

The Role of British Colonial Administration in the Establishment and Workings of the Nigerian Police Force, 1930 – 1960

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Abstract

Ideally, colonial administrations, including the British colonial administration, played significant role in the establishment and workings of security agencies to maintain peaceful coexistence and protect the lives and property of all members of any given society around the world. This paper examines, critically, the role of the British Colonial Administration in the establishment and workings of the Nigerian Police Force, contrary to bourgeois claim that the Nigerian Police Force protect all members of the Nigerian society; the paper posits that the Nigerian Police Force was established primarily to save guard the British colonial state and also to protect the lives and property of British Officials and influential members of the Nigerian society. Although the British colonial administration ended in 1960, the Nigerian Police Force continued providing state security services for the Nigerian state with minimum attention to the people – oriented security services for common Nigerians. The writer has observed that the preoccupation of the British colonial administration with the provision of state security services instead of providing people – oriented security services for all members of the Nigerian society provoked nationalist agitation against the British colonial administration. The writer has out rightly condemned colonialism and the associated discriminative practices against the colonized Nigerians. The paper concludes that it was the British colonial state’s preoccupation with the protection of colonial state institution and the lives and property of the British and influential Nigerians rather than the provision of people – oriented security services for all members of the Nigerian society that brought about the end of British colonial administration in 1960.

Introduction

Nigeria is a large West Africans democratic country which occupies 923,788 square kilometers of land and inhabits 140 million people who speak diverse languages and practice Christian, Islamic and Traditional religions freely. Probably, the differences in culture, economic and political activities among Nigerians discouraged peaceful coexistence which was necessary for exploitation and this insecurity compelled the British colonial administration to establish various security agencies, notably the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Police Force among others to secure lives and property in Nigeria. Although the British colonial administration established the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies primarily to secure lives of British officials, influential Nigerians and their capital, political ideologists argue that those security agencies were established to secure the lives and property of all members of the Nigerian society with equal attention. The writer of this paper, believe that the Nigerian Police Force, like other security agencies, were established and educated specially to secure the lives and property of British officials and members of the Nigerian society.

The paper observes that although the British colonial administrators knew that colonial laws were based on ill -formulated constitutions between 1946 and 1960, the British administrators encouraged the police to enforce the laws probably because the law favoured the British officials and secured colonial state institution adequately. It has been observed that as the colonial administration continued formulating and implementing anti – people laws brutally through the Nigerian Police, Nigerian nationalists criticized and protested against the British colonial administrative policies generally. Although the British colonial administrations headed by Lugard, Clifford, Thomson, Buordillion, Richards, Macpherson and Robertson produced constitutions, hopefully to control Nationalist agitations; the colonial administrations did not educate the police officials sufficiently on how to implement laws with minimum brutality. This partly explains why the Nigerian Police Force over – emphasized force in the process of enforcing or implementing the laws and consequently intimidated and terrorized Nigerians, instead of maintaining law and peaceful coexistence among Nigerians till the British administrators handed over the mantle of leadership to Nigerian leaders in 1960.

Admittedly, the post – colonial administrations have made efforts to reform the laws and the Nigerian police Force purposely to provide humane laws and more objective police to enforce the laws and ensure peaceful co-existence. But these efforts have not yielded desirable fruits perhaps because the post-colonial administrations, have not provided good and humane laws as well as adequate education for the police officials to enforce the laws, secure the Nigerian state institution as well as the lives and property of the rich and poor members of the Nigerian society during the 21st century.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CLARIFICATIONS

In order to avoid possible ambiguity, the key operational term like “role “, establishment, working and “force” were explained to enable readers understand what role the British colonial administration played in establishing

the Nigerian Police Force and encouraging the system to perform its duties according to the dictates of the British colonial administration in Nigeria till the British administration handed over the mantle of leadership to Nigerian political leaders in 1960.

The term 'role' implies the position and functions one performs in an organization, society or situation purposely to achieve desired objectives.¹ The term "role" as used in this study, denotes the dominant position the British colonial administration occupied and used in the establishment of the Nigerian Police Force to maintain law, peace and security of lives and property in Nigeria. Tamuno observes that the British colonial state played dominant role in the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 and single handedly established the Nigerian Police Force to maintain peaceful condition necessary for the exploitation of human natural resources.²

Sinclair explains that the word "establishment" denotes creation of an organization, system or institution in a way that is intended to be permanent.³ Usman agrees with Sinclair's definition when he observes that the word "establishment" as used in this context implies creation of the Nigerian Police Force with the responsibility and specific instructions to provide security for the lives and property of British officials, the influential Nigerians and the colonial state institution.⁴ But Adejo observes that the Nigerian police officials during the colonial period was not adequately educated and consequently relied on physical actions to implement or enforce colonial laws which Nigerian nationalists criticized and rejected because the laws were formulated to safeguard the interests of the British colonial officials, rather than the interest of Nigerians.⁵

Crowder observes that although the British administration, introduced several constitutions including Richards, Macpherson, and Robertism Constitutions with improved provisions between 1940⁶ and 1960, the British administrations did not educate the police officials sufficiently to implement these amended laws tactically and diplomatically, hence the police beat, killed and destroyed property as they tried to enforce exploitative laws on Nigerians forcefully.⁶ As the working of the Nigerians Police Force during the colonial period failed to implement law and ensure peaceful atmosphere necessary for the exploitation of resources, the British colonial administration reluctantly handed over the mantle of leadership to Nigerian leaders in 1960.

The term "working" implies the way a system, an organization or a piece of equipment works.⁷ In this context, the word "workings" implies the way the Nigerian Police works to ensure appropriate application of laws in order to maintain peaceful co existence in the Nigerian society.⁷ It has been observe that the Nigeria Police Force failed to provide security during the colonial period because the police officials applied exploitative laws forcefully because the colonial education system did not equip those police officials with appropriate tactics and diplomacy. Indeed, the British colonial administration played dominant role in the establishment and failure of the Nigerian Police Force to provide security in the colonial period.

The establishment of the Nigerian Police Force and the setback to its workings during the colonial period

The British colonial administration established the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) on 1st April, 1930. The British colonial authorities merged the southern and northern police forces that had existed separately in line with the ordinance No.3 Of 1930.⁸ The British colonial authorities establishment the Nigerian police force primarily to implement laws and minimize criminal activities such as theft, armed robbery, burglary, kidnapping etc, The Nigerian Police were instructed to prevent these criminal activities because the activities of thieves, armed robbers, kidnappers among others challenged the security of lives and properly or capital of British officials and influential Nigerians as well as the colonial state institution.

Following the establishment of the Nigerian Police (NPF), the organization was charged with many statutory duties including the prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offenders; preservation of law and order, protection of life and property and the performance of necessary military duties in and outside Nigeria.⁹ The functions of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) have been summarized in the Police Act No. 41 of 2005 as follow:

The police shall be employed for the prevention and detection of crimes, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged and shall perform such military duties within or without Nigeria as may be required by them, or under the authority of this or any other Act.¹⁰

The order to perform its statutory duties efficiently, the Nigerian Police Force with 371800 officials has six departments today namely A) administrating B) operation, C- works, D) Investigation, E) Education and F) Research and Finance. The daily administration and operations of the Nigerian Police Force is controlled and headed by the Inspector-General of police, The Inspector General is assisted by the Deputy Inspector. General and six assistant Inspector. Generals who head the six Departments for effective operations.¹¹

Furthermore, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) composes of 12 zonal commands covering the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Each zonal command comprises of 3 or more states grouped together under the control of an assistant inspector General (ALG). The zonal commands are furthermore subdivided into 37 state police commands (the 6 states and the Federal Capital Territory). Each state command is headed by a Commissioner of Police (CP).¹² Admittedly, the Nigerian Police Force reorganized its administrative and

operational activities to minimize the set back to effective performance the organization faced during the British colonial administration.

The problems that militated against the effective discharge of the duties of the Nigerian police force during the British colonial administration.

It has been observed that the Nigerian Police Force NPF made several efforts to discharge their duties effectively during the British colonial administration. Although the Nigeria police force adopted the watchman style, the service style, the massive patrol style,¹³ the organization was not able to solve some of the problems which militated against the effective discharge of police duties. The notable problems which impeded and still impede the effective discharge of the Nigerian police duties include lack of manpower, poor condition of service, lack of modern equipment, corruption of the rank and file, lack of support and cooperation from members of the public, poor education among others.

The first problem that discouraged police officials from discharging their statutory duties effectively in the colonial period was lack of manpower. As Tamuno observes, the number of police men during the 1930^S was as low as 1,218 as most of these officials were equipped with batons and torch lights to control more than 100 million Nigerians, the police officials did not discharge their duties efficiently.¹⁴ Vaaseh also observes that the problem has not changed in the post colonial period because truly, 371, 800 police officials have the responsibility of controlling approximately 150 million Nigerians.¹⁵ Besides the problem of manpower, the Nigerian Police lacked modern equipment to discharged their dutties efficiently during the colonial period.

Tamuno critically observes that the problem of the Nigerian Police Force were compounded by the fact that the officials were not adequately equipped with modern working tools.¹⁶ Although the British officers were permitted to own and even use pistols and short germs, most officials were given police batons and allowed to use the batons life and property. It is therefore, understandable why the Nigerian police officials did not perform most of their duties efficiently during the colonial period. As if the issue of poor working materials did not discourage the Nigerian Police officials from performing their duties sufficiently, the rank and file proved too corrupt to perform their duties satisfactorily.

Admittedly, the problem of corruption started when the British colonized Nigeria, but it intensified during the colonial period to the extent that even policeman demanded and collected bribe in order to change the course of justice. Adejo argues that come police officials became too corrupt to perform their statutory duties efficiently.¹⁸

In addition to the problem of corruption, most Nigeria officials lacked tertiary education to handle criminal cases efficiently. This partly explains why most police officials relied on physical force as an alternative attempt to implement the law and maintain peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. Tamuno observes that the use of excessive force by the Nigerian Police officials intimidated Nigerians and discouraged the population from offering useful information to the police in time of need.¹⁹ Indeed, the Nigerian police officials discovered that without the cooperation from the members of the Nigerian public, it would be difficult to maintain peace and security for the British administration.

The nature of security challenges and the response of the Nigerian Police Force, 1930-1960

Despite the setback within the Nigerian police force, Faclola rightly observes that there were numerous security challenges including armed robbery burglary, theft, inter communal dashes, hunger, poverty, diseases among other issues that threatened the lives and property of the British officials and the influential Nigerians as well as the colonial state institution itself.²⁰ Although all these issues were security related because the issues threatened the security of lives and property and the colonial state institution,²¹ the Nigerian Police Force paid attention to the issues that threatened the security of lives and property of the British officials and the colonial state institution more than the issue of poverty, hunger, and disease that threatened the lives and properly of the majority of ordinary Nigerians.²²

While the Nigerian police force adopted various strategies, including watch man style, service style, massive patrol style and physical force to enforce laws and prevent criminal activities of thieves, armed robbers, burglars, communal, inter-ethnic and war fighters because their activities threatened the security of the colonial state institution and the lives and properly of the British and influential Nigerians.²³ hunger, poverty and diseases killed many ordinary Nigerians and encouraged Nationalists to criticize the British colonial administration and compelled the colonial regime to handover the mantle of leadership to Nigerians in 1960.

The impact of security challenges on the socio-economic and political activities in Nigeria, - 1945 – 1960

It has been observed that the activities of socio-economic and political criminals threatened the security of British colonial state institution as well as the lives and property of both the British officials and ordinary Nigerians during the British colonial administration in Nigeria.²⁴ Indeed, criminal activities of thieves, armed robbers, burglars, communal and inter-ethnic fighters as well as the issues of hunger poverty and disease

destabilized socio-economic and political systems and compelled the British colonial administration to use and enforce exploitative laws that Nigerian nationalists disobeyed and criticized the British administrative policies and called for changes which brought positive impact on the socio-economic and political situation in Nigeria.

According to Dyson, the activities of war lords, community fighters, inter-ethnic warriors, thieves, armed robbers, burglars, rapists as well as hunger, poverty and sickness brought negative impact on social co-existence in different parts of Nigeria.²⁵ Indeed, the most serious impact of these security challenges on the Nigerian society was the decline in productive activities in offices, schools, hospitals, markets, family houses among other social institutions. Although these security challenges threatened life and property and thus compelled Nigerians to shun productive activities, the British authorities alleged that production declined because Nigerians were lazy people.²⁶

Similarly, the impact of these security challenges on the Nigerian economic activities was devastating because produces shifted their attention from productive activities such as farming trading transportation, fishing hunting, rearing education among others, the production of goods and services declined.²⁷ Although the level of production in various economic sectors declined mainly because colonial education system did not provide produced with appropriate technological skills, the British authorities alleged that workers lacked work discipline and consequently promulgated labour laws²⁸ to enhance work discipline among Nigerian workers to perform efficiently. Truly, the British colonial administration used the Nigerian police force to enforce labour laws on reluctant Nigerian workers who responded with series of strikes that worsened the problems of low production/productivity in various sectors of the Nigerian economy in the 1940²⁹

CONCLUSION.

Admittedly, the British colonial administration played dominant role in the establishment and functioning of the Nigerian police force purposely to provide adequate security for the lives and property of the British officials, the influential Nigerians and the colonial state institution between 1930 and 1960. Although the British colonial administration established and influenced the functioning of the Nigerian Police Force primarily to achieve colonial interest, many colonial apologists believe and insist that the Nigerian police force existed to enforce laws and maintain peaceful coexistence of members of the Nigerian society.

However, the writer has rejected this bourgeois claim, arguing that the Nigerian Police Force was established primarily to enforce the laws that the British colonial administrators formulated mainly to facilitate the exploitation of human and natural resources and protect the British interest in Nigeria. The writer, however, observes that the British colonial administration did not achieve its objectives satisfactorily because the British administration did not provide the Nigerian Police Force with adequate manpower, modern equipment, good condition of service, tertiary education and above in the police officials were too corrupt to implement the laws and provide security for the state institution and all other members of the Nigerian society.

The writer further observes that the Nigerian police force failed to provide security for both the British colonial state and the Nigerian people because the Nigerian police officials over emphasized physical force in their efforts to implement the laws which Nigerians considered too exploitative and anti-people hence, nationalists demanded for political independence and the British colonial authorities handed over the Mantle of leadership to Nigerians in the event that marked the end of colonial administration of Nigerian in 1960.

The writer appraises the efforts of post-colonial administrations to reform the NPF since 1967 but suggests that the post colonial administrations should continue to discourage the formulation and implementation of unpopular and intolerable laws which are exploitation of human and natural resources from Nigerians. The paper concludes that if the British colonial administration had formulated and implemented people – oriented laws and re organized the Nigerian Police Force adequately the Nigerian police officials would have implemented the laws without resistance hence the British administration would have achieved its objective in Nigeria.

Endnotes

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