

RETHINKING THE SECURITY NETWORKS IN NIGERIA: LESSONS FROM THE TRADITIONAL YORUBA SOCIETY

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Abstract

In recent times, the rate at which the wave of insecurity is blowing across the nooks and crannies of Nigeria is not only alarming but problematic. It is a fact, that every part of Nigeria has witnessed one form of violence and chaos, due to nefarious activities of banditry, kidnapping, separatist insurgency, terrorism, clashes between herdsmen and farmers, in addition to the staggering poverty and unemployment, with debilitating effects particularly on the youths as well as across Nigeria. The paper advocates a rethink or restructuring of the security network system in Nigeria to curb this wave of insecurity. The paper posits further, that such a rethink or restructuring of Nigeria's security system must be based on the fundamental pillars of security networks as obtained in traditional Yoruba society. Moreover, the paper argues that essential elements of traditional (pre-colonial) security networks system, which gave room for peace and order, ought to be injected into the current security network system in Nigeria. Some of these include the commitment of the leaders to the success of security networks supported by an oath or covenant of performance: the building of efficient and loyal security personnel, through adequate funding and welfare schemes; enforcement of objective discipline among the leaders and the followers, etc. In addition, the paper recommends the formation of regional police or security outfits, which will enable citizens to exercise their fundamental human rights in protecting their lives and properties and defending their communities from external aggression and impositions. Finally, the paper makes a case for a reinvigoration and infusion of some of these essentials with expected social values into the current security networks, as these would improve Nigerian security system and foster peace and unity amongst the citizens of Nigeria.

Keywords: Rethinking, Security Networks, Nigeria, Traditional, Yoruba Society, Insecurity

Introduction

Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2000), defines security as "activities involved in protecting a country, building or person against attack or damage." At the same time, insecurity refers to the quality or state of being unstable and insecure. This implies that present Nigeria is suffering from being uncertain and unstable. The importance of peace alongside the security of lives and property of the peoples in any nation cannot be over-emphasized. It is a known fact that Nigeria is currently facing a myriad of security problems that continue to threaten the lives of its people

daily. Nigeria is presently characterized by several security challenges such as terrorism, banditry, Kidnapping for Ransom (KFR), armed robbery, separatist insurgency, and religious and ethnic crises. Citizens are no longer sure of the government's ability to protect their lives and properties as the state of the country's security is an appalling sight to behold.

So far, despite public awareness and military aid, the government has not successfully combated the security problem. Questions arising are; what is the way forward? Is the problem the approach and method used? What other means can be explored in tackling these problems? Following the questions raised traditional rulers in contemporary times and scholars alike posit that prior to modernization, the growing age of technology and development, pre-colonial African societies did not suffer such extensive cases of insecurity, this could be owing to the security measures employed by pre-colonial African states such as the Oyo Empire among the Yoruba indigenous people. Therefore, it is believed that there are indeed lessons to be learned from assessing and examining the security approaches and systems of indigenous African societies, peradventure we may extract lessons to curbing some of these extenuating security issues. Based on this assertion, one may begin to ask, what aspect of traditional African thought the system could be construed as necessary for security, peace, and survival?

We argue that prior to colonialization and modern developments, traditional Yoruba and, by extension, traditional Africans had their unique security system and agencies in place to safeguard the people and checkmate crimes as well as the activities of criminals/offenders in their various communities.

Therefore, this paper aims to examine the traditional security systems and devices of the Yoruba people, particularly the Oyo Empire to determine the values and usefulness of these methods in order to combat the current state of insecurity and challenges facing Nigeria as a nation. Furthermore, the paper makes a case for a reinvigoration and infusion of some of these essential features of indigenous security systems with expected social values into the current security networks simultaneously with the current availability of modern technology, as these would improve Nigerian security systems and foster peace and unity amongst the citizens of Nigeria.

Traditional Security Networks System: The Yoruba Example

The Yoruba people are one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria occupying the South-Western region and constituting a sizeable amount in other West African states such as the Benin Republic, Togo, and other parts of the globe. African societies were known for their communitarian nature, with a bond of the family hood, and the same holds for the Yoruba people. The Yoruba people and their society were characterized by reliance and dependence on the community to achieve personal goals and development. The Yoruba hold specific social values,

which, as Kanu (2011) described, include a sense of community, good human relations, hospitality, respect for elders and authority, and respect for family and religious customs. The Yoruba society was embedded and guided by communal values, customs, norms, and principles derived from their culture, belief, and traditions, put in place for effective governance.

Using the Oyo Empire as an example; the Oyo Empire had an organized community, social structure, and a leadership system. The community was grouped into a hierarchy, categorized by units and group heads. The highest being the Alaafin or Oba (King/Ruler), Igbimo (council), Oyomesi (Kingmakers), Oloye (chiefs), Olori Ebi (Family heads), Eso (warlords) or Aare Ona Kankanfo (chief-of-command of the military in the Oyo empire) Balogun (chief of staff of the army within a village), Olode (watch guards/vigilante), local police agencies, the Baale (chief/elders), Ifa priest (oracular priest), etc. each position was occupied by qualified, verified candidates from chosen households or via divine selection.

Also, each position was accepted as a privilege to serve the people, ensure peace and development in the community. The pre-Colonial Yoruba people recognized that the duties entailed in these offices were first and foremost an office of service to the people and their community. This is not to say that it was a smooth operation. However, political unrest and issues of insecurity such as robberies, insurgencies, and terrorism were adequately managed and handled with both secular and traditional means. These means included youth empowerment through handiworks/trades and crafts learning, informal education, local community policing, use of charms, rites/rituals, and sacrifices.

Leadership and public governance were important positions that were not taken carelessly or flippantly. The Alaafin (king/ruler) is made to swear an oath of allegiance before assuming office. Likewise, before the selection of the Aare Ona Kankanfo (chief of the military) or Eso (warlords), Oba in council, Oloye (chiefs), they are made to swear oaths of loyalty and allegiance to protect their people and community in order to avoid cases of betrayal, misplaced loyalty or insurgencies. Yoruba traditional education also helped in curbing crimes and maintaining peace. The Yoruba teach their children and youth particular virtues and principles. They emphasize good behavior, hospitality, duty, respect, dignity, and harmony.

Through social education and customs such as myths, folklore, proverbs, and informal training, social values such as respect for authority, hard work, respect for family and lineage, etc., are upheld and instilled in the members of the society. These values and training acted as a control mechanism to ensure peace, stability, law, and order. Among the values characterized among the traditional Yoruba is hard work. In order to discourage laziness and idleness, which leads to vices such as stealing, robbery, and poverty? The Yoruba use proverbs and poems to emphasize on the need for hard work, such as;

Ise l'ogun ise
Mura siise ore mi
Ise ni a fi di eni giga

Hard work eliminates poverty,
Be diligent in your work
It is work that elevates a person (Ogunjo, 2008)

Religion was also another tool the Yoruba used to strengthen kinship and respect for elders and authority. Religion here is means the indigenous religion of the Africans before colonization. Traditional African Religion was used to enhance social relationships among extended families and the community and enforce law and order. Religious activities mainly were carried out together from the family unit to a more general one involving the whole community. As such, whatever divination or ritual/rites were made benefited every member of that community. Religion was used to support moral order and establish a sense of security among worshippers and members of the community. African scholars such as J.S. Mbiti (1969), Bolaji Idowu (1962), and Awolalu & Dopamu (1979) posit that Africans are notoriously religious and religion permeates into all areas of their being, belief and practices.

The social value of respecting elders was a principle the Yoruba used as a control device due to the need for community well-being and promotion of beneficial values. Also because elders were seen as wise, experienced, and respected individuals. They act as pillars for the youth and a voice of reason. So, when elders see youths going astray, it is their duty to caution and advice such a person. The elders laid down rules and guidelines that were followed religiously.

Another principle or value that acted as a control mechanism was the importance placed on the principle of *iwa* (character) among the Yoruba people. *Iwa* is extolled as a virtue every individual must possess to be recognized as a person. *Iwa* implies a person with good moral standing, uprightness, and disposition. Therefore, on the one hand, a reasonable person would refer to an individual who obeyed the rules and regulations of society to promote the wellness of family and community. On the other hand, an unreasonable person or (*eniti o niiwa*) would refer to a person lacking moral uprightness, acting contrary to society's rules, and not exhibiting virtues that promote societal development (Fayemi, 2009; Fayemi 2014, Abimbola, 1975: 389).

Vices such as theft, armed robbery and lying, etc., were seen as constitutive of lousy character, soiling a person's family reputation and negatively impacting a community at large, and was discouraged. Proverbs are also a means the Yoruba uses to condemn specific actions as right or wrong and also promote good character. In this regard, to prevent stealing, as the Yoruba proverb would express,

Eni ba jale le kan

To wa fi daranbori

Aso ole lo da bora

(translation) He who steals once but later wears expensive clothing, wears a thief's attire.

Ka kaki n jale

Ma kukuderu

Rather than be a thief, I'd become a slave.

Ojogbogboniti ole

Ojokannitolohun

Every day is for the thief, one day for the owner.

The implication of these proverbs was to deter children and members of the community from engaging in acts of stealing or armed robbery but to actively participate in honest work.

These proverbs calls for wisdom and worked in discouraging people from engaging in corrupt acts. After they have been caught, the action becomes a dent not only on them, but their family as well as the community. Asides from the social values and education, the pre-colonial Yoruba people had some security systems such as the local policing group, known as Olode (vigilantes/night watch guards) (Fourchard, 2008), who made use of protective charms such as alile, bante, ayeta, onde, ifunpa, etc. and rituals such as oro and sacrifices in safeguarding their communities.

The Olode are night watch guards who patrol a specific night hour. In current times, there have been given the title 'vigilante' But the idea of local patrol is not new to the Yoruba people. The olode group consisted of young men in the community who were tasked with the duty of monitoring the community's borders, fight on behalf of the people; they know every location and hideouts, family and people, which allows them to alert the necessary authorities in the case of strangers entering the community.

Another means of security among the traditional Yoruba is the act of Oro. Oro is one of the many ways of ensuring peace, harmony, and orderliness in society. The Yoruba believe that the Oro festival is used to cleanse society, even though it is controversial due to its patriarchal nature. Oro is believed to be a god of ancestral spirits among the people, dead spirits wandering about who must be appeased (Daramola and Jeje as cited by Akanji and Dada) as such oro was also used as a means of appeal to appease the gods after certain wrongs or atrocities had been committed by community members. In other times, Oro appears as a fixed tradition carried out at certain times in a year within the community. The oro was a cult used in judiciary administration as members of the cult carry out investigations in civil criminal cases and also punish and condemn criminals (Akanji and Dada, 2012).

Oogun (charms) and ebo (Libation and sacrifices): sacrifices for the Yoruba are linked with religious worships. Nevertheless, etutu and ebo (atonement and libation

and sacrifice) are offerings prepared to atone or appease the gods for goodwill, often before a battle, as a means of ending a problem, during socio-political confusion and distress. Etutu and ebo are carried out with a particular significance or function through the instruction and authority of the ifa priest. When issues become problematic or in a state of confusion and no way out, the Yoruba undertake sacrifice to seek the help of the gods, alleviate suffering and ensure peace and tranquility (Kanu, Omojola & Bazza, 2021).

Causes and Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria

Nigeria, rich in abundant human and natural resources, remains derelict and devoid of growth and development. Lack of employment, poverty, and hunger have led youths to engage in nefarious activities such as armed robbery and kidnapping, thereby contributing to the overall level of cruelty and disorderliness.

One paramount duty of the government is to secure the lives and properties of its citizens; however, the government is failing spectacularly at it. The masses can no longer run a business as usual as farmers are killed on their farmlands, children gutted, and women raped without consequences to the perpetrators if they are caught. The current level of insecurity in Nigeria can be traced to various activities ranging from the insurgent Boko Haram group, the Fulani herder-farmers clash and negligent of duty from police, military, and paramilitary personnel coupled with the failure of the government in providing security which is her primary responsibility to the citizenry. All these have led to security breakdown and unrest especially in the northern and southern regions of Nigeria.

The Boko haram group responsible for causing panic, fear, and anxiety in the North has been in operation since 2009 (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Boko-Haram>). Despite the presence of police, military task force, and other armed forces, there has been no significant progress in eradicating the group as they have made North Eastern Nigeria their home base. The Boko haram insurgents continue to thrive and grow while lives are lost, families displaced, properties destroyed, and children kidnapped during their raid because the government has abandoned their people. All these activities have been linked to several factors and causes— majorly weak security system and lack of up-to-date security architecture to ensure national growth and adequate development. Security is necessary for national development; however, as the government continues to direct resources to security challenges such as the eradication of Boko haram insurgency, terrorism, and banditry, the country's socio-economy suffers and remains redundant. Lack of economic development, political instability, and decline in social life are some of the consequences of insecurity in present day Nigeria.

One of the causes of these security problems has been traced to the ineffectiveness of the government and her law enforcement agencies to adequately cater to the needs of the people, ensuring their safety, protection, and well-being. One

contributing factor to this is the problem of corruption and lack of commitment on the part of the government and leaders.

Another challenge to security in Nigeria is poverty and unemployment. The unemployment rate has been increasing recently; according to statistics, the current unemployment rate is at 33.3%, with one out of three working-age Nigeria jobless (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). As the rate of unemployment increases without any working plan to diminish or minimize the effect, youths continue to roam the streets and engage in precarious acts of stealing, nuisance, and breaking the law. Among unemployed youths are those who have joined criminal groups like; armed robbery, kidnapping, abductions, and militant groups.

Perhaps if the government had set up youth empowerment schemes for educated youths and other parastatals, these youths would be gainfully employed and contribute to the economy's growth. Therefore, the government should provide more jobs and social amenities to curb poverty and unemployment to ensure economic stability.

Another problem associated with insecurity in Nigeria is ineffectiveness, inadequacy and shortcomings of the law enforcement agencies. Over the years, the police force and military members have terrorized and killed innocent citizens while abusing their power within their jurisdiction. In most cases, the agencies tasked with protecting lives are often perpetrating these crimes and causing disorder. This is evident in the 2020 End-SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) protest against police brutality. The rally ensued when citizens got tired of how the SARS team extorted and killed innocent members of the various communities they were assigned to protect.

Rethinking Security Systems in Nigeria: Lessons from the Yoruba

It is important to emphasize that due to the social values and education in traditional Yoruba society, the Yoruba people exhibited a culture of discipline, which included conformity and obedience to organization's rules. This was done to enjoy certain benefits as a law-abiding community member.

The ethics-based education and training was a massive factor in curbing crimes associated with youthful vitality. The emphasis on discipline and hard work cannot be under looked; hard work for the Yoruba people is a virtue that is needed and considered for daily survival, marriage union, growth, promotion, and certain political positions. It is a tradition in the pre-colonial Yoruba society that before the Alaafin is appointed as king or head, he is made to undergo certain rites and rituals, which binds him by oath to the effective exercise of duties attached to the political position. He is made to undertake a covenant of commitment to the people. This is one of the reasons he cannot act contrary to the consent of the Oyomesi (Kingmakers), on issues affecting the community or rule tyrannically because he

is bound by oath to the people and understands that there are instant repercussions for breaking such covenants. It must be noted that there are some Alaafins or Obas who refuse or dodge such rituals knowing the consequences to escape the wrath of the gods and the people. However, nemesis often catches up with them. This is exemplified in the Yoruba movie titled *Saworoide*, set in a Yoruba cultural and traditional sphere.

The act of oath swearing led to effective governance, leadership of concern, loyalty, and performance. The traditional oath swearing ensured that leaders carried out their duties efficiently, with little or no corruption and inadequacy. The principle of oath swearing among the traditional Yoruba effectively curbed the excessiveness of leaders, improper actions, and helped in producing loyalty against dire consequences of betrayal such as death. The paper recommends that the current government or Nigerian leaders must be bound by oath of commitment (which may not necessarily be a spiritual rite but maybe in form of covenant agreement with the state) to discharge their responsibilities so as to ensure the security of Nigerian citizens and where they fail to be alert to their security responsibilities, such ruler should be sanctioned or removed and made to face the full wrath of the law. This act of commitment or oath taken which binds them will enable them guide against payment of leap service and exhibition of lackadaisical attitude in handling security matters it is our argument that if Nigerian leaders are truly committed to curb challenges of insecurity using the forces and resources at their disposal perhaps Nigeria will be a better place to live

The paper recommends that the current government take a cue from traditional security systems, their ethics-based education, and the positive role of their religion. Rather than fueling religious crises or supporting one ethnic group against the other thereby creating ethnic war, the government ought to embark on programme of national reorientation in order to train and mobilize citizens to be security conscious and be more objective in resolving ethnic and communal clashes. In addition, the government can mandate the religious and traditional rulers to discuss a decentralized communal means of protecting citizens in their region.

The government should also provide resources, funding, and welfare schemes to ensure that poverty is reduced, youths are empowered, law agencies are effectively and efficiently trained, and provide up-to-date weaponry in order to minimize the level of insecurity across the nation. Nigeria has the resources needed to create better-living conditions for its people, but due to corruption in public offices, most of these resources are diverted for personal use and any leader who is guilty of such allegation should be publicly executed.

It must be emphasized that to improve the level of security and curb the menace of insecurity in Nigeria the government must be ready to dedicate more funds to the

training of security personnel like Police, Military and Para-military. The security personnel must be well trained and retrained regularly and undertake refreshers course on modern security system in order to reduce police brutality and abuse. The welfare and the salary package of the security personnel in Nigeria must not be compromised, they must be adequately remunerated. In other words, the government must take decisive step in organizing drastic reforms among his security personnel so as to make them more active and functional. The government must renovate dilapidated barracks and build comfortable and befitting barracks to enable her security personnel have sense of belonging and human dignity which will in turn enhance their performance.

The distinguishing feature of the traditional Yoruba society has respect for communal living and rules. This creates a need for inclusiveness and harmony, ensuring adherence to laid down rules and regulations. Secondly, respect for cultural beliefs, social norms, and traditions created a peaceful atmosphere and ensured that each family/individual's well-being was accounted for in modern day Nigeria the government must ensure that citizens abide by rules and regulation guiding security orderliness and peaceful coexistence and any citizens find flouting this order or breaking rules and law irrespective of his/her status must be discipline and brought to book as it was obtained in traditional Yoruba society.

Drawing inspiration from the above structure of the tradition Yoruba society it is posited that Nigerian government should decentralized policing system and amend the constitution to give recognition to the existence of regional policing system, these will not only improve the security system it will give the region of the state the opportunity to be in charge of their state of regional security system.

Moreover, community policing where members of a particular community are coopted to form community security network in their community will also serve as an aid or complement the effort of the state police in curbing crimes and other nefarious activities. The government should not only commend the effort of some regional governors in establishing community policing groups like, Amotekun (Leopard)in south west Nigeria, Abubeakwu in south East and Shege-ka-fasa (I dare you to attack or surrender) in the Northern Nigeria.

But encourage other smaller community to come up with their community policing groups in other to complement the efforts of the central police in abating crimes. This community policing groups must not be seen as rivals to the central policing group, but as a supportive arm with harmonious interaction. A situation whereby a governor of a state who is known as chief security officer (CSO) cannot give order to a commissioner of police because of the centralized police system. This is appalling and not tidy enough for a smooth running of security network system in Nigeria.

Our argument is that to curb and address the security challenges in order to eradicate or minimize criminal activities, there is a need for diversity of security networks; the government must systematize and fuse pre-existing traditional practices embedded in our cultural norms and value system with the modern techniques. There are so many values in the traditional African culture that can be finessed as modernization kicks in with its changes and trends.

A critic may argue that in a plural or multi ethnic society like Nigeria it might become impossible or impracticable for other non-ethnic group apart from Yoruba to embrace the traditional Yoruba value or use the element of security in traditional Yoruba culture in modern day Nigeria. The response of this paper to the above question is that we are not advocating for a return to the past neither are we pretending that the traditional Yoruba had all a total glorious past. The emphasis is that some of the essential elements of her past that are good and worthy of emulation should be cultivated and inculcated into modern security network in Nigeria as this will not invalidate modern security network but rather strengthen it. Furthermore, most of these Yoruba moral value alongside the use of modern technology which can serve as the foundation of modern security network are under moral universalism which is rationally embraced by every culture. Hence, the recommendation of founder mental pillar of security network in traditional Yoruba society as tools for rethink security network in Nigeria is not only viable but philosophically plausible.

Conclusion

It is a given fact that a significant concern of human beings is the need to be protected and assurance of security of their well-being. The leaders' goal is to ensure that the maximum well-being, survival, and protection of the people they govern are guaranteed.

In the face of neocolonialism, the imposition of alien ideas and modernization, coupled with the era of decolonization, Africans would do well to incorporate traditional ideas and modernize them rather than discard and abandon them in the name of civilization. The Westerners did not abandon their cultures and practices. They built upon earlier methods and invented new ideas.

As such, their children and youths in their homes and educational institutions were taught social values which incorporated their traditional culture in their day-to-day activities as trends develop. Thus, it is pertinent to end that security of lives and properties will be guaranteed and Nigeria will be a better place to reside if, these essentials elements of security system in traditional Yoruba society are incorporated into our day-to-day security network system in Nigeria

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