:

*Ise ni ogun ise
Mura si ise ore mi
Ise l’fin di eni giga
Bi ako ba reni feyin ti
Bi ole lan ri
Bi ako ba reni gbekele
Atepa mo ise eni
Apa lara, ejika ni iye kan
Bi aiye ba nfe te ni
Aye a ma fe ni lola
Iya re le lowo l’wo
Baba re le reshin lekan
Bi o ba gboju lewon
O te tan ni mo so fun e
Atelowo eni kii tani je.*

(It means that work eliminates poverty, be steadfast in your work, it is work that elevates one, there is nothing like one’s work, even if your parents are rich, do not depend on them because they will live someday. Your palm will never deceive you.) These were made possible in the society because the community made the people responsible by apportioning task to everyone.

The Yorùbá people are hospitable. They welcome visitors amidst them and try to guide the visitors from danger as well as freedom to live as other members of the community. Social relations are strengthened through respect for authorities and the elders. The elders are assumed to have communal wisdom and are saddled with leadership in the affairs of the people. Respect is one of the major principles that guide behaviour of the Yorùbá families and the Africa societies at large. These families are structured in the extended family type, where father, mother, children, grandparents, cousins, uncles, aunts and in-laws were regarded as one family. It makes social security and economic insurance possible for every member of the family. This was typical of the African families. Kanu (2011) pointed out that extended family is a veritable instrument in the family cohesion and community continuity and stability such that the security is not just for the old age, but also for the poor and disadvantaged members of the family, who have been seen to have made efforts but have not been successful. It implies that the extended family provided a comforting atmosphere for its member’s survival. No wonder the Yorùbá would say *Olowo kan larin opo otoshi, babanla otoshi ni* (a single rich man amidst the poor, is also a poor man). Religion amidst the Yoruba people was the basis on which moral values rest. Religion according to Kanu (2011) lends meaning and authority to values. It also strengthens the social relations of the people because sense of religion makes man have respect for human life and dignity.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND SOCIAL CONTROL AMIDST THE YORÙBÁ PEOPLE

The traditional social organization of the Yorùbá people is characterized by kinship relations who comprises of a number of kindred nuclear families. They lived a communal way of life such that they attached value to extended

families. (Atanda, 1996). The social structure of the Yoruba people was stratified into hierarchical units, each under the jurisdiction of an appropriate chief. The *Oba* and his *Igbimo* (oba in council) were the overarching rulers because the influence the decisions within the society. Directly under them was the *Adugbo* (quarter), headed by an *Olori Adugbo* or *Olori Itun*, whose appointment was ratified and approved by the *Oba*. Below this stratum was the *Agbo-Ile* (extended family compound), headed by an *Olori Ebi* (head of the extended family). The lowest unit was the individual nuclear home, headed by *Baba* (father). The extended family members appoints the *Olori Ebi*, because the oldest member of the extended family usually assumed this position. Every married man assumed the position of his own home. Since the family was the basic unit of society, it is expedient to recognize it as the fundamental unit of the society's administration as well as a judicial unit. In other words, legal and political control was exercised mainly via the family and extended kin groups. A Yoruba family was comprised of father, mother, and children. Each position had very carefully defined household duties, and each household member played a significant part in social control by socializing children and motivating them to conform to social order and norms (Onadeko, 2008).

The kinship affinity of the Yoruba family was quite strong such that it regulated behaviour of its members and made members aware of the rule of conduct. Kinship solidarity accounted for institutional emphasis on the need for provision of social security and justice of large family members hence involved the acceptance of responsibility and obligations to the group to the extent that individuals were seen, primarily, as members of their particular families before they were understood as members of society at large.

The people were able to effectively control social menace in the traditional institutions with the presence of norms and values that were characterized by their cultural heritage, for instance the 'shame culture' among the Yoruba which was rooted in the fact that Yoruba society condemns shameful behavior and, therefore, people are expected to avoid things which might put them and the members of their lineage into shame (Adejumo, 2010). As opined by Fadipe (1970):

"the Yoruba cannot afford to pretend to be indifferent to the public...and its opinion". (cited in Adejumo, 2010)

This implies that if a member of a family or lineage errs with respect to the accepted norm, he and the members of his family will be publicly ridiculed; public ridicule is thus an important character-molding device. Adejumo (2010) further buttressed that satire was another form of weapon for public ridicule used among the Yoruba to checkmate erring members of the society. It is even used as a form of traditional judicial system. Satirists are like traditional policemen, who bring deviants to book. Categorically he said:

"In fact they have the license to do so without being sued. In other words, the Yoruba principle of reconciliation, conflict resolution and societal harmony could be found in the use of satire." (Adejumo 2007 and 2008)

There were other forms of social control mechanisms that were inhibited in songs, storytelling, folklores, festivals, proverbs and so on. These values were passed on from the old to the young members of the community, because the elders were believed to be endowed with prestige and power such that they know the norms and the values of the community. This provided the reason why the older people with experience were the arbiter of the community. The Yoruba proverbs present how the society respects and regard their elders as well. For instance:

*Agba kii wa loja, ki ori omo tuntun wo (Where there are good elders, there is orderliness).
Inu bibi o da nnkan. Suuru baba iwa; agba t'oni suuru, ohun gbogbo l'oni (Indignation does not result into anything good. Patience is the best of character. A patient elder has everything).*

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING: SOCIAL CONTROL PERSPECTIVE

This paper adopts Hirschi (1969) social control theory to provide an insight into ways of redressing the security and criminality problems within the Nigerian society. Hirschi posit that rather than looking for the causes of delinquency, it is much more fruitful to look for the causes of conformity. Perhaps delinquency is the absence of the causes of conformity. He buttressed his view that whether individuals are law abiding or deviant depends on the extent of variance from the four factors that are critical in bonding them to the society:

1. Attachment to parents, school and peers,
2. Commitment to conventional lines of action
3. Involvement in conventional activities and
4. Belief in conventional values.

First Hirschi theorized that juveniles will be law abiding if they have strong attachments to positive role models or significant others – their parents, schoolteachers, and law abiding friends. Weak attachments to expectations and opinions of significant others can derive from a lack of discipline by parents and teachers, poor intellectual

and social skills exhibited by juvenile, disrespect for or indifference to expectations and opinions of significant others, and differential association with juvenile delinquents.

Second, he maintained that for a system of social control to be effective, juvenile must fear punishment. He argued that delinquents are likely to be juveniles who during their difficult passage to adulthood, are less committed to completing their education or achieving a high status career.

Third juvenile attachments and attitudinal commitment to positive role models and conventional goals are likely to be reflected in the juvenile's daily involvement in conventional activities. The more juvenile are involved in such conventional activities, the more they are discouraged from engaging in delinquency and vice-versa.

Fourth, Hirschi argued that the belief in the goodness of certain values such as respect for the law and for the police and belief in wrongness of such actions as juvenile delinquency – operates as a brake on delinquency. Lastly, he maintained that the four factors (attachment, commitment involvement and belief) are interrelated.

This theory explains that for social control mechanisms to be effective, parents and teachers who are role models have to be effective in inculcating values into individuals during the socialization process. This in a way explains the traditional Yoruba society where there is strong attachment to ones family such that individuals conform to norms and values because of their commitment to these cultural values as well as their family roles. The social structure of the Yoruba people also gets members involved in activities that will keep them busy and distract them from deviating from the norms of the society. For instance the songs that tells about the occupation of the people and failure to get involve is tantamount to stealing. It goes thus:

ise agbe ni ise ile wa, eni ko sise ama jale. Iwe kiko laisi oko ati ada ko ipe o ko ipe o!(farming is the occupation of our society, anyone who does not work will steal. Formal education without hoe and cutlass is incomplete).

This song exposes the member of the society to hard work and discourages laziness as a way of life. It also makes the people conform to the norms and values of the land. the elders of the land and parents are models and teachers of the young ones. This enable have belief and respect the culture of the land. The sense of belief among the Yoruba people strengthens social relations and makes people have respect for the people.

Just Hirschi put it that the four factor are interrelated, so it is among the traditional Yoruba societies were conformity to the norms of the land were strictly adhere to. This is so because an individual is first identify as a member of a family before being identified as a member of the society. The family nurtures the individual and the individual in return recognizes and understands the implication of not conforming to the laws of the society. Hence gets committed and involved in the activities of the society because of the belief that “*omode nbo waa d'agba*” that is “the young shall grow”.

CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA AND ITS CHALLENGES

Nigeria today is characterized by all sort of social problems which encompass criminality, socio-economic issues and more recently, the security question of the nation. In all of this, it is still referred to as the giant of Africa. Giant of African where there is no respect for human life and dignity. Thousands are wallowing in poverty. Corruption is a national tag of the people both old and young. Bomb blast and killings has become a way of life. The Government has failed in its responsibility to the people and as such the people to their nation. Our media sources are everyday providing us with heart breaking news that leave Nigerians in reflective moods that is if they are ever concern. If it is not bomb blast, it is kidnapping or a father raping a 3year old daughter, if it is not looting of banks, it is unknown gun-men eliminating innocent Nigerians. The question of safety arises hence security. No doubt the government made attempt to put an end to the recent boko-haram insurgence within the society but these measures are not effective probably because it has political undertone. In Nigeria we hear less of the Niger-delta crisis probably because it is their son that is steering the leadership of the nation, and probably because of the amnesty policy.

The widespread and systematic murder and persecution by Boko Haram, a militant Islamist group in northern Nigeria has become totally unbearable for the citizens, and according to Human Rights Watch (2012) amounted to crimes against humanity. Government security forces have also engaged in numerous abuses, including extra - judicial killings, further pointed out by Human Rights Watch. So even those who are supposed to bring order into the society are causing harm. The 98-page report, “Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Force Abuses in Nigeria,” catalogues atrocities for which Boko Haram has claimed responsibility. It also explores the role of Nigeria's security forces, whose own alleged abuses contravene international human rights law and might also constitute crimes against humanity. Ekhomu(2012), called on the Federal Government to formally declare war on Boko Haram and its foreign affiliates to stop further loss of lives. He further said the law

enforcement and criminal justice models for controlling the Boko Haram insurgency has failed due to poor problem analysis (<http://www.punchng.com/news/expert-urges-fg-to-declare-war-on-boko-haram>). The measures are not enough to end terrorism and criminal behaviours within our society. It is the responsibility of all because the hazard which modernization caused the society needs to be revisited.

Families today are no longer good instrument of socialization; individualism has taken over the communal way of life where every member of the society is a watch-dog of one another. Wage labour has made so many parents spent limited time with their children while housemaids who are supposed to be undergoing various socialization processes assume the motherly role for the children under their custody. The elders who are supposed to pass norms and values across to the younger generations are themselves violators of the norms. The adage that bestows on the elder as the forebearers of peace is no longer imbibed by the people. Such include: *Agba kii wa loja, ki ori omo tuntun wo* (Where there are good elders, there is orderliness). Now what we have is bad leaders who will rather cause chaos within the society than promote orderliness. Corruption is another cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society. Starting from the family level, parents encourage laziness amidst their children rather than make them embrace hard work. A child who is not socialized into the values of hard work should not be expected to grow and become a person who will achieve a goal through the societal approved means of goal getting.

Modernization has affected all the norms and values embedded in our culture. The western world which is always a point of reference for us in measuring development and underdevelopment did not abandon their cultural heritage totally but rather dance to the rhythm of change by modernizing their old traditions to stand the test of time. In Nigeria it is rather different. The traditional african societies used social thought that were embedded in traditional, moral and ethical values directed ultimately at social and universal survival. For instance, Agbaje (2005), Ajayi (2004) and Akinyemi (2003) discuss how the Yoruba oral philosophy is used in the education and socialization of the young to teach and 'build' in them knowledge about the social and physical environments and the qualities of an *Omoluabi* (i.e. a good personality), whose actions will comply with social norms and values (cited in Omobowale, 2008). All of these are faded off if not dead. The electronic media which is a new agent of socialization and best means of socializing the young today does not celebrate our culture as expected. The language usage is another problem in contemporary time, many young ones cannot speak their local dialect except English language which serves as barrier amidst grandparents and their grandchildren, such that some of the values that would have been passed across through the dialects are made impossible.

The policing structures today are centralized, though there are private policing organizations that are also used to help put the society in order. The effectiveness of these policing structures is questionable because our society is not in order compared to the traditional societies where every locality had a way of policing its environment which was through norms and values embedded in the culture of the people that were base on truthfulness.

CONCLUSION

In order to redress the appalling security and criminality state of our nation, there is the need to re-embrace our abandoned cultural heritage embedded in norms and values of the society. Within the context of this paper, the Yoruba cultural norms and values are used to discuss the way forward.

What Options Do We Have?

Instinctively, most people understand what security means. It means safety from the constant threats of hunger, disease, crime and repression. It also means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of our daily lives-whether in our homes, in our jobs, in our communities or in our environment (Human Development Report1994- www.undp.org/hdro/e94over.htm). It can be related to the Yoruba traditions and its value for security within the society. The norms and values enhanced and empower it members and makes the society worth living. Sacredness was attached to human life such that killing and taking of human life were majorly during wars or if the traditions were violated, that attracts execution of the offender. Values and traditions were the determinants of people's behaviour. But the social structure of the Yoruba society witnessed transformation through colonialism and capitalism. With westernization the better part of values that could make the society worthwhile are abandoned. Individuality became the norms of our society. Salvaging the situation becomes the duty of every family within the society. The family should create time for proper socialization process to make the young one grow with good values especially with the Yoruba social thought. If every family is in order within the society, then the society at large will be better.

No doubt change is vital in every society, the tradition norms and values can be modernized to suite the present time. Our media houses and communication networks can be used to propagate cultural values especially because the youths are glued to these mediums. The Yoruba adage says:

A kii f'agada se 'le aye, irukere l'a fin tun lese (The power of sword does not yield social co-existence; it is only through authority that social equilibrium is attainable), the message this proverb convey is that whatever the crisis situation of the Nation, the leaders should not address the book - haram with war because it is possible for the nation to witness another dimension of the crisis.

This paper therefore concludes that the young ones should be taught the values of the society to match up with the development and technology era rather than allow the values of hard-work to die finally.

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