RESEARCH ARTICLE

METHOD OF SOCIAL CRIME CONTROL IN TRADITIONAL IGBO SOCIETY: A STUDY OF IKEDURU COMMUNITY

JOSHUA OKECHUKWU ONWULIRI

Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Every society of the globe has its methods of controlling the social behavior of its citizens in order to attend a desired goal of harmony and peaceful co-existence. Social crime in traditional Igbo-society consisted of violence of standardized ways of behaviour such as murder, theft, adultery, rape, incest, suicide and so on. They are conventional crime which had far-reaching regrettable consequences not only for the offender, but, also his immediate family and close relations. These are the problems the researcher has been desired to address, to see how such deviant behaviours or crimes are controlled in Ikeduru traditional society. In achieving this goal, agents of social control and local machineries are well utilized within Ikeduru cultural settings. This paper, however, adopts social control theory.

Keywords: Ikeduru traditional society, social crime, social control theory.

Corresponding Author

Joshua Okechukwu Onwuliri
Telephone Number: +234034899383

1.0. INTRODUCTION

There were various channels traditionally through which societies controlled crime. This may include the elder councils, chiefs, village heads, traditional oracles, and so on. Their functions were the interpretation of the codes of conduct and behavior of the subsisting community members as pass down from generation to generation. Before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria, Igbo people had in their tradition an elaborate organizational structure, in which their social life was anchored and upon which their philosophies of life were propagated. Ikeduru is not exceptional.

Aguene (2001:62) made this points more clearer when he observed that "in the traditional society, the absence of any organized system of public control does not imply that such a society had no form of social control in which their laws were enforced; he further maintained that, in those societies, all their institution, patterns of social interactions, and customary, practices served to regulate the relationship between the members of the society and thus, maintain law and order. The ideas here are in line with the views that the traditional Ikeduru society, before their contact with Western civilization, had adequate institutional mechanisms that serviced their social life.

1.1. The Study Area

Ikeduru Local Government Area is located in the Western part of Imo State, in Southern Nigeria, it was previously carved out of Mbaitoli Ikeduru Local Government and consists of twenty-four towns. Via: Inyishi, Owuala, Avuvu, Amakohia, Umudim, Atta, Ngugu, Atta West, Owubinubi, Ikembara, Ugirike, Umuonyeukwu, Abazu, Akabo, Amatta, Iho-Dimeze, Ebikoro and Uzoagba (Okechie, 2012, p.23).

Traditionally, Ikeduru people are basically republican in nature because they had no centralized system of government. This is what Afigbo (2007, p. 64), refers to as "village republic" as against the "presidential monarchy", while there may be variations in traditional nomenclatures in different parts of Igbo land, the philosophies, methodologies and customs in achieving social order were always the same. The basic organizational unit in traditional Igbo government is the village administration which consisted of the (oldest) members of each family or lineage group as the sentatives in the village government. In this regard, Igbo government has sometimes been called a gerontacracy (Isichei, 1976, p.90). This is known as government by the council of elders, hence they were regarded as "senior citizens" by virtue of the spiritual and social positions they occupy in Ikeduru traditional society. Most of the time, the council of elders performed the functions of the three arms of the government, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.

Ikeduru society was carved out of the former Mbaitoli/Ikeduru Local Government Area in 1989. Its headquarters situate at Iho along Iho-Ubaakiri road Mbaitoli. It shares boundaries with Isiala Mbano on the North, Owerri North Local Government Area on the South, Aboh

Mbaise and Ahiazu Local Government Area on the West. Okehie, (2012, p.26) had described the modus virendi of traditional Ikeduru society as based on human living. This refers to as way of life emphatically centered upon human interests and values, a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, consideration and compassion. In other words, the social order and character of traditional Ikeduru society guaranteed honest living and maximum security of life and property (Ekwuru, 1999, p.45).

A lot has been written about Ikeduru people but not much has been written about them on the issue of traditional social crime control. As in any other African society before the contact with the European cultural infection the Ikeduru society had their own patterned of organization of social life.

2.0. CONCEPTUALIZATION AND THEORITICAL Framework

2.1. Conceptualization

Social Control

Like any other society, traditional Ikeduru society has various mechanisms by which it regulates the behavior of human beings in the society. This is what is generally referred to as the social control or crime control. Social control focuses on those various means or mechanisms by which a society exercises its authority over its members and enforces conformity to its norms. According to Otite (1979: 34), "belief systems rather than specific laws, guided what people do and universally serve to control behavior. Social control aims at preventing deviant behaviour by human beings in society. It represents the prevention and control of both criminal and non-criminal behaviour.

As the researcher remarked before, a lot has been written about the tradition of Ikeduru society but not much has been written specifically about social crime control in traditional Ikeduru society. This work is a modest attempt towards addressing this gap. Specifically, the paper examines the concepts of social crime control in traditional Ikeduru society, it examines the agents and mechanisms of social control in the traditional Ikeduru society.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on social control theory, which assumes that human beings can be induced to behave in conformity with societal standards and expectations. It was Reckless (1967, pp.63-90), who developed the "containment" version of control theory by arguing that individuals are differentially immunized against the urge to engage in criminal behaviour and that this immunity depends largely on the control exercised by their communities or society. For Reckless, there are two levels of containment: the 'outer' or external containment, and the 'inner' or internal containment. The outer containment concerns the social pressures that impinge on the individual and cause him to disobey the norms or laws of his/her group or

community, while the inner or internal containment has to do with the individual's self-control or self-discipline. According to control theorists, "what causes conformity is social control over the individual, and therefore the absence of social control causes deviance" (Thio, 2001: 27).

The other version" of control theory that is relevant in this study is Hirschi's (1969: 21) "social bond" perspective which focuses on the individual's self-control. The argument here is that when people's social bond with intimate groups (e.g. family, church, school) are strong, it ensures conformity, whereas when they are weak, the result will be deviant acts. According to Hirschi, conformity depends on the degree to which people are attached and committed to, and involved and believe in, conventional people and institutions (Thio, 2001:.28). Put simply, one would not like to disappoint or embarrass one's family, church, or school by misbehaving or getting involved in anti-social or criminal conducts. This was particularly true of traditional Igbo society in Ikeduru community that had all the trappings of a close-knit group.

The next version of control theory relevant to this study is Braithwaite's (1989, p.55) shaming theory, which is designed to show social disapproval and humiliation of the individual offender. According to Braithwaite, there are two types of shaming. These are: reintegrative' shaming, which is imposed on the offender as a corrective measure, and 'disintegrative' shaming which has to do with disowning and rejecting the offender.

This paper is based generally on-the control theory of Reckless and more specifically on a combination of Hirschi's social bond theory and Braithwaite's shaming theory. Traditional Igbo Ikeduru society was based on strong social bonds or solidarity with the nuclear and extended family, as well as the kin group and community. This is because the people prided themselves as "being their brothers' keepers", in sickness and in health, no matter the circumstances (except perhaps in crime). In reintegrative shaming, offenders who committed abominable offences against the gods and the ancestors were, in most cases, required to make necessary sacrifices to appease the gods and undergo some ritual cleansing and purification. Thereafter, the offender was accepted back into the society, with all his/her rights and privileges restored. This is an aspect of restorative justice.

Disintegrative shaming, following the commission of abominable acts, has to do with denouncing or disowning the offender. Sometimes, the offender's house was burnt down and this was usually followed by banishment or sending the person on exile. This was the worst type of humiliation and rejection of an individual with strong social bonds to his family and community.

In some cases, punishment meted out to an offender was extended to their families and close relatives, as in cases of murder, theft, rape and incest. In suicide, for example, the victim was "punished" by not according him/her the customary burial and mourning rites. Any family

that violated the injunctions was in danger of being fined and ostracized until necessary reparations and cleansing rituals were carried out. In this way, the family, including the extended family, kept a close watch over the activities of their members to ensure that no individual member was allowed to drag the good name and reputation of the family into the mud for selfish reasons. Consequently, people tried as much as possible not to shame, and incur the wrath of, their families, close relatives and community through criminal and other anti-social behaviours.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

This paper derived from both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources were based on unstructured oral interviews and conversation with a number of Ikeduru elders forum. The secondary sources, on the other hand, derived from documented accounts of the oral tradition of the people by historians, anthropologists and other researchers.

4.0. DISCOURSES

4.1. Social Crime in Ikeduru Society

Unlike the present English legal system in use in Nigeria today, what constituted social crime in traditional Ikeduru society was not codified. In short, any act or conduct that violated the cherished norms .and values of the community or group, and which was, visited with severe sanction, can be referred to as social crime or an offence could be minor or serious depending on the circumstances. However, there were some major offences which amounted to serious crimes. These were referred to as 'abominations', due to their propensity to arouse, strong indignation and condemnation among the people. The most serious offences in Ikeduru society were also seen the same way in most other societies. Igbo (2007:l43) has explained that 'traditional crimes or social crime which were generally regarded as abominations, include murder, theft, adultery, rape, incest and suicide lie identified three major types of offences or crimes in traditional Igbo society as offences against individuals, offences against the community, and offences against the gods or spirit world.

Offences against individuals' include assault, stealing of one's property, murder and serious breaches of trust. In these offences, the victims and their relatives took appropriate measures in seeking redress or revenge. Such measures often led to an endless cycle of offences and retaliations, including killings and counter killings (blood-feuds) between families and communities. Offences against the community' include acts of sabotage, like aiding and abetting enemies of the community, witchcraft, murder, adultery and incest, which were believed to bring about terrible consequences and woes to both the offender and the entire community. Offences against the community also attracted severe punishment. In this regard, Oputa (1975:l1-12) has noted that in traditional Igbo society, notorious evil-doers were usually got rid of, like we now get rid of insanity nuisance, by removing it. He stated that

these evil men were removed either publicly, or put to death, usually by burning, in the case of notorious witches, or by being thrown into a ditch in die case of notorious thieves. Such killing today would amount to murder. But in traditional Ikeduru jurisprudence, it was justifiable homicide and crude justice, and an effective deterrent to evil-doing.

Offences against the gods or spirit world were actions and conducts that were believed to offend the gods and ancestors of the land, with serious consequences for the living. These include many of the offences against the community, as well as the desecration of sacred places and shrines, and the killing of sacred animals associated with shrines and the earth goddess. According to Ifemesia (1979: 49), "the concept of Mmo (or Mmuo) was based on the idea that the long-dead ancestors continued to take an active interest in the affairs of their living descendants". The author further pointed out that "offences against 'muo' were not private matters but public issues, which provided one of those rare occasions on which an assembly of the whole village... and beyond, was convened; and the consequences could be dreadful for the offender". Offenders in this category of offences were either killed, ostracized, or banished from the community in order to placate the gods and ancestors so as to avoid a general evil vengeance being unleashed on the whole community by the offended forces in the spirit world.

4.2. Traditional Mechanism of Social Crime Control
These are some forms of traditional mechanisms of social crime control in Ikeduru society. The notable ones include but not limited to fines and compensation, ritual cleansing; trial by ordeals; masquerade institutions, confinement, ostracism, and banishment

Fines and Compensation
The imposition of fines on offenders, usually in the forms of compensation to victims and at times as ransom to the entire society. Furthermore, in most traditional African societies, it was a popular method of crime control. According to Bascom (1960:p.50) this method played a key role in the maintenance of order and social control in traditional societies and was essentially necessitated by the fact that social control and behaviors were tied to an individual's sense of reciprocity with the group to which he belonged. In this respect, groups were largely responsible for enforcing restitution orders against offenders in favour of victims. It must be emphasized that apart from serving as an instrument of social control. This method was a veritable tool of conflict resolution especially between offenders and their victims. Unlike formal resolution   in criminal courts, this method ensured that offenders and victims lived in peace and harmony after the former had duly compensated the latter.

Ritual Cleansing
In traditional societies, violation of certain norms and values were considered as pollution of the land *(aruruali)* and sometimes as direct insult or affront to the gods. In such circumstances, the appropriate remedial measure was a form of ritual cleansing offences such as adultery, murder and incest usually attracted this method of punishment. Ritual cleansing

especially with respect to adultery, subject women to public ridicule and indignity and consequently served as serious deterrence mechanism for potential offenders.

Trial by Ordeals

This is another important and recognized method of social control in traditional African societies. For the purpose of the study, trial by ordeals will be defined as a traditional method of proving the innocence of guilt of serious offences beyond any reasonable doubt. Generally, trial by ordeals involves oath taking, invocation of juju, the use of boiling palm oil, and the administration of traditional medicinal concoction in different forms which were usually taken by drinking.

Masquerade Institutions

Masquerade institutions were and still very important organs of social crime control in some traditional African societies. Ishichie (1976, p.44) had observed that members of the masquerade institutions would appear masked often at night in the role of supernatural beings and would denounce and attack offenders. Similarly, Onyeneke (1999, p.22) has noted that the personal identity of the animator of the masquerade is hidden suppressed and strictly guarded as a secret. Moreover, the hidden identity of members of the masquerade institutions provided a formidable platform for enforcing criminal laws in traditional African societies. Thus, Masquerades were even used to execute dangerous criminals in some traditional societies. In addition, masquerade institutions were also veritable organs of socialization. The application of this method, Masquarade institutions were useful for_ disciplining deviant children and women in Ikeduru by frightening them and by instilling good behaviour, conduct, obedience and truthfulness in them.

Confinement

The idea of confinement or what is today known as "imprisonment" was used as a method of punishment and indeed had become established among many traditional African societies long before the colonial era. Opara (1980, p.66) had reported that many traditional Nigerian societies had evidence of the use of places where offenders had to concur to a sentence of confinement (imprisonment) as an admission of guilt. Oral evidence also abounds to suggest that among the traditional Ikeduru people, the houses of chiefs had rooms for keeping suspects from where offenders were often sold into slavery. This was usually facilitated through the help of the much dreaded "long juju" of Arochukwu, Amadioha of Eziama Ikeduru and Ezealagaku Inyishi. The use of confinement as a method of crime control was often restricted to dangerous criminal who were often considered as "security risk".

Ostracism

Ostracism refers to the deliberate decision of isolating an offender in a traditional society. This method was and is still effective because it meant severing social contacts of friends and

relatives which entails a lot of social and psychological pains. Every case of ostracism generally had a fixed period of time and the expiration of such periods was usually accompanied by some fines which were either in cash or in kind in traditional Ikeduru society; Offences that attracted this type of punishment include, adultery, poisoning and habitual stealing. Clifford (1994:38) had observed that social ostracism in the African traditional context was usually much worse than any physical punishment or any obligation to compensate the victim.

Banishment

Banishment is the act of sending an offender away from his/her community either for a short or long period. According to Ugwuoke (2005:50), this method was also used for getting rid of dangerous criminals in traditional societies. It provided either a permanent or temporary avenue for expelling a miscreant from his community. This method was significant because, it prevented immediate action or retaliation by the victim's family and facilitated their acceptance of an indemnity and peaceful settlement with the family of the offender. Furthermore, offences that attracted short term banishment in most traditional Ikeduru society, included: persistent stealing, repeated cases of Adultery, Sexual Union with a Widow and manslaughter. On the other hand, offences which attracted long term banishment and even life exile in extreme situations like, Murder or Culpable homicide^ established cases of poisoning and treasonable felony. Banishment was a dreaded method of crime control because; it brought disgrace both to the offender and his kinsmen.

4.3. Agents of Crime Control in Traditional Ikeduru

Before the advent of colonial rule, there was rudimentary formal and informal policing in traditional law and order was maintained by militant village youths constituted by the council of elders (amala), and investigation of criminal matters was done through sooth sayers, oath swearing and sorcerers (lyamagba, 1998,p.21). In short, in traditional Ikeduru society, there were several agents of crime control. These include the family, the council of elders, vigilante age grades and militant youth groups. Others are traditional priest, diviners and deities among others. For lack of space, only the vigilante and institution of deities, will be discussed here because of their unique nature.

The Vigilante

The use of vigilante is not new in Igboland. In pre-colonial time, different Igbo communities organized night-watch parties with the aim of securing and protecting their communities from thieves and other undesirable elements. Vigilante groups were made up of able-bodied men who participated effectively in the fight against internal and external breakdown of law and order. In those days, enemies usually took advantage of the night to invade their target communities with many atrocities, including head-hunting, kidnapping for rituals or slavery, raping of the womenfolk, and vandalism. Ordinarily, the traditional setting was homogenous

with strong, close, face-to-face relationship and solidarity among the village inhabitants and these provided a kind of self-watch mechanism that was not conducive to criminal tendencies (Oputa, 1975:49).

The age grades, sometimes referred to as 'age groups' or 'age sets', and other militant youth groups were the major participants in the vigilante system across most parts of the traditional Ikeduru society. They carried out several public duties, some of which were "the execution of the laws and decisions of the council of elders and the lineage or village assembly, including the collection of dues and fines and punishment of crime..." (Ifemesia, 1979:81).

4.4. The Institution of Deities

Some villages had powerful deities which, according to their beliefs, could disorganize internal and external enemies against possible mischief. In traditional Igbo society, people feared community deities because of their belief that such deities were capable of mirroring people's mind and could punish people for mere bad intention, with or without anti-social or criminal conducts. Some misfortunes that happened to some individuals or groups in those days were seen as havoc brought upon them by deities as punishment for their bad deeds. From this background, the influence of deities and their priests or messengers in Ikeduru traditional society was so widespread that it impinged on the psyche of people and constrained their inclination to engage on serious misconduct, thereby working for the community as a potent deterrence against crime. Deities were also used in those days to resolve allegations and claims pertaining to criminal conducts, including fraudulent claims to land ownership.

A typical example of these dreaded deities were Amadioha of Eziama Ikedueru and Ezeala-anyamon of Inyishi Ikeduru were dreaded deities or oracles where people prayed not to be summoned to appear for crime-related issues. Apart from the village deities, some individuals engaged the services of the 'medicine men' to conjure the means of protecting them from criminal victimization and other related harms from criminals and 'bad people'. The magic of the medicine-men were believed to have the power to confuse the criminals from locating their targets or to make them vulnerable to easy apprehension.

5.0. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Discussions with some elders of traditional Ikeduru society confirmed that social crime investigation control in traditional Igbo society were more effective than what is obtained in present day society. References are made to "the good old days" when people went about at day-time without watching their backs and at night slept like babies with their doors open. Granted the facts that there were social crimes during the period but they were few and isolated and did not constitute serious security problems as is the case today. Among the most successful checks on social crime in any society are those stemming from traditional and

informal social mechanisms, superstition, taboos, religion, customs, shared values and moral standards in one way or the other have proceeded the laws upon which the more formal criminal justice system of an advanced societies are developed.

Ikeduru traditional society had their moral codes, customs and tradition which constituted the body of their laws. The function of the laws in the traditional setting was both pro-active and reactive. It was proactive in the sense that the awareness of the laws and the consequences of violating them served as deterrence. On the other hand, it was reactive since it was on the basis of these laws that those who violated them were sanctioned. Naturally, there was no vacuum according to our theory as to whose responsibility it was to enforce the laws and got justice done.

Competing Interest

The author declares that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript

REFERENCES

Agbo, D.J. (1995). *Igbo traditional Religion*. Chinedu Press.

Alexander, J.P. (1999). The philosophy of punishment. *Journal of criminal* Vol. (13), 42.

Basden, G.T. (2006). *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*. Nonsuch Publishing Ltd.

Ifemesla, S. (1979. *Traditional human living among the Igbo*. Fourth foundation Publisher.

Igbo, C. (1997). The masquerade institutions and social control in African societies. The case of Igboland. *African Journal of Archaeology, 1*(2), 50.

Isichie, E. (1976). *A history of Igbo people*. The Macmillan Press.

Ogbula, F.C. (2018). *Igbo institutions and customs*. University Press.

Ogbuoke, C.U. (2014). *Methods of crime and social control in Nigeria*. Echrisi and Company Press.

Reckless, W. (1916). *Crime problem*. Third Edition. Social Century Crafts.