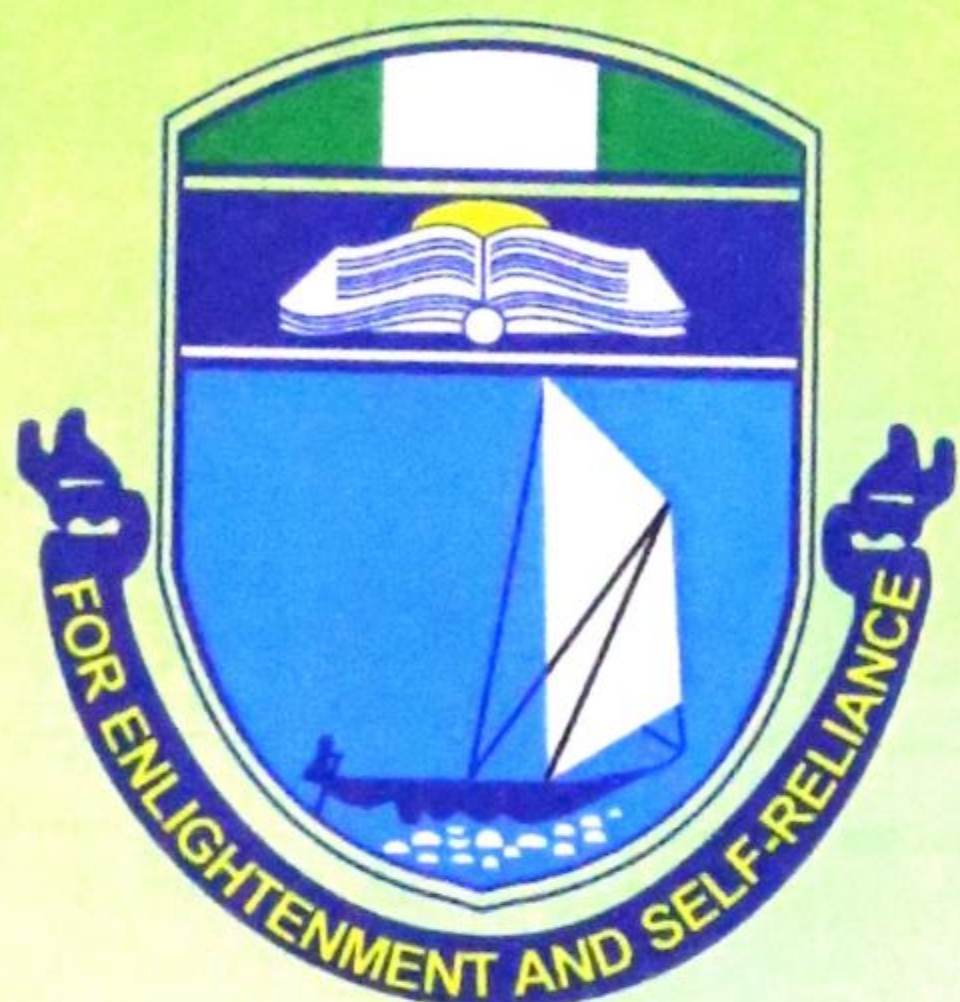




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YORUBA TRADITIONAL METHODS OF CRIME CONTROL AS PANACEA FOR SECURITY CHALLENGES AND CRIME CONTROL IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The alarming rate of criminal vices experienced in Nigeria is worrisome and it is a great concern to all and sundry. No doubt despite the provision of security agents such as the military, the police, the special mobile squad, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, the courts and among others to curtail criminal tendencies, it has not been able to vigorously fight crime to standstill. Arguably, the kind of sophisticated weapons used by the security agents have not significantly reduced crime, because of the infiltration since the security apparatus failed. It is along this line, that the paper, argues that the use of Yoruba traditional method of controlling crime would serve as a measure to reduce the crime and security challenges in all ramifications. The paper adopts analytical and descriptive methods to evaluate the use of Yoruba traditional method in controlling the wave of crime in Nigeria.

Keyword: Traditional Method, Crime, Yoruba, Insecurity, Magic

Introduction

Nigeria as a country today is confronted with myriads of rising waves of crime and criminal activities pervading all societies and these issues have led to a great concern to all. In spite of security apparatus put in place to checkmate the activities of criminals, it has indeed, failed woefully. Nigeria has been adjudged as the most religious nation with three religions in place, African Religion, Islam and Christianity, yet, crime is the order of the day.¹ Odumuyiwa in his assessment of crime rate in Nigeria observed that, "We can claim that we have a religious society, and at the same time crimes persist in our society".² This buttresses the fact that Nigeria is a religious society, yet, the country is pervaded with all kinds of crime ranging from armed robbery, murder, kidnapping, rituals, fraud, human trafficking among others leading to insecurity. One cannot sleep with his two eyes closed despite the fact that various security agents such as the police, the military, the civil defence, custom, special squad and many others that are put in place to checkmate crime in Nigeria have woefully failed in their security bid. It alleged that the criminals are working hand in hand with some security officers and there is an infiltration of criminals among the forces, which made it impossible to apprehend these criminals.

It is on this note, that this paper argues that the use of Yoruba traditional method of crime control would serve as an antidote to stem the high rate of crime, criminal behaviours and insecurity in our society. There is no day that goes by without a report of crime in the media. Recently a gang of armed robbers numbering twenty-two broke into the bank in Offa and over fifty people were killed in the operation. In Akure a gang of armed robbers broke into a bank and killed two people. What could one say about the menace of the herdsmen robbing and rapping their victims? Worthy of note is the activities of those who robbed people of their properties at gun point and those of the 'Yahoo boys' who defrauded their victims of their money. Mention should be made of those who engage themselves in bunkering and thieving the money that belong to all, and these made Abogunrin to cite Graham who correctly remarked, "Our world is on fire, man without God would never be able to control the flames. The demon of hell has been let loose. The fires of passion, greed, hate and lust are sweeping the world. We seem to be plugging towards Armageddon."³ This insinuation means that without a probable system to checkmate the nefarious activities that are pervading the society as a result of passion, greed, hate and lost would continue to plunge us into an insecure environment.

The objective of this study therefore, is to examine the Yoruba traditional methods of controlling crime and security challenges in Nigeria. In doing this, the work is divided into sections. The focus on the first section is on conceptual classification of terms. The second section, on the other

hand, discusses the Yoruba traditional society. While section three sheds lights on Yoruba traditional method of crime control. The concern of the fourth section is on using traditional measures as panacea for crime control in Nigeria. The paper concludes with the highlights of the major submission in the work.

A Conceptual Classification of Terms

Before the topic is discussed, three key words in this paper, which are: crime, security challenges and traditional method would be conceptually defined. What is Crime? Crime is a noun, which means an illegal activity or action.⁴ Crime according to Ayuk, et'al is to be understood as the act of violating the law and equally a social problem that transcends generation and mankind and characterized all known contemporary modern societies.⁵ Abogunrin a religionist and theologian describes crime as an act of violation of a penal law prohibiting such an act and imposing a penalty for the commission of it.⁶ He also remarked that "crime as an offence against the ethical sense of the community for, which a definite punishment has been prescribed by law."⁷ While security means safety from attack, harm and damage.⁸ Gbanite defines security as safety; confidence, anything that gives or assures safety, free from danger, fear or doubt, not likely to fail or give way, stable, assured and certain.⁹ For the purpose of this work, security is defined as anything that gives or assures safety, confidence and free from danger, fear or doubt. The security challenges as used in this paper denote a deteriorating situation where well-organized crimes and nefarious activities are carried out by killing and maiming people without appropriate security measure.

Traditional method is a means by, which African societies particularly Yoruba people of Nigeria use traditional measures in control of crimes in their areas. Ever before the advent of western civilization and penal system to Africa and indeed Nigeria, traditional African societies had means of social control, reformation and moral cleanser, which served then as instrument to correct and serve justice.¹⁰ Ayuk cited Ezenibe to have opined that traditional methods of crime control were means the society used to encourage conformity to norms and values. In modern societies, legislative bodies make law; the executives implement the laws while judiciary interprets it. As of old, there were clear cut distinction vis-à-vis division of labour as to who should handled what or not. At the same time no society has ever existed without rules, customs and laws that explained government relationship between individual and group.¹¹ To this extent, the traditional method of crime control, though primitive as it were, were very useful in true sense of it, but as the society becomes more complex via industrialization and urbanization, the traditional methods increasingly became disengaged from the process of maintaining law and order.

It is worrisome to note that the advancement in technology and tremendous progress in communication have facilitated crime. Olaoye asserts that, "Technology which means the production of concrete objects of man's needs, somehow has a close relationship with crime. This is because the product of technology such as dane guns, pistols, double barrel guns, artilleries, nuclear energy, cutlasses, knives, computer and machine guns had direct impact on criminal activities."¹² The above explicates that with the advancement of technology various implements have been produced which have been used to commit crime and it has direct impacts on criminal activities. Furthermore, Olaoye asserts that, indeed, criminals such as armed robbers, thieves, pick-pockets, use these products to carryout their nefarious activities.¹³ Be that as it may, we have seen that advancement in technology has bred an insecure environment where people are being exposed to risk, anxiety, danger, or injury, susceptible to harm etc. which has led to security challenges in Nigeria. All the above perceived crimes made Abogunrin to comment thus, "One of the great issues that are of great concern to all right now among Nigerians is the rising wave of crime, rebellion, violence, lawlessness which are already present on a scale such as Nigeria has never witnessed. Apart from the frequent day light robberies it is dangerous to work the streets, our boarders and other major roads have been turned into jungle of violence, terror murders, rapes, smuggling etc."¹⁴ Abogunrin also submits that what is the answer to the problem of crime in Nigeria? He said despite the fact that the police force has increased and they are better equipped than ever before, there are decrees that prescribe stricter punishment yet crime refused to subside and insecurity is on the prow.¹⁵ It is in view of coping with these magnitude of problems that the paper postulate that the Yoruba traditional method should be used to control crime.

Traditional Yoruba Society

Before the coming of the Europeans, Nigeria had organized socio-cultural, political and economic setting built on traditional norms and values. There were political structures based on village and community leaderships, fiefdom, empire, kingdom and emirate. These include the Oyo Empire, Benin Kingdom, Sokoto Caliphate, Ilorin Emirate and Bornu Empire.¹⁶ In this paper, we are going to examine the Yoruba people, who are the Yoruba? Yoruba are the children of *Oduduwa* or "*Omo Kaaro oo ojire*". Although, recently, there has been a debate among the Yoruba elders as to the name they bear. According to Alariya Magazine quoted Chief Fani Kayode and Chief Yemi Elebuibon the Araba of Oshogbo land to have bare their minds on the issue as to the name the Yoruba bear. Chief Fanikayode was of the view that "it was the Fulani's who met some Yoruba in year 1800 named the tribe '*Yariba*' in which it was later modernized to become Yoruba. He said, however, the name means betrayals, distrusted and bastards. He said, henceforth, the Yoruba who is wise should reject the name but should call themselves as *Omo Oduduwa* children of *Oduduwa* or *Omo Kaaro oo Ojiire* (Good morning did you wake up well) while Chief Yemi Elebuibon asserts that such a name was not known to *Ifa* which is holy book of the people and therefore, suggested that the people should call themselves *Ara Ile-Ife* (people of Ife) or *Omoluabi* (the cultured people).¹⁷

There is no doubt about the fact that generally, the Yoruba of the South – Western Nigeria have been well researched into with not less than three thousand five hundred works. They are found in Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Lagos, and some parts of Kwara and Kogi States. The sub-ethnic group found in Yorubaland are Ijebu, Oyo, Ife, Ijesha, Ondo, Akoko, Ekiti, Ikale, Ilaje, Egbado, Okun and Igbomina.¹⁸ It is important to note that in various Yoruba tribes and ethnic groups they all practiced the monarchical system of government and they are all keepers of traditions. However, there may be slight variation in their culture but they are almost the same.

Yoruba Traditional Method of Crime Control

Traditional methods of crime control are not universal. They are culturally relative.¹⁹ When people are bound together by strong cohesive bond of community consciousness, well tribal transaction, crime can be reduced to the nearest minimum.²⁰ Ayuk et al describes the traditional crime control and indeed prevention and controlling of criminal behaviour in Nigeria communities to have been rooted in kingship and extended family system.²¹ For example among the Yoruba there is an extended family in which the most senior is known as *Olori Ebi* (family head) who is in charge of the family ancestors in which each member of the family are told to protect the name of the family. The Yoruba proverb states thus: *Ile lan wo kato so omo loruko* (the lineage of the family are looked upon before given a child a name). Also, another Yoruba proverb says *tori ki omo mo baa daaran la fi n so omo loruko* (so that a child should not commit crime that is why he or she is given a name).

Apart from this, there are local chiefs that are in-charge of each community to see to day-to-day activities and their moral life. Each family subject themselves to the whim and caprices of the chiefs. The council in chief are those with the kings that makes and execute decision jointly agreed upon by members of the community. One would have seen that this system prevents crime in the society. Another binding factor that prevents crime is religion. The Yoruba as described by Bolaji Idowu as "in all things religious".²² This corroborates the fact that they have a religious society. Religion can be regarded, as one of the best way of controlling crime in the society and, it 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 parts of culture of the people.²³ The etymological meaning of religion points to its social function which this study contextualizes. Emile Durkheim who is one of the proponent of sociology of Religion sees religion as unified system of beliefs and practices which unites into one single moral community,²⁴ while Colcord observes that, "Religion as the control of men by the establishment of rule which creates mutual obligation in order to cement social relationship. Mankind would lie in a deplorable state if no principles or precepts of justice, veracity and beneficence were not taught privately or publicly – opposite vices would steal the shine."²⁵

The above indicates that religion as a way of life has a means of influencing and impacting members of the community through establishment of rules to do away with immoral attitudes and vices in the society and cementing social relationship. Ayuk (et al) opines that it was the religious ties that created propitious leverage for strong community ties and less crime in Africa-traditional

societies. In relation to criminal behaviour, religion has expressly sort to going integratively these problems, because it legitimizes our values and provide reasons why certain values should be preferred to others.²⁶ It is on this note we shall proceed to look at the traditional method used in controlling crime and security challenges in Yorubaland.

Using Traditional Measure as Panacea for Crime Control in Yorubaland

The Yoruba people had different and various method of controlling crime and maintenance of social order in their domain. These include:

a. The Use of Magic:

The belief in magic also remains an enduring allegiance of the Africans to their culture. Indeed, call it magic, voodoo, fetishism, witch-craft or any other names, magic is esoteric in nature and inexplicable phenomenon born out of ancient native wisdom to achieve outstanding feat both in the negative and positive forms.²⁷ To support this view Oso opines that "magic in its own case, is distinctly a human act through the human agency and its virtue is in the spell and in the specific rites which are performed."²⁷ Citing Hegel and Fred, the former is quoted to have said that "magic aims at controlling nature directly, by Sheer force of spell and enchantment"²⁹ while the Latter said "magic disregards spirit but it can be used in dealing with spirits. It's set aim is the subjection of natural phenomenon to the will of man; to protect individual or tight individual power to injure his enemy".³⁰ Dopamu defines magic as "the art of using the available resources of nature to procure non therapeutic needs of man. It is the act of influencing (the) course by means of supernatural control of nature and invocation of particular spirit aids".³¹ Dopamu further asserts that, "Anyone who is familiar with the Yoruba needs no persuasion to admit that the practice of magic is not on the wane despite the grip of modern science and technology on all the people."³²

The above explains that despite the advancement in technology the practice of magic is not reducing but peoples so much belief in it. Olaoye, however, corroborated this view when he opined that magic can be used negatively and as well as positively.³³ In addition to this, he said for one to be bold in stealing and robbery, there must be weapon that is usually code named African insurance. According to him African insurance in particular involves a native knowledge of protection whenever 'there is danger'. He further explains that there is usually the use of Juju or charm in robbery operation.³⁴ For example, the punch newspaper reported that a gang of armed robbers were apprehended, among other things recovered were sophisticated guns and charms.³⁵ Other examples gathered was about a notorious armed robber named Toyin Alabi (a.k.a.) J.B who was terrorizing Ilorin metropolis and some parts of the North, each time he was arrested, he would disappear and continue his nefarious activities.

It is in view of his thaumaturgical power that makes him to disappear and reappear. Therefore, native doctors were contacted by the people and the authority in which the source of his power were detected and destroyed. He was finally apprehended and Alhaji Tunde Alaguntan narrates that "the security agents were told not to allow his legs to touch the grounds or else he would disappear."³⁶ This they did, and when he was taken to the firing ground his legs were raised up and he was eventually shot dead. One would have seen the efficacy of magic working both negatively and positively. Dopamu in his write up further gives an illustration of how Odua people's congress (OPC) one of a number of movements which has developed in the wake of political tension in Nigeria, sought to serve the overall interest of the Yoruba. According to him:

In doing this, it tries to re-institutionalize belief in magic. One of the most important factors in the success of OPC is its claim to efficacy in affording protection against bullets, machete cuts, acid, and other bodily harm. In some notable Yoruba cities especially Lagos, members of OPC are said to have fought relentlessly against criminals who are persistently menacing the people. Their display of tough mindedness and other demonstration of thaumaturgical practices are clearly illustrative of their magical power.³⁷

From the above expression, Dopamu was able to point out the success of the OPC in fighting criminals in Lagos as a result of their magical powers which have been instrumental in controlling crime in Nigeria. In corroborating the above fact, Sunday Orimoogunje reported that:

The year 2000 – 2003 would never be forgotten in the history of Mushin Akala an area in Lagos which was said to have been an abode of criminals, thieves, armed robbers, pick-pockets among others. This area was said to be a no go area even for the security agents, the police could not dare them which has been a home to these criminals. The Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) dared these criminals and entered into the arena arrested, pursued, and over-whelmed the criminals and ensured they did all round jobs, notable known criminals were arrested and killed. In spite of the fact that these criminals had charms used by them.³⁸

The foregoing has shown the role of the OPC members who had been fighting the criminals and having their ways. Why do they succeed? They succeeded because they possessed African magic in which they used to neutralize the power of criminals. Lukman Omiyale further attests to the fact that in Lagos, President Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan regime employed the service of members of the OPC to further help to secure the pipe-lines to prevent bunkers and pipeline vandals to complement the effort of other security agents³⁹ in securing total shiftily of the pipe-lines. In the use of magic for security purposes, is the use of African bullet proof among the Yoruba. There is no doubt about the fact that modern technology provides this protective devices, comes as bullet proof vests, doors, cars etc. Akhilomen observed that:

One of the many advances of modern science and technology is the development of bullet proof technology. By this development, a resistance is effectively provided to act as proof to the ravaging effects of shots from guns of all kinds in any physical assaults. This protective device comes as bullet proof vests, doors, cars, etc. Today, with the increasing incidences of crimes and other acts of physical violence, the bullet proof technology has become more popular and relevant. The police and other arms bearing forces and the wealthy influential citizens, now wear bullet proof vests drive bullet proof cars

and install bullet proof devices in and around their habitats as a protective security measures.⁴⁰

From the above observed expression of Akhilome's, it is true that modern technology had developed bullet proof technology. But, the question is how many people could afford the bullet proof vest, cars or to install bullet proof devices, these are beyond the reach of individuals. It is based on this that we shall examine the bullet proof charm among the Yoruba as viable implement to safe guard one in the penetration of bullets from gun shot. This bullet proof making among the Yoruba is called *Ayeta* (bullet proof insurance) which is a process where when a gun is shot at an individual who had this charm or African insurance on would not be hit by the bullet. This process of gunshot immunity would of course help in preventing crimes in the society. We are not unmindful of the armed robberies operations in Nigeria where they busted financial institutions killing and maiming security forces and harmless citizens. This paper postulated that with the use of African Magic of bullet proof insurance in which bullet could not penetrates the security guards and forces would enable them arrest the armed robbers and then prosecute them in the law court. Recently, some police men numbering up to three lost their lives in the bank robbery operation at Ile-Oluji in Ondo State where the thieves shattered their head with bullets. Had it been that, they are immune they would have been able to fight back.

The Yoruba traditional built bullet proofing like other types of built-proofing in traditional Africa is rooted firmly in their spirituality furnished by African religious world view. Alikhilomen cited Dime to have aptly asserted that "there is a peculiar unity of religion and life that is characteristically African."⁴⁰ He further quoted A.G. Leonard to have speculatively opined that, "The religion of this people is their existence and their existence is the religion".⁴² It is therefore not amazing that the traditional bullet proofing is also found on the Yoruba traditional beliefs.

The spiritual element in Yoruba bullet proofing is further evidenced in the faith of the accomplice in the charm applied on which is vital to the efficacy of the charm. Dopamu illustrated a scene that happened between a man who was a drunkard, who had gulped about three bottles of local gin called *ogogoro* and lost his senses and fomenting trouble all around the village and his uncle remonstrated against his behaviour. Unknown to anyone he went into his house, took his locally made gun and hid it under his dress. When he saw his uncle coming he fired at him and shouted at the same time. "I have killed him. A thick smoke covered the old man and people thought that he had died. But

when the smoke cleared, the old man was seen smiling unhurt.⁴³ Dopamu affirms that it was both mystery and a miracle and that bullet could not have hit the old man, as the head of the guild hunters because he has been immunized against bullet wound.⁴⁴ Bullet proofing among the Yoruba are very prominent which could be used in preventing crime in the society.

b. Oath Taking

Another measure for crime control is Oath taking. This involves oath taking by swearing to Ogun divinity which is known to be God of iron or steel. Oso noted that "Ogun in character is rather harsh and ferocious, he is also a guardian of morality, hence any covenant made before him is very binding".⁴⁵ One would have seen that Oath taking or swearing before Ogun gives an instant judgement which the Yoruba people do not toil with because of his ferociousity if an issue is unclear people are made to swear by Ogun to ascertain their innocence or guilt. Ogun was potent and effective that people were scarred to commit crime-because of it resultant effect of sudden death. In other words, Lois Fuller maintains that:

Oaths are often used to confirm promises people who swear on oath expect to be severely punished by the spiritual power by which they swear if they do not keep their promises. This help people to tell the truth and be faithful.⁴⁶

From the above it has been ascertained that oath allows one to speak the truth and be faithful knowing fully well that any oath taking with carrying out the detail of the agreement would result in punishment by the gods and spirits. Applying this to our modern day system would to a great extent douse criminal tendencies and also curtail security challenges.

c. Alile, Ale (spell, or tying of red cloth or palm frond leafs)

This measure is most effective because it scared people away from stealing. *Alile* was usually lung on trees, fruits or farmlands, to prevent people from trespassing farmlands, steal or harvest any fruits without the owner consent. Omolewu, a linguist opines that there are two types of *Ale* (spell), one is a process in which the trespasser will be at a spot and the second is that the trespasser will be hypnotized that he would continue to work at where he/she went to steal.⁴⁷ It is important to note that although it is primitive but if it could but employed it would help to douse crime in our society.

d. Taboos

Taboo is one of the traditional methods used as panacea for crime control in Yorubaland. Taboo has to do with conduct which are forbidden. The conduct forbidden by Yoruba according to Aderibigbe are referred to as *Eewo*.⁴⁸ (things forbidden) on the whole, taboo embraces everything that could be considered as sin. Corroborating the above view, Abogunrin correctly notes:

For most of our people, the ethnical principles are regulated by a system of taboos and a strong sense of community. For example, the word *eewo* (taboo or that which must not be done) explains the principles of ethical decision-making among the Yoruba. The simple exclamation *eewo!* Means "It is taboo!" or "It is forbidden or "Hold it". Crime is also called *Owun* (that which brings judgement or condemnation when the taboo is broken). Another word for wrong doing is *ese*, often translated "sin". These three words cover anything that can be considered sin or sinful.⁴⁹

From the above it can be said that taboo is an ethical principle used in the regulation of human conduct and when the taboo is broken it is usually said that the person has committed sin (*eese*) which goes along with punishment. Abogunrin further enthused that "sin to our forbearer is not an abstract concept. It is connected with man's duty to his fellow man which is the concern of the Supreme Being and the Divinities."⁴⁹ Therefore, as mentioned above, taboos play a significant role in the ethical duty of transmitting and preserving life, and the breach of taboos endanger the health and well-being of society. It is in view of this that the paper advocated that this method should be employed and it will go a long way to douse crime and insecurity in our nation, Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study has focus on traditional methods of crime control among Yoruba of Nigeria. It has, however, argued that traditional method of crime control has been rooted in kingship and family system control and religion. However, this discussion has shown that traditional measures used in

crime control in Yorubaland include the use of magic, oath taking, *Alile* (spell) and taboo would help to subside the high increase of crime rate in Nigeria. Ayuk in his treatise argues that:

In the context of crime control and insecurity challenges, anomies refer to personal isolation and anxiety resulting from lack of social control and regulation (anti-social behaviour). Anomie in the traditional African society run rampant today due to several extraneous influences viz, borrowed western culture as expressed in their institutional build-up (court, police, prison e.t.c), telecommunication, internets, movies, etc which were persistently unAfrican,⁵⁰

These injections to a large extent, have dislodged the original held beliefs and bonds that define African tenet. It is important to note that, the values that characterized social control mechanism in African Society have become relics and historical rites. These have led to high increase in criminal activities resulting in security challenges in which the security outfit cannot salvage the situation. Therefore, this paper postulates that for efficient and effective crime control, Yoruba traditional measures would serve as panacea to stem crime and security challenges and that community policing should be reinstituted.

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