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**CRIME AND CRIMINALITY OF POST COLONIAL AND PRESENT DAY EHUGBO PEOPLE
OF IGBO EXTRACTION IN RETROSPECT**

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Abstract

The upsurge in crime and criminal activities in post-colonial Nigeria has engaged several hours of both the security agents, government and the citizenry in general, who are worried and helpless to the wave of rising crime. Unfortunately little has been said or written about the dynamics of crime control. The fear to enquire into why the precolonial societies were more stable and relatively crime free is so sensitive that no mention of it may be made. Based on interviews and focal group discussions the people of Ehugbo had an advanced crime control mechanism that saw to a crime free society in the pre-colonial era and as such the paper recommends that present government recognize and possible adopt the traditional crime control mechanism.

Key words: crime and criminality, pre-post colonial era, government and crime mechanism.

Introduction

The original name of Afikpo is Ehugbo which has been interpreted variously. Some say the word Afikpo comes from a combination of two words Viz; "Eho" which means "Belly" and "Igbo" a name borne by a people who occupy the south-Eastern part of Nigeria and whose language grouping is the "Qua" or "kwa".

According to prof. Simon Ottenberg, (1971:32) Ndiigbo are one of the most unusual peoples of Africa, known for their high achievement, skills their mobility (tendency to migrate from their home areas). They fought a 30 month survival war. Ndiigbo are hated and admired by other African countries and the world at large.

Professor Adiele Afigbo (1981:13-15) impresses that Ndigbo have occupied their present location longer than they can remember, and that they have altered their environment in such a manner that no traces of their original environment are discoverable. He cites the Nri, a group of Ndiigbo that has developed an advanced spiritual kinship and who now claim to have been created and placed by God where they now occupy.

Although various historical account of the origin of the present Ehugbo abound, the evidence before us favors that Ehugbo was founded by immigrant groups who settled at various times principal among these are the Egu, the Nkalu and Igbo.

According to Egwini F.U. (2003:4-7) Rock excavations at Eziukwou Ukpa Rock shelter conducted by Prof. D.D Hattle in 1966, and recently by Dr.B.W Anada and F.N Anozie, revealed that the first human settlement in Ehugbo is dated between 3000-5000 BC. The first inhabitants, Egwini Believes, were the Egus and Nkalus who were non-Igbo extract called Agbor people. The Egus inhabited the northern part, while the Nkalus inhabited the southern part. These are the present "Ugwuegu" and "Enohi Nkalu" respectively.

Igboukwu who conquered and subsumed these original inhabitants had migrated from Saudi Arabia in the middle east in search of conquest and settlement. Something is striking about the introduction of Saudi Arabia to the founding of Ehugbo as this may have its link with the confusion of language at Babel from where men were scattered. Igboukwu may have traveled that far although he may not have been the original person. He first settled at Ikoyi, then Calabar “from where he attacked, defeated and drove away the Ibibios and inhabited the area now occupied by the “Aros” Egwini, F.U quoting Afrikpo Today (1990:35) ascribes the similarities in name and custom between Afikpo and Calabar to this migration. Although the migration and trade brought so much influence. In Ehugbo, igboukwu settled at Amozaro Orgogoro in the present day Nkpogoro. Nkpogoro is formed from the combination of “Nkpu” and “orogoro” which means the shelter of the orgogoro. Tradition supports this view when the Ehugbo still mentions Nkpogoro as the first ancestor during libation and other ritual incantations. Again, Iko Okochi begins there also. The coronation of igbo-ukwu at Ogogoro, all point to the historical significance of the place. Later, more group began to arrive, and to settle in Ehugbo: Oziza and ibii known as Edomoke, Urobochiali who left Okigwe to Ngodo Isuochi and eventually settled at Ngodo in Ohaisu. Ata Aja came from Arondiuzoogu to settle at Amaizu and Ukwuanyi who came from Aronchukwu to settle at Ngbo; Okoro igbo founded Unwara while Eseni Igbo committed adultery with his father’s wife, and was sent on exile to Edda where he settled and was called Ufu Eseni Ufu Eseni is still in existence till today. Another is the Ebiri warriors who settled at Amaechara.

It is instructive to state that most of the villages that make up Ohaisu. Namely; Amaechara, Amachi, Amangbala, Egeburu, Evu, a, ngodo and Ukpa have a tradition of having originated from the Isuama Axis. We can deduce from all these that Ehugbo is a collection of fragmented migrants whose only attribute is their long history of association and which has robbed-off on the peculiarities of each migrant group to enthrone a common identity. Only two phenomena can achieve this apparent unity: the presence of a hard and uncompromising leaders and a very strong collective conscience with strong regulatory system.

Problem:

In recent times, blood-clothing stories of criminal activities have gone unabated, and have pre-occupied the media. Armed robbery and rape are so rampant that governments and policy makers at all levels are deeply concerned about how to deal with this as theory upon theory expresses inefficiency and inadequacies on the part the society crime control mechanism, and as such crime generally becomes more endemic.

The justice system is one that permits long adjournments so much that cases take as long as five to ten years to be dispensed with. At times, crimes files get lost in the process and criminals are discharged for want of evidence.

Similarly, the prisons and cells are far from being the corrective institutions they are supposed to be. They are basically punishment and breeding grounds for criminals. Punishment only lead to the hardening of criminals while their stay in prison walls to become worse than their masters.

The intention of this paper is to examine the traditional crime control strategies in an African society with a focus on Ehugbo. To bring to for, the relationship existing between the pre-and post-colonial crime control in Ehugbo. Mainly sources from three groups:

- a. The “Essa,” who occupies a very central position in Ehugbo traditional set-up. They are elders. Who are believed to be quite close to the ancestors (Ndeichie). This constitute 15.5% (16) of the respondents.
- b. The second group are the different age groups in Ehugbo community. They are found between the age grades listed below:
 - i. Nskuekpe-junior sets-(Isielia, Eto Ezi and Nsuekpe)
 - ii. Ekuke Eto-(Ohali Eto, Ugbo Etiti, Isieto)
 - iii. Ohale Ndeichie.These constitute 64%(64) of the people interviewed.
- c. The third group are those who are not found in the age group mentioned above. These include the wrestling grade which consists of Mkpufu Mgba, Isiogu and Ikpo, women and others. These constitute 20.55 of the respondents.

For this purpose, both focus Group Discussion (F.G.D) and Oral Indepth Interview (O.I.I) was employed in order to study the effectiveness of traditional crime control mechanism in Ehugbo over the modern crime control mechanism.

The population of Ehugbo is 107, 633 (NPC. CENSUS 1991). The Ehugbo elders constituted the targeted populations. However, the existing social structures in Ehugbo community provided the focal point and direction for information. Age grades thus become the rallying point for information on the topic consequently members of the various age grades were interviewed using the random sampling method among the different age group-nsu Ekpe, uke Ekpe, Ekpuke Eto, Ohale Ndeichie, Neichie, and Mkpufu Mgba, Isogu, Ikpo and the women and others not categorized among the age groups.

Purposeful sample technique was used to select three interviewees and focus Group Discussants. They included Ndeichie, and the elders who are the custodians of the respondents. The second group were the different age groups (Ottenberg, 1971:70). This was made up of 64% of the total respondents. The third groups were made up of the wrestling grade and women. These groups are much larger in population, they mostly depend on the first two for information concerning the group of villages called Ehugbo. The group accounted for 20.5% of the respondents.

Paper Instrument:

The main research instruments employed in this study were Direct indepth interview and the focus Group Discussion. The aim was to collect first hand and indepth information from the respondents.

INDEPTH INTERVIEW:

The use of this method enabled the researcher to tap the psychology of the interviewees. Interviewees were friendly and were aided by an interview guide prepared by the researcher.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (F.G.D):

This, though, did not give room for confidentiality of information gathered, it rather gave room or clarity and detail in the process of administering justice. And what one would not have ordinarily disclosed for fear of tradition was made bare especially in situations where people had their feelings bottled up as a result of injustice.

The following exploratory questions served as guide in the interviews and discussions.

These are:

1. There was no crime mechanism in pre-colonial Ehugbo Society.
2. The imperialists taught the natives crime control and judicial process.
3. Crime wave has increased in frequency and sophistication since the advents of colonialism.

Exploratory issues explained:

The exploratory questions that were raised were aimed at establishing when and how crime started in Ehugbo. The first was premised on the understanding that there may never have been any form of crime control mechanism in pre-colonial Ehugbo society. The responses were unanimously in the negative. Most respondents saw that there was crime control mechanism in the pre-colonial Ehugbo just as in other societies of the African continent. H.E. Casely-Heyform, 1922 even said that,

"..... before even the British came into relations with our people, we were a developed people, having our own institution, having our own ideas of government".

To think that there was crime control mechanism in pre-colonial Ehugbo is to assume there was no criminality of behavior that was abhorrent to the society, no such society has ever existed anywhere which has no norms and forms of norm violation. For example, deviance from religious norms gave rise to heretics, legal norms to criminals, cultural norms to eccentrics and health norms to sickness.

Exploratory Issue II, seeks to establish the genesis of crime control in Ehugbo: was it before, during or after the advent of imperialism that crime control came into being? It is evidenced that Ehugbo prior to the advent of colonialism for peace to reign.

EXPLORATORY ISSUE III, Sought to know whether it was the colonial master that taught the natives judicial process of dealing with criminals/deviants. It is pertinent to quote Simon Ottenberg, (1971:96-97).

"the resolution of conflict and dispute in Ehugbo falls largely to the elders. When these Old men sit down to discuss a matter, it is Ehugbo sitting".

Ottenberg holds that it is a well laid out and sustained phenomenon that pervaded the whole of the society. There was a form of court process which stretched from juvenile to the more complicated adult matters. Nonetheless, there was no notable case of miscarriage of justice in the long history of the process in Ehugbo.

ANALYSIS:

The Ehugbo pre-colonial criminal justice system was highly organized. It spanned from juvenile to adult courts which treated misdemeanors, civil and criminal cases. For instance, Ehugbo will treat as an accident the death of one of two underage children at play and would not visit with the same punishment on an adult who waylays and kills another adults in any circumstances.

The philosophy of Ehugbo criminal justices was that no criminal should go unpunished and no innocent person should suffer unjust treatment. The researcher mentioned earlier in this work that the Ehugbo believes that an injury to one is an injury to all because of their closely knit relationship.

“No person may be punished if he has not been heard” echoed one of my sources who insisted that it was for this singular reason that the Ehugbo created courts of sorts in every place and for all kinds of misunderstanding.

Simon Ottenberg’s observation that “the resolution of conflict and dispute at Afikpo falls largely to the elders”. Otteberg- (1971:96-97). He further state that, “when these old men sit down to discuss a matter, it is Afikpo sitting down”, which pictures the wisdom and authority vested on the court of the elders fortunately, certain cases never gets heard in these courts. However, and as will be shown later, things changes with the coming of colonial rules, some of the cases which ordinarily should have been head and dispensed off speedily within the village or Ehugbo courts were now allowed to linger and escalate. This created its bad blood among the Ehugbo people who eroded the authority of these elders.

The Ehugbo criminals justice system became even more appreciated because of the involvement of the kinsmen and relations of the disputants and the accused. In this circumstance, one was always very sure to be heard without bias except when one had become notoriously known to and the community. At times, first offenders are given minimal sentences and punishment. The Ehugbo courts have graduated cause.

Crimes in Ehugbo are categories. There are male and female crimes and with different sentences that are handed down. For instance, a case of homicide may attract as little as exile while certain cases of robbery will be visited with capital punishment. (Death by burying one alive or necklace “punishment according to Otu (20030. The guiding principle was prevailing circumstance environment and law, which was operational at the time.

The exective Grades (Ottenbery, 1971:71-85) who make the laws, also enforce it. So they will best interpret their environment and circumstance. Their words were finals in the pre-colonial Ehugbo. When they legislate on a matter with their staff of authority and the symbol of prohibition, “Omu”, (the tender part of the palm frond) which is take round the market on the big market day “Eke”, becomes law and every citizen was obligated to obey it.

Conclusion:

This work has relied heavily on point of view and is further strengthening the conclusion that behavior lie in the person-situation complex.

In this study of pre-colonial crime control in Ehugbo (an African society), we have examined the hypothetical genesis of crime control and concluded that the Ehugbbo had evolved an efficient crime control mechanism that gave the society stability and enhanced its growth and development.

We also found out that Ehugbo received the white man first as trading partners, later as missionaries, and then, as powers of government. The governmental aspect in colonial hands emasculated them and built a structure upon an existing structure. It was resisted because it disorganized the society’s system.

We have stated that the Ehugbo had achieved stability and equilibrium at its cultural system which included a well laid out systematic criminal justice system. However, we also in the course of this research found out that crime since the introduction of colonialism and its systems, had increased in frequency and sophistication. This is not only due to the initial shock on the system but largely to urbanization, to industrialization which encourages migration to new clusters where people hardly know one another.

The unemployment situation genders all kinds of crimes and criminality. The concentration of amenities in the urban centers lure young able bodied men and women out of the farms that would have emerge them gainfully. All these in addition to the received system of crime control encourage criminality. Institutions of remand are turned into control encourage criminality. Institutions of remand are turned into training

grounds for more criminals Corruption which came at the wake a colonialism has also made a mince meat of the criminal justice system and crime control mechanism.

The situation is this bad because the two systems are at crossroads. It is made worse because the received system is in the denial stage. It denies the existence of the traditional pre-colonial crime control mechanism and therefore its effectiveness. It labels the traditional system barbaric and brutal for the only one reason that it was not introduced by the colonial masters.

Again, the Received System (RS) was introduced abolition to protect a segment, not the whole. It was introduced to protect the European traders, missionaries and those who had been converted to their religion. It was an imposition. It did not evolve. It was mechanistic and so troublesome. It tilted the society to a side.

Recommendation:

The problem created is the escalation of crime, its frequency and sophistication has become a social problem needing solution. The enquiry into the functional existence of the Ehugbo society and its adaptation, and most importantly why the society, which ought to have stabilized, or reached equilibrium was still grappling with a problem it ought to have overcome, revealed the presence of unctiguous elements in the same society. a crime control mechanism had existed in the Ehugbo society before another called the "Received system" was introduced and which has fought to no appreciable success to obliterate the former, is responsible for the disequilibrium situation not just in Ehugbo but the whole of the African society.

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