
AN EXAMINATION OF CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER PROCEDURES IN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN SOCIETIES OF AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines crime and public order procedures in traditional and modern societies of Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. The paper predicates its analysis on some propositions extracted from the structural functional theory. On methodology, the paper relies substantially on secondary method of data collection which it analyses using content analysis. The paper argues that the security agencies alone cannot curb crime in Akwa Ibom state going by the high rate of crime in the country today. Accordingly, there is the urgent need for partnership and synergy between security agencies and traditional crime control measures/institutions to enhance crime control and public order effectiveness in Akwa Ibom state. The paper therefore, recommends among other things, that government at the state and national levels should make policies that will create avenue for partnership and synergy between the security agencies and traditional institutions all geared towards effective crime control and public order.

Keywords: Crime, Crime Control, Public Order, Public Order Procedures, Traditional Society, Modern Society, Akwa Ibom State

Introduction

Over the years in Nigeria, tackling crime and maintaining public order has always been supported by successive governments and their agencies even when the country was still under colonial rule. This is as a result of the fact that every human society has specific measures by which the behaviour of its members is regulated in the overall interest and wellbeing of the members (Adebayo, 2013). There is therefore no known society where individuals are left to do as they like without some form of control (Essien, 2009). According to Box (2000), for some time now (in the last 3 decades or so), The Nigerian society and in particular Akwa Ibom State has been plagued with frightening crimes with the attendant consequences considered to be causing a lot of damage and destruction to the society. This unpleasant development has created a lot of concern amongst scholars, religious leaders, government and non-governmental organizations alike. According to Clifford (2000), this concern has been expressed in the media (print and electronic), conferences, seminars and symposia, all in an attempt to meet a common ground on its control.

As rightly stated by Colcord (2003), what constitutes crime varies from society to society or culture to culture and from time to time. It is pertinent to note here that before the coming of western civilization and the penal system in Africa and indeed Nigeria, traditional African societies like those in Akwa Ibom state had some means of crime control which served then as instruments to maintain public order. Emmanuel (2000), opines that these traditional methods of crime control were measures the society used to encourage conformity to values and norms. There were various channels traditionally through which societies in present day Akwa Ibom state control crime differently from those of the modern society as this study will unravel. It was and it is still a fact that traditional societies, did not and still do not have written laws or codes to guide conduct as observed in modern societies but it had well established institutions for controlling crime and maintaining social as well as public order.

Akintola (2000), observes that in modern societies, legislative bodies make laws, the executive implement the laws while the judiciary interprets. As of old, there were no clear cut distinction vis-à-vis

divisions of labour as to who should handle what or not. At the same time, no society has ever existed without rules, customs, norms and laws that explain relationships between individuals and groups. According to Akak (2000), the traditional methods of crime control, though primitive as it were, were very useful in the true sense of it, but as the society became more complex via modernization, urbanization and globalization, the traditional institutions became increasingly disengaged from the process of maintaining law and order and by extension public order. However, it is pertinent to point out here that the traditional set up has not been completely upstaged in many societies in Akwa Ibom state. Accordingly, this study will examine crime and public order procedures in traditional and modern societies of Akwa Ibom state.

Methodology

The data that was used for this study was generated from secondary sources using documentary method. Accordingly, textbooks, journals, periodicals, monographs, seminars and conference papers, unpublished research works, newspapers and magazines, internet materials, etc, constituted the sources of data for the study. Thus, relevant data and information were collated from the foregoing sources and studied.

The secondary data that were generated in the course of this study were analysed using content analysis. Content analysis has to do with the rigorous analysis and examination of written records and documents in a critical, analytical, descriptive and explanatory manner so as to make generalizations and meaning from such written records and documents. According to Kerlinger (1977), content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, quantitative and qualitative description of the manifest content of communication. The central objective of content analysis is to convert recorded data or information into data, which can be treated in a scientific manner so that a body of knowledge may be built up. Content analysis as a method of analysing qualitative data was used in this study to examine crime and public order procedures in traditional and modern societies of Akwa Ibom state.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts structural functional theory as its theoretical framework. Structural functional theory, which is also known as structural functionalism, originated in the sphere of social anthropology in the writings of Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski. Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton and Marion Levy later developed it in the field of Sociology. Structural functionalism is a derivative of the general systems theory. Just like the systems theory, structural functional theory is also concerned with the phenomenon of system maintenance and regulation.

The structural functional theory emphasizes the role of structures and functions in understanding the political processes and the conditions under which structures can perform and the functions could be fulfilled. The basic theoretical proposition of structural functional theory therefore is that all systems exist to perform functions through their structures. A structure is a pattern of behaviour that has become a standard feature of a social system. Structures are arrangements within the system that carry out the functions, which could be from the system. Eminue (2001:90), defines a structure as “any human organizations that can do things and have an effect on human beings and other human organization – a family, a public corporation, a court, a bureau, a legislature, etc”. A function on the other hand denotes the impact of a structure on another structure and the interrelationships among various structures. Marion Levy (cited in Eminue, 2001:89), defines a function as a “condition or state of affairs resultant from the operation of a structure through time”. Function relates to the activity of a structure and its external effects. One can see from the foregoing that structural functionalism revolves around two main concepts namely, structures and functions; and it is based on this that Varma (1983), raised three basic questions: (1) What basic functions are performed in a given political system? (2) By what structures? (3) Under what conditions? He emphasizes that while functions deal with the consequences of patterns of actions, structures have to do with arrangements within the systems that actually perform the functions.

According to Almond and Powell (1966), the basic assumptions of structural functionalism are as follows:

1. That the society is a single inter-connected system in which each of its elements performs a specific function and whose basic goal is the maintenance of the systemic equilibrium;
2. That the society, being a system as a whole consists of its numerous parts, which are inter-related;

3. That the dominant tendency of the social system is towards stability, which is maintained by its own in-built mechanism;
4. That the system's ability to resolve internal conflicts is usually an admitted fact;
5. That changes in the system are natural, but they are neither sudden nor revolutionary, but are always gradual and adaptive as well as adjustive;
6. That the system has its own structure, with its own aims principles and functions.

Structural functional theory is considered more apt and appropriate in this paper because of its utility and analytical strength in providing explanations for the interactive effects of certain elements and their consequences on other elements within the same political system. In other words, the examination of crime and public order procedures in traditional and modern societies of Akwa Ibom state can rightly be explained and analysed in the light of the structural functional theory. The major proposition of structural functionalism is that all systems have parts (structures) that can be identified and which behave (function) in a coordinated and interdependent manner to achieve the objectives intended for them by the society in order to maintain systemic equilibrium, stability and development. As such, tackling of crimes and other public order procedures are put in place to perform certain functions arising from societal demands to ensure functional and operational stability and progress of the system.

Traditional Methods of Crime Control

Traditional methods of crime control were/are the various traditional means through which societies controlled crime. These include the elders' councils, chiefs, village heads, etc, whose functions are the interpretation of the code of conduct and behaviour of the subsisting community as passed down from generation to generation. Crime on the other hand, is any act or behaviour which violates the norms (normative behaviour) of a society, while crime control refers to efforts and procedures aimed at tackling crime. Traditional African societies had well organized and well established systems of administration where public order was provided and maintained; where laws were made and implemented; and where inter-communal and inter-tribal conflicts were settled (Itodo and Onodugo, 2016; Peters and Bassey, 2019). Akak (2000), opines that traditional methods of controlling crime and maintaining security is not of universal acceptance as it is culturally relative. These ways to a great extent have to deal with pattern of organization and belief system of the people. When people are bound together by strong cultural ties, community consciousness, well established tradition, crime could be reduced to the minimum. Also, Dambazau (cited in Akak, 2000), notes that traditional crime control and indeed the prevention and control of criminal behaviour in Nigerian communities has its roots in kinship and extended family system. Within the lineage group, the leader of the group, usually the eldest male person provides leadership example as he is the model or point of contact. Above the lineage group are the clans in which authority is also subordinated to a figure who is not merely a model or point of contact, but who also helps to conduct the affairs of the clan. He is also armed with the power of sanctions against offenders.

It is important to note here that among the Ibibios of Akwa Ibom state, such lineage system is made up of a number of territorially kin-based units. Each unit is made up of economically independent households and each household recognizes the authority of the compound head. The compound head has numerous rituals, moral and legal rights and obligations. He offers sacrifices for the welfare of his compound members whom he helps to extricate from the ritual, social and legal problems. The system of organizing the family in the pattern of kinship and extended family is significant in understanding crime prevention and control in the traditional Nigerian setting. Control of members of a family was simple but effective and in most cases democratic. The family which was the source of stability and social control was united under the control of the oldest person. But the coming of modernity has affected the kinship and extended family system and social control is no longer as it used to be (Ayuk, Owan and Uyang, 2013).

African traditional religion was also regarded as one of the best ways of controlling crime in traditional societies of Akwa Ibom state. Religion may be viewed in a narrow sense to refer to a set of theological beliefs held and rituals performed by members of a particular group. In a broad sense, it involves the integral part of culture of the people (Ayuk, Owan and Uyang, 2013). According to Durkheim (1961), religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things (things set apart and forbidden), beliefs and practices which unite people into one single moral community. Also Turner (2003),

sees religion as the control of men by the establishment of rules which creates mutual obligations in order to glue social relationship. Religion has also been seen as a source of strength, consolation, and essential for moral education, moral endeavour and moral achievement (Akiba, 2012). According to Emmanuel (2000), it was the religious ties that created propitious leverage for strong community ties and less crime in African traditional societies. In relation to criminal behaviour, African traditional religion has expressedly sought to solve these problems because it legitimizes our values and provides reason why certain values should be preferred to others (Essoh, 2004).

It is worth mentioning here that some scholars see the use of curses as a means of maintaining public order in many traditional African societies (Ekong, 1983; Essoh, 2004). The use of curses by traditional leaders and elders helps to compel people to respect traditional taboos and laws, thereby serving as a control procedure. Curses were generally feared because of the belief that defaulters were to be inflicted with sickness, sudden death or other calamities. Some groups and organizations also play important roles in the maintenance of public order in traditional African societies. Among the prominent ones in Akwa Ibom state were groups like age grades, social clubs and women association, as identified by Ezenibe (2000). Ezenibe observes that age grade organizations played very important roles in the socio-cultural life of the people particularly in the area under study. They performed both social and political functions and inculcated healthy ideas and objectives in their members and further acted as a disciplinary body for erring members. This was done by subjecting such members who violated the societal norms to sanction and punishment and with this, public order was maintained.

Crime and Public Order Control Groups in Traditional Societies of Akwa Ibom State

In Akwa Ibom state, there existed and still exist several groups and bodies that played/play significant roles in maintaining social and public order in their respective domains. Some of these groups are still in existence and include the following: *Ekpe society*, *Iban Isong*, *Ekpri Akata*, and age groups. They assisted and still assist in no small measures in crime control in Akwa Ibom state. It is important to explain these procedures and groups.

- a) **Ekpe Society:** Ekpe cult was and still remains the highest of all traditional institutions in Uruan, Ibeno and related communities in Akwa Ibom State. Ekpe was and is still an instrument of government and authority which is known as very powerful. Ekpe helps in the formulation and enforcement of traditional policies and authority. According to Udo (1983), and Ekong (1983), Ekpe society plays political, economic, cultural and even legislative and judicial roles. Ekpe society settles conflicts/disputes; and cases involving individuals, groups and cases between different clans and other parties and sanctions as stated by Talbot (1912), were enforced in different ways such as:
 - i. By confining offenders to their homes.
 - ii. By preventing the movement or use of culprits' property.
 - iii. Offenders were/are made to swear to *mbiam ekpe*' (traditional concoctions) oath which can lead to culprit's sudden death by swelling if guilty.
- b) **Ekpri Akata:** This is a male dominant and oriented group whose concerns are to maintain moral sanctity of the communities. It is still known as one of the strongest forces of correction and moral cleanser in most communities in Akwa Ibom state. *Ekpri Akata* disposes clairvoyance to all sorts of crimes and scandals committed by Ibibios – Ibeno communities. Merton (2000), opines that the primary function of *ekpri akata* is the detection of anti-social behaviour, exposing those who commit such anti-social behaviour and ridiculing them into correction. Members usually meet at night to discuss misbehavior and immoral acts of individuals or groups in the community. With disguised voices and sounds, members move around the village in pursuant of moral crusade and cleansing in order to ensure that public order prevails.

Young girls who attempted abortion, those who stole as well as men and women found committing adultery were/and are the greatest targets and victims. *Ekpri Akata* uses songs to rebuke, ridicule and expose so many unholy practices of members of their society/communities. In the olden days and up till today, *Ekpri Akata* was and is the mouth piece of the public concerning secret happenings in the villages. It helped to expose criminals, theft, immorality, etc. The operation

of *Ekpri Akata* as at then and even now was very necessary and useful as means of getting rid of what society termed immorality, illegality and slander.

- c) **Iban Isong:** The *Iban* group in Ibibio and Ibeno areas of Akwa Ibom state were mostly elderly women. They aimed at sustaining discipline and repudiating immoral acts, irresponsible behaviours and utterances. They serve to protect the integrity of the women by training them in moral and domestic responsibilities and upholding the moral value/virtue of those involved. This group does not tolerate indiscriminate utterances or blackmail of the women. In extreme situations, they usually sing and dance before the offenders. They exercise unquestionable authority over the affairs of women in the community with the fundamental objective of protecting the decency of womanhood. Omagu (2000), observes that their laws were usually harsh on women who stole in the market places or farms. When caught, their hands and feet were tied and mouth stuffed with dirt. In extreme cases, the culprit's body would be smeared with charcoal and paraded before the public. The offender could be banned from future participation in the affairs concerning women in the community. This group played prominent role in the Aba women riot of 1929 which forced a reform on the tax law and indirect rule system in Eastern Nigeria (Essoh and Oluwabamide, 2006).

Crime and Public Order Control Methods in Traditional Societies of Akwa Ibom State

According to Inyang (cited in Iton *et al.*, 2024), there were various traditional crime control mechanisms which the traditional societies of Akwa Ibom state utilized to control crime and bring about public order. These include the elders, chiefs, village heads as well as traditional secret societies of *Ekpo*, *Ekpe* and *Akata* among others, whose functions were the interpretation of the code of conduct and behaviour of the community as laid down from generation to generation. For Essien (2009), Akwa Ibom state up till date, engages in traditional practices as they assist in controlling crime and bringing about public order using diverse methods such as *Mbiam*, *Ukang*, *Ekpe-Abon*, *Ekpo*, etc, among others. These crime prevention and tackling methods have indeed remained the hope of many rural communities in Akwa Ibom today. Similarly, Iton *et al.* (2024), note that the traditional crime control measures among Akwa Ibom people include: *Idiong*, *Mbiam*, *Ukang*, *Ekpo*, *Akata*, *Ekpe*, *Iban Ison*, *Nka Nkparawa*, *Asian Uboikpa*, *Ayai*, *Adagha*, *Ibed Ukot* and *Ibed Eyeyen*. All these methods were found to be useful and effective in crime control and in the maintenance of public order. It is pertinent to explain some of these control measures.

- a) **The Mbiam (Oath):** This involves oath taking by swearing to juju. Crime suspects were made to swear by *Mbiam* to ascertain their innocence or guilt. The *Mbiam* was and is still so potent and effective that people were scared to commit crime because of its resultant effect of sudden death by swelling. A recent phenomenon in Use Offot, Uyo, reveals the potency of this control measure as some young people who terrorized the community at night were made to undergo this ordeal and those guilty got swollen and eventually died (Essoh, 2018).
- b) **Uwang (Tying of Palm Frond Leave);** This measure was and is still very effective in the traditional set up because it scares people from stealing and *uwang* is usually hung on trees, fruits or on farm lands to prevent people from trespassing farmlands, stealing or harvesting any fruit or farm produce without the owner's consent. Often times also, it serves as scare crow to birds which attack crops in farmlands.
- c) **Uyere Nkang (Rubbing of Charcoal):** A person caught red handed in the act of a crime or deviance from societal or community norm(s) is paraded stark naked with charcoal rubbed or smeared on his/her body and such a person is made to dance around the whole village. The shame associated with *uyere nkang* compels would-be criminals to suppress their criminal inclinations. That served as deterrence to delinquents thereby furthering the drive for public order.
- d) **Public Denouncement:** Public denouncement was and is still a measure in crime control in traditional societies of Akwa Ibom State. It carries with it some economic sanctions which might prevent the offenders from engaging in any type of economic relationship with any person in the village or community and nobody will buy from the offender in the village. Public

denouncement serves as deterrent to people intending to commit crime and make others to abstain from such act, thus contributing to social and public order.

Analysis of the Procedures of Crime Control and Public Order in Modern Society of Akwa Ibom State

The procedure of crime control in the modern society of Akwa Ibom state is different from that of the traditional set up. In the modern society, crime control measures have assumed different dimensions because there is competition among interest groups which are in conflict with each other due to unequal distribution of wealth and resources which equally results in inequality in economic and social powers. Security tends to be more practiced than in the traditional set up.

Haralambos and Holborn (2000), observe that government agencies involved in crime control for public order in modern societies are the police, court and the correctional services. The police are involved in the arrest of criminals and in most cases the criminals are handed over to the court to determine such case or cases. However, besides the police, it is necessary to mention other agencies involved in crime control in the drive to sustain public order in modern societies. For instance, we have the Immigration Services, the Custom Services, National Agency for Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), the Nigerian Civil Defence and Security Corps (NCDSC) and a few other ones established by the Federal Government of Nigeria since the formulation and control of policies on security agencies fall under exclusive legislation. The Federal Road Safety Corps for instance deals with erring drivers who are unable to standardize their vehicles and sometimes lack vehicle documentation in terms of road worthiness of such vehicle or where drivers do not adhere to traffic regulations. All the foregoing security agencies are saddled with the responsibility of enforcing ethical behaviours in the Nigerian society. It is also interesting to add that in the Nigerian society, the foregoing government agencies and many such other agencies established by the government regulate the conduct of people in the public space.

The media is another important procedure of crime control in Akwa Ibom today. It is all obvious that every society's growth, survival and continuity depend among other things on a system of communication. Even during the traditional era, the traditional media played important roles in crime control and public order. Most of the crimes committed during that era were exposed through effective communication in the villages or communities. Today in modern society, the case is different. Now, the mass media plays prominent role. The mass media comprises the institutions and techniques by which specialized groups employ technological devices such as newspaper, magazines, radio, television, films, social media, etc, to disseminate symbolic contents to large heterogeneous and widely dispersed audiences.

In the modern societies of Akwa Ibom, the mass media could also be said to be one of the procedures of crime control because the different members of the audience are fed with relevant information pertaining to crime. It is also necessary to mention the new media (social media) in which basic news about crime is presented on different platforms. Basically, the mass media reveal out important facts about crime by describing the crime trend and giving accurate data and information about criminal activities. Religious groups or bodies could also be confirmed as procedures of crime control. Religious doctrines are taught to members of each group or body in their congregations. Since at least two of the outstanding religions in Nigeria i.e. Christianity and Islam adopt the Bible and the Koran respectively as means of disseminating their belief system to the members, it would be agreed that these tools are used to inculcate discipline among the members and also to explain the resultant consequences or effects of crime in modern society which therefore serve as a platform for not only crime control but also social and public order.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined crime and public order procedures in traditional and modern societies of Akwa Ibom state. While traditional procedures rely on traditional institutions like elders councils, chiefs, village heads, traditional cultural practices, etc., to promote lawful behaviour; modern methods rely on the law and official government agencies to curb criminal activities. However, modernization and civilization has brought some major shift from traditional methods of crime control to modern methods of crime control. These shifts have also affected the cultural practices of the people. Unfortunately, the high rate of

crime in Nigeria today shows that the security agencies alone cannot curb crime. There is therefore the urgent need for partnership between security agencies and traditional crime control measures/institutions in Akwa Ibom state, and Nigeria at large. Based on the foregoing, the paper makes the following recommendations:

1. There should be partnership and synergy between traditional crime control institutions and modern crime control agencies to enhance or improve crime control effectiveness in Akwa Ibom state.
2. Government at the state and national levels should make policies that will create avenue for partnership and synergy between the security agencies and traditional institutions all geared towards effective crime control.
3. Lastly, the aspects of traditional methods that are repugnant to natural justice and offend morality should be jettisoned for their partnership and collaboration with the security agencies to work effectively.

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