

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Policing Actors, Plural Processes and Hybridisation: Histories of Everyday Policing Practice in Central Nigeria

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The focus of this paper is to account for plural and hybrid dynamics of everyday policing practice in selected areas of central Nigeria. I argue that it is the plurality of actors and the plurality of practice that constitute hybrid context of security provisioning. It then follows that the conceptualisation of policing as I have used it and argued from the historical study but also the current state of affairs is a mode of statecraft, a means of governing, situated within a plural landscape, that is shaped by political, economic and social interest. Furthermore, the paper demonstrates how plural policing is a product of forms of policing socialisation. The main point that emerges therefore is that violent practices of policing actors are adopted and imbibed not just from a history of the formation and development of state security institutions, but also influenced by wider Nigerian political and social history. State power in the socio-political context I have studied, has always been accompanied or preceded by violence. Routinised violence therefore relates to forms and practices of legitimated violence inherent in policing authorities. Furthermore, the paper argues that alongside these particularly violent forms of policing are the everyday civic policing services, that policing actors render. Policing practice entails normal everyday civic responsible policing and violent everyday practice – all are constitutive of policing practice. In sum, and in conclusion the paper explores how policing practices impact on citizens, particularly as it relates to the processes of policing, the plurality of actors, and the accountability of policing actors.

Introduction

In a traditional state-centric sense, the provision of security and the maintenance of law and order are the responsibility of the state to citizens. State security and justice institutions are therefore statutorily mandated to provide security, guarantee the safety of

citizens and secure public and private property. However, in various contexts around the globe the state is not alone in providing security and enforcing law and order, it is a plurality of actors and practice (Baker 2008) that constitute a hybrid context of security provisioning (Bagayoko et al 2016). The main research objective of this paper is to account for historical and contemporary violent hybrid dynamics of everyday policing practice in selected areas of central Nigeria.

In this sense, policing is thus a phenomenon that is characterised by cooperation, co-option, and at times conflict amongst the varied actors engaged in security provisioning. I have adopted a broad definition of policing: it refers to all organised activity and services provided by statutory and non-statutory institutions that seek to ensure and maintain law, order and security. It then follows that the conceptualisation of policing, as I have used it and argued in this paper, is a mode of statecraft (Lar 2016: 52), a means of governing, situated within a plural landscape, that is shaped by political, economic and social interest and not simply a technical function of state confined to the lens of the criminologist (Kyed 2009). Specifically, the argument of this paper is that violence is imbedded in policing practice, and the activities of, and relationship between, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and non-state actors such as the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) illustrate this. Additionally, the policing practice and violence this paper has focused on is violence for confessional purposes rather than punishment or punitive objectives. Our understanding is enriched when we consider the relationships and interactions between state and non-state actors in relation to security functions. This paper explores the policing practices of mainly non-state actors, socialised by state policing actors.

The manifestation of hybridisation and plural policing practice has thrived on the critical role, which the state (The Police) has played in sanctioning and legitimating non-state policing actors. In return, vigilante groups like the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) have acted as agents of state power and thus contributed in legitimating the authority of the state (Lar 2016: 204). This is despite the fact that, on occasion, vigilante discourses have been against the state. Nevertheless, the VGN's actions have revealed an unqualified ambition to be part of the state policing system. With its headquarters in the city of Kaduna, the former capital of the Northern region at

independence in 1960 and current capital of Kaduna State, the VGN is the officially recognised umbrella body of vigilante groups. According to the group's national leader Alhaji Ali Sokoto,¹ the group has members and branches in all the 36 states of the federation.² The Vigilante Group of Nigeria was registered with Nigeria's Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in 1999. The importance of this registration was that the certificate of registration officially recognising the VGN as a corporate legal entity; prior to this, the group had existed on a fluid basis merely as a Non-Governmental Organisation, with varied levels of operation across the country, particularly in northern Nigeria. To properly grasp historical trajectories of plural policing in Nigeria, and relate same to present dynamics, it is important to note that the origins and history of vigilante groups in Nigeria and Plateau State dates back further. The micro level refers to the plurality of actors engaged in everyday policing. The historical trajectory is analysed across three epochs of plural policing (Lar 2016). Firstly, the dismantling of the former Native Authority Police in the late 1960s; the Nigerian government's policy in the mid-1970s to reform local government, and the attempt by traditional rulers to re-assert some semblance of influence and authority, constitute the first epoch. This was closely followed by the Nigerian government's introduction of vigilante policing, packaged as community policing initiatives in the wake of austerity occasioned by the Structural Adjustment Programme in the mid-1980s. This constitutes the second era of plural policing. The third and final era of plural policing is the aforementioned era that commenced from 1999 with the Vigilante Group of Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework: The Relationship between Plurality/Hybridity and Violence

Violence in this paper is understood in its basic meaning: as action or behaviour involving physical force intended to injure, impair or cause the death of someone or something,

'a form of power, it is a doing-to and a being-done-to, the object of which is the human body' (von Trotha 2011: 34). Following on this premise, violence is contextualised in two analytical frameworks; violence as routinised everyday practice, and violence as manifested by epic outbreaks of sectarian collective violence.³ My understanding and conceptualisation of the concept of violence is informed by a significant departure from literature that has focused on historical and contemporary patterns of collective epic violence. This literature has featured and analysed ethno-religious, identity-based conflicts, emerging from inter-group disputes, often drawing on historical narratives and contestations over belonging, with variations between urban and rural areas. There is a paucity of studies that explore violence as everyday policing practice, and a reluctance to explore how such practices are embedded within policing practice in a field where state and non-state actors converge, interact and reproduce former, and sometimes new forms of policing practice.

What connects these conceptions is how I have deployed all in understanding a sociological history of plural policing. My conceptualisations of violence are informed by scholarly insights drawn from some considered thinkers. In his essay 'The Critique of Violence,' Walter Benjamin extrapolates the difference between divine and mythic violence. Mythic violence is understood as legalised violence. According to Benjamin, mythic violence has a close relationship with the law, in the sense that the instating and maintaining of the law requires coercion, which is inflicted on a body. Divine violence on the other hand is the antithesis of mythic violence; it is a break in accountability, divine violence stands in opposition to mythic violence. Benjamin writes, '...if mythic violence is law making, divine violence is law destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter destroys them; ...if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood' (Benjamin 1986: 297). Relying on Benjamin as his theoretical inspiration, Slavoj Žižek

develops an understanding of violence that is expressed in a dual conception. According to Žižek, what we identify and recognise as acts of crime, sectarian violence, and (physical violence) is subjective violence – there is a clearly identified subject responsible. Subjective violence is thus understood 'as a perturbation of the normal peaceful state of things' (Žižek 2008: 2) In contrast, objective violence is understood as violence, which is 'inherent to the normal state of things' (Žižek 2008: 2). Objective violence goes on according to Žižek, without us noticing, because what we usually notice is a disruption of the recognised and accepted order; objective violence is that which is invisibly perpetrated so that the established order continues uninterrupted, violence as a tool for regulating societal order.

The manifestation of objective violence is therefore captured in the notion of routinised everyday violence (Lar 2016: 72). This violence is historically rooted in the colonial formation of the Nigerian state. In other words, state power in the socio-political context has always been accompanied or preceded by violence. According to Fanon, physical violence was used to inaugurate the colonial state, and along with structural violence, it was deployed to sustain it; as Fanon asserts, 'colonialism is violence in its natural state' (Fanon 1968: 40).

Routinised violence therefore relates to forms and practices of legitimated violence inherent in policing authorities, who make claims to what von Trotha has termed 'regulative orders of violence' (von Trotha 2011: 34). Violence has been to an extent legitimatised in Nigerian society, and varied agents of socialisation have ingrained this. For instance, in Plateau State the culture of 'disciplinarity' was a key feature of the church and educational institutions. The concept of discipline introduced within the educational system in Nigeria included the celebration of corporal punishment as a crucial tool of socialisation. This is also articulated in legislation. Article 55 (1) a. of the Penal Code with jurisdiction in Northern Nigeria clearly

states that ‘...nothing is an offence which does not amount to the infliction of grievous hurt upon any person and which is done by a schoolmaster for correcting his child or ward, such child or ward being under eighteen years of age.’⁴ The Criminal Code operating in the southern states of Nigeria equally has a similar provision that accepts violence as a means of socialisation. According to article 295, a blow or other force, not in any case extending to a wound or grievous harm, may be justified.

In many national contexts, violence is constitutive of policing practice. Police practice in Nigeria is rife with accounts and cases of brutality and violence, characterised by physical assault, harassment, illegal arrest and detention (Lar 2016: 199). There are reports of police excesses during crime control operations, which range from crowd control, demonstration, and protest management to harassment at checkpoints. Police also summarily execute suspects and commit extra-judicial killings (Alemika and Chukwuma 2000; Okeshola 2013). Owen and Cooper-Knock have referred to this phenomenon as ‘police vigilantism’ (Owen and Cooper-Knock 2014). This explanation is specifically offered as a better way of understanding the phenomenon of extra-judicial corporal and capital punishment by the police. In sum, such police practices can be understood as a response to a critical public demand for vigilante policing. The expediency of punishment that vigilante policing offers appeals to citizens more than the sometimes cumbersome and tardy process of juridical prosecution and trial. This is a useful departure from arguments that situate such practices strictly within discourses of human rights abuse, with little or no effort to understand why the police engage in such practices.

Following from the aforementioned analysis, this paper will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the historical and contemporary practices of policing actors

as it relates to violence and policing practice?

2. How does this manifest in everyday hybrid/plural policing practice of state and non-state policing actors?

This paper draws from my existing work on histories of plural policing practice in Nigeria from the late colonial period to the present. I have primarily deployed a historical approach embedded in qualitative methods. This is to specifically account for the origins and changing forms of policing. To examine the contemporary manifestations, selected ethnographic methods are used to complement the historical methods of data collection. I have done extensive fieldwork, with several months spent in urban and rural central Nigeria. The study is not attempting a systematic coverage of the whole Plateau State; instead only selected local government areas were included in order to understand everyday violence and hybrid/plural policing practice. The local government areas studied are Langtang North, Shendam, Pankshin and Jos North.

Non-State Violence as Policing Practice

Understanding Vigilante Torturous Interrogation

Drawing from accounts of past interrogation episodes and more recent witnessed acts of interrogation best described as torturous interrogation, we can understand the process of vigilante interrogation. Torturous interrogation in vigilante practice means a plethora of acts, which vary from one town and village to another. These acts include caning, slapping, threatening, and some specific forms of stress positions. From the information gathered, most of these practices, with some exceptions like floggings, first began with the community-based vigilante groups of the early 1980s (Lar 2016: 195). To illustrate what vigilante interrogation entails, I present two instances of the use of stress positions that vigilante groups use in interrogating suspects and coercing confessions. These

are drawn from Shendam LGA and Langtang North LGA. According to the vigilante members their interrogation methods of choice are, first subjecting the suspect to frog jumping not as a muscle strengthening exercise and pastime but rather frog jumping as a pain-inducing, humiliating prelude to inquisition. Very popular in Nigerian secondary schools, it entails the holding of ears and jumping while in a squatting position. When done repeatedly, the thighs are strained and it becomes quite painful. The suspect is subjected to frog jumping until he/she agrees to confess and 'tells the truth', usually accepting responsibility for stealing. The vigilante members added that there are instances when the suspect is whipped while frog jumping to increase the pain and expedite the confession.⁵ Vigilantes also commonly use another stress position technique as an interrogation tool locally referred to as *Lilon Mecca*⁶ (Mecca Swing). *Lilon Mecca* entails hanging on a pole with arms tied to the ankles; the pole is situated on two branches of a tree or alternatively supported by two pillars with the suspect hanging on the pole, held up by the arms. The strain and pain is felt on the shoulder joints, and the hollow under the base of the shoulder. Vigilantes recounted that *Lilon Mecca* is reserved for stubborn and headstrong suspects (Lar 2016: 195). This technique has been used for interrogation since the 1980s and is still used by the current vigilante group members in the area.

The vigilante group members also talked about another technique used in their practice of torturous interrogation, aptly named the 'talk true.' As the name suggests, this technique is used to get the suspect to tell the truth, or to confess to an offence he/she is believed to have committed. The 'talk true' is basically four slim wooden bars about 10 inches in length, held in pairs by four short iron rods, with screws used to tighten the grip of the wooden bars on the offender's lower legs, or the tops of the ankle. A vigilante member strikes the wood on the suspect's leg or ankles, which directly impacts

the bone. They continue this process until they induce a confession. The suspects, who are experiencing excruciating pain, may under extreme duress. However, vigilante members argue that when they subject suspects to such interrogation techniques, they usually have already gathered substantial evidence proving culpability (Lar 2016: 196). This practice has also been in use since the early 1980s and is still part of the techniques of current vigilante groups.

The Arenas of Public Shame

I could not establish where and when the much-preferred vigilante punishment of subjecting suspects to the 'dance of shame' originated. What is clear, however, is that this was the penalty of choice adopted by vigilante groups across the state in the 1980s and is still practiced by rural based vigilante groups (Lar 2016: 196). It is my contention that, by subjecting an individual to this dance of shame, multiple visibility objectives are achieved, namely: to punish the offender, to generate income and to gain and sustain social legitimacy from the community.

Sandra Walklate⁷ has written about 'public arenas of shame' (Walklate 2002: 1986) in her analysis of informal crime management in Salford, Greater Manchester, UK in the 1990s. She makes a very apt point about the function of shaming offenders who contravene societal norms and values in public places where the community usually converges for commercial and social exchanges. According to Walklate, such public arenas of shame are usually areas where:

...nearly all the local amenities are located: a supermarket, a chemist, a betting shop, a job shop, a post office, a public house and hardware store. This area provides the physical location and space for 'public shaming' ceremonies. In other words, if there is graffiti to be written, and if there is graffiti to be written about a person, who it is believed has 'grassed',⁸ then their name will appear in this

location. It is here that people are named for the rest of the community to see: and since this is the only place where there are any local amenities in this locality, it serves its purpose as a public arena of shame very well. (Walklate 2002: 1986)

In the towns and villages of 1980s Plateau State, the public arenas of shame are the local market squares. There are usually designated market days, and the markets range from major hubs of commerce to small village markets where people will converge to socialise while enjoying the local brew. The act is stage managed to not only expose the suspected offender to public ridicule; also important is to demonstrate that the local VGN is working. In some towns, local amenities will include a supermarket shop, a local drugs store, bars and eateries, small scale vegetable sellers, a barber's shop, etc. In the major towns, and the state capital Jos, vigilante members no longer practice the dance of shame. The urban vigilantes have a higher ambition to be seen more like the police; therefore, they have discouraged practices referred to as "olden day's vigilante practice." Amongst the rural vigilante members however, the dance of shame is still an important part of their practice. In villages, the market square is of a modest level and while there is indeed commerce going on, people regularly congregate to socialise and catch up with the latest news. Therefore, the market square becomes the best location to demonstrate that vigilantes are working hard to rid the community of undesirable elements. Furthermore, displaying such offenders also serves the purpose of reminding community members of their responsibilities to the vigilante group and encouraging them to show their appreciation with monetary gifts.

I witnessed such a practice in Langtang North. The dance of shame is referred to locally as *tabakaka*. The case I witnessed involved two young men, in their early twenties. The local vigilante members had caught them with two goats the night before.

According to the young men, the goats belonged to their father and had gone missing; they had simply found them and were taking them back home. The vigilante members were not satisfied with the story. They detained the boys until morning and checked their story with their Dad; as expected the two had lied. Following further interrogation and flogging the young men confessed to have stolen the goats from a neighbouring village. The ordeal then began in the late afternoon. The young men were stripped of their shirts and given goat-hides to carry on their heads, and a local drummer played a constant repetitive beat and followed them around the village as they made their way to the market square.

After the dance of shame,⁹ in this case, the whole episode lasted for 2 hours, the vigilante groups handed the suspects over to the police and returned the goats to the owner. The grateful owner of the goats gave a monetary gift of 3,000 Nigerian naira (10 Dollars) to the vigilante group. I witnessed people dropping money into a polythene bag as we made our way around the village and in the market square; however, I was not told how much was raised from the dance of shame. This is just an example of what transpires. Witnessing it, one can see how, once an individual is labelled a suspect, they lose all rights and claim to dignity. Rather, the suspect is an object of scorn, disgrace and embarrassment. Pratten has argued that shaming through this public performance should be seen against a range of social control mechanisms. In his study of vigilantism amongst the Annang of southern Nigeria the most important mechanisms identified were oath taking and songs (Pratten 2007: 195). What is at play here in our context is a display of the hybrid convergence of the moral and legal community at work. The language used to interrogate and declare guilt is drawn from the legal penal community. The act of punishing inculcates the contextual moral community, to be punished is to be disgraced and to be subjected to pain; both physical and psychological.

Corporal Punishment and Policing Practice: The Violence of State and Non-State Actors

The relevance of corporal punishment in policing is best expressed in the vigilante group's authority to punish. In a sense, it performs two functions. First, it confirms the vigilante group's capacity and ability to punish the suspect by applying physical pain through very torturous means. The offender is not only exposed and humiliated; he/she is also subjected to physical pain. The recognised capacity to punish further legitimises the vigilante group's authority within society. Secondly, while vigilante members attribute their preference for corporal punishment to the socialisation they received from the police, police extra-judicial practice has been understood as 'police vigilantism'. Police vigilantism is when the police (individuals or groups), though being a legally constituted authority, mimic the informal solutions of vigilante groups by engaging in extra-judicial action. Herein we witness another type of policing practice hybridisation.

Interestingly, this excessive culture of fierceness and severity in policing practice is also imbibed from police training and orientation, which creates police men that are hardened and unruly. While this approach may find justification when dealing with hardened criminals, it has unfortunately alienated police from the general population it is meant to serve.¹⁰ Corporal punishment, for instance, remains a legal penal sentence in Nigeria. Suspected criminals often suffer the ordeal of severe beating and harassment from the police and indeed from vigilante groups. Sometimes this follows arrest and on other occasions as part of interrogation. The Penal Code equally provides for offenders to be sentenced to flogging. A basic scan of contemporary Nigerian newspapers reveals several reports of offenders convicted and sentenced by lower courts to flogging. I conducted such a survey myself while on fieldwork. The main newspaper I used was the *Daily Trust Newspaper*. The sentences

ranged from ten strokes for attempted suicide;¹¹ another offender got fifteen strokes for criminal trespass and theft.¹² In another report, a court in Abuja convicted and sentenced an offender for the joint act of house breaking and theft, to six months in prison and 6 strokes of the cane.¹³

The foregoing accounts demonstrate how policing practices, as prescribed by law, provide the platform for policing actors, state and non-state to be violent.

While policing by force has continued to be a constitutive feature of policing practice, particularly the practice of vigilante groups. We also see how the quest for social legitimacy, and longevity of practice necessitates the embracing of civic practices. The paper turns to these practices, by first considering the methodologies that vigilante groups have copied from the police.

Hybridisation, the Police and the VGN

Methodologies of Everyday Policing Practice

One of the more prominent and visible forms of policing that the vigilante groups have copied from the police is the operational idea of the patrol. This remains the most feasible operational method of checking and curtailing the activities of criminals. Vigilante patrol is often not motorised, as there are only a few vigilante detachments that have patrol cars.¹⁴ Vigilante patrol is on foot, mostly at night when the community is sleeping. The patrol was the very first policing practice that vigilante groups' members imbibed (Lar 2016: 148). Similarly, as the Nigerian police instituted the practice of roadblocks and checkpoints into patrol practice, vigilante groups began doing the same (Lar 2016: 148). The practice of vigilante patrols has continued to be part of contemporary vigilante policing practice. The basic operational equipment that vigilante members require for night patrol include flashlights, warm clothing, raincoats, boots and whistles. I present two accounts drawn from my observation of vigilante patrols.

Account One: The Check Point -Night Road Patrol

To patrol the town at night means not only policing the town's residents: you are also policing night travellers who are either arriving in the town or passing through to a neighbouring or a distant destination. Usually from 11:30 pm or 12:00 midnight, road blocks are set up with logs of wood and wood planks with a line of nails protruding upwards. A defiant motorist who does not stop will therefore puncture his/her tyres. From afar an approaching vehicle sees the bright light burning off a thread soaked in kerosene. At first the commuters would likely assume that the police have set up the checkpoints; only upon arrival do they realise that they are dealing with not just with policemen, but also with the local town vigilante. Sometimes the routine takes just a few minutes: queries about identification, where the travellers are coming from and their destination. If the vigilantes are satisfied, they allow the vehicle to proceed; if they are not, they request the commuters to disembark and they commence a check. I have witnessed episodes where drivers arrived at our checkpoint with their hands motioning to hand over money, but on some occasions, they were berated and accused of trying to hide something. The area is still part of a larger conflict zone and has witnessed cyclical violence, so such drivers could be accused of trying to hide arms. On other occasions, the vigilantes take the money and allow the vehicle to pass. Usually in the morning, all the men assemble at the local chief's house for a debriefing session, after which they are dismissed until the evening. In addition, the checkpoint is more than a security post, it is equally a place where men, young and old, congregate and engage in discussions of a wide variety including local politics, gossip, and wives and girlfriends. The checkpoint therefore becomes a social forum where friendship is cultivated and nourished. For these individuals, it is a place where police and vigilantes meet, here as fellow members of the policing institution. The vigilante

members enjoy the camaraderie that accompanies their association with the police. The camaraderie and closeness of association serves to reinforce the active practice of the VGN members and their mission to be recognised by the community as legitimate policing agents of the state.

Vigilantism has increased in prestige and consequently social legitimacy and popular acceptance is high within the communities these groups operate in. The foregone description refers to a contemporary manifestation and is further evidence of the institutionalisation processes. Therefore, vigilante groups in their practice bring positive elements to hybrid relationships. When I first began studying vigilantism in 2012, in interviews recorded with leaders and members of the VGN, most of them lamented the lack of support from the local government and a general lack of uniforms, boots, torchlights, and other policing paraphernalia. They always took the opportunity to emphasise the dire situation in which they were doing the job (Lar 2016: 238). When I returned in 2015, and in further fieldwork in 2016 and early 2017 the change in the fortunes of the VGN was conspicuous. Lamentations had not necessarily ceased, but they were now tempered with some level of contentment. New uniforms had been procured and distributed; the cooperation with the police had been deepened. Activities like the highway checkpoints described previously had contributed to elevated levels of visibility, recognition and legitimacy (Lar 2016: 238).

Account Two: The Checkpoint-Daytime Highway Patrol

Another form of vigilante patrol is the highway checkpoint. The critical importance of the checkpoint is to carry out security checks on travellers in order to curb the menace of robbery along the road. The background of the checkpoint is a consequence of the sectarian violence that swept the area a decade ago – the legacy of which is the proliferation of small arms. It is these arms that criminal elements have used to perpetrate crimes on the

highway. The local government commander of the VGN, Nicodemus Ngozi Chukwu, a motorcycle mechanic who arrived in the area in the early 1980s outlines the objectives behind setting up the checkpoints:

...the major challenge we had was a sudden rise in arm robbery on this road. In the past, these were occasional cases at night, those responsible were outsiders. Unfortunately, because of the crisis and violence there are so much arms circulating and when you have a lot of young men with no livelihood, no jobs this is what happens. The robbery cases were particularly alarming because it was occurring in the daytime. We had consultations with the police and it was agreed that we mount the checkpoints. It was our initiative and the divisional police officer in charge of the local government area said we should go ahead.¹⁵

The VGN take turns in working at the checkpoints. The commander prepares a weekly roster of three duty schedules: morning, afternoon, and evening. There are three checkpoints on the road, manned by the local VGN. During a shift there are normally six-seven men operating the checkpoints. This number is not constant as sometimes some VGN members take leave to attend to pressing family matters. The checkpoints are made with large stones situated on the road to create a single zigzagged lane. This means the way of passage is alternated between the opposing directions. On busy market days, there is more traffic on the highway and motorists therefore spend more time at the checkpoints.

The procedure I witnessed is essentially routinised. A car arrives, and after an exchange of pleasantries the VGN ask the driver of his point of origin and destination. After which they inquire what the driver is carrying in the boot of the car. Often if the car is on commercial business, the boot will

contain the personal effects and luggage of the passengers. The next decision is the critical one for the vigilante members on duty, and more so for the driver and passengers. Whereas these exchanges may last for a few seconds, or at most a minute or two, if the vigilante members decide that the car should be checked then the driver and passengers are held up for a period of thirty minutes to an hour while the vigilante members conduct their check. Bags are opened and the car seats are searched. Therefore, to avoid the check, and the delay that comes with it, some drivers decide to pay off the vigilantes and hope to get an expedient passage in return. I have witnessed varied reactions to this. While on very rare occasions the VGN members frown and still demand to search the cars, it usually serves its purpose and the search is not conducted.

The Uniform

The VGN members turn out in a mixture of attires. Some are kitted in the complete VGN uniform, others are garbed in a combination of VGN, police, military, and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) uniforms. As one of the vigilantes responded when I inquired why they wear such a mix "...to look official he answered."¹⁶ The importance of the uniform as a symbol of authority and legitimation is made clear. Another feature of the checkpoints is the tools used for the job. The VGN members also carry an assortment of weapons; some have dane guns (popular amongst hunters), machetes, sticks etc.

For a vigilante group member aspiring to be recognised as part of the policing system – 'stateness' is bestowed by the mastery of how to talk (the language of policing), how to act (the everyday practice of policing), and what one wears (symbols of policing) (Jensen 2007: 118). The uniform is the principal symbolic marker of stateness, the instinctive symbol of officiousness; it is a signifier, an insignia of authority. It bestows on the police and the vigilante the legitimacy to act. The expectation is that such action will be in the interest of the public

good, but as I have shown in this study, this is not always the case. Osoba captures the role of the uniform in the misappropriation of authority when he notes that “there is no tyrant more vicious, narrow-minded, self-centred and insufferably exhibitionist than a primary educated Nigerian dressed in a brief robe of authority” (Osoba 1976: 71). However, there is more to it than this, as the power of the uniform is twofold: it grants a person the power to construct a livelihood, a relationship, and access to state services, as well as the power to destroy a livelihood, a relationship, and access (Poppe 2013: 28). In a sense, the uniform speaks to the aspirations of vigilante group members desirous of being part of the state policing system; it also shows the public, the community, that the vigilante can act for and on behalf of the police. Once in uniform, the vigilante member is not required to convince others of his authority. The uniform, as Poppe has argued, is visible proof that one is entitled to act as a law enforcer. In this sense, they (vigilantes) emerge as mediators between the state and the community (Poppe 2013: 28).

Recruitment, Funding and Oversight

While conducting field research amongst the vigilant groups some specific repertoires demonstrate how vigilante groups seek to exercise authority and build legitimacy. The recruitment process has been made officious and formal; the process can be divided into three main stages: the application form of membership; vetting by the local chief (usually ward head); and interview by the local police and final selection. For the successful few, uniforms are procured; identity cards are issued and rudimentary paramilitary training given. As part of a national association, vigilante members in the current typology are keen to be identified as extensions of state institutions. Primarily an individual should volunteer.

Furthermore, the manifestation of hybridisation and plural policing practice has thrived on the critical role which the state (The Police), and other supervisory and

oversight institutions play in sanctioning and legitimating vigilante practice. Vigilante oversight in this context reveals how different forms, and multiple authorities govern vigilante practice. Traditional rulers; local government officials and the police are all involved in the business of contemporary vigilante oversight. Implementing oversight processes for supervising vigilante group practice at the local level consists of the traditional ruler vetting potential recruits before they are recruited; the local government provides funding support in the form of allowances for the vigilante group members; and the local police provide operational oversight.

Police and Vigilante Cooperation

In my exploration of plural policing it did emerge quite early that the best place to understand the relations between the police and other policing actors is at the local level (Lar 2016: 222). My approach has been to understand policing practice from the viewpoint of those who deliver it. There are broadly two categories of vigilante cooperation with the police: those who are embedded in the police stations subordinate to the police, and those who work independently but in close cooperation with the police. In current practice, we observed the adoption and use of two legal codes: a statutory code based on vigilante groups understanding of state policing, and vigilante codes drawn from historical practices (Lar 2016: 222).

In an interview with the Patrol and Guard Officer (P&G) in charge of one of the local government divisional police offices, there is a tacit acceptance that violence has a place in everyday policing practice. The P&G's daily chore is posting police officers on patrol beats and guarding posts across the town. He also goes around inspecting and supervising and attending to emergencies that arise. The crucial point relevant here is his admittance of violence, which he describes as the “occasional necessity of ill-treatment to bring out the truth.” In his own words:

We made the VGN to understand how our work and theirs is very similar, and for them to appreciate the importance of professionalism. They have been working very well, in fact, we are indeed satisfied, the local government officials and the ward heads are also satisfied with the support and work of the VGN. The VGN have also learned how to deal with tricky situations, while we do not support torture and excessive violence – we understand when they have to use occasional ill treatment to bring out the truth. This can be tolerated because it helps to catch criminals and prevents criminality. We are always giving the VGN men lectures and closely supervising them.¹⁷

The police, as I understood their logic, have minimal problems if vigilante groups operate within the auspices of the NPF – or what the police hierarchy happily refer to as an aspect of community policing (Lar 2016: 224). What the police despise is when they (the police) do not have ‘authority’ over VGN practice. In sum, it is not the perpetrating of violence or illegality that the police find problematic. What is frowned upon, up to levels of condemnation, is when this is carried out independent of the police. On joint patrols, which I was part of consisting of the police and members of the VGN in Langtang North, and Shendam LGAs the police witnessed VGN members engaging in acts of policing violence and no observation or complaint was raised. The same police officers requested the VGN local government commander to reprimand two of his men for beating a motorcyclist whom they accused of not paying market tolls. The police it seems are particularly concerned when vigilante excesses are followed by a public outcry, so the police act to not only demonstrate to the VGN who is in charge, but more importantly to maintain and in some cases regain, social legitimacy. In her excellent and insightful 2012 paper (Meagher 2012), “the Strength of

Weak States: Non-State Security Forces and Hybrid Governance in Africa”, Kate Meagher interrogates and questions the celebration of non-state forms of order and authority. Making a compelling case for a more cautious approach and demanding far more empirical evidence if we are to embrace non-state order and authority. There is much to echo from Meagher’s analysis, as I have shown in the foregoing analysis of historical and contemporary practice of policing, it is important as Meagher has argued that we do not get into the trap of essentialising non-state forms of security provision and understand the relationship of state and non-state security actors, but more critical capture the basis for local legitimacy of non-state security actors.

Another dynamic I observed was the diverse ways in which senior police officers, like Commissioners of Police at state headquarters and their subordinates at the local government level understood the role and place of the VGN in the policing system (Lar 2016: 224). Senior police officers preferred to incorporate all citizen policing groups and formations within the ambit of community policing. The Divisional Police Officers (chief police officers) in charge of these local government areas were aware of the existence of these vigilante groups and were more pragmatic. The extent to which the police are aware of the activities and operations of these groups varies across the state. In some local government areas, there is close monitoring and supervision; in others, the situation is much more relaxed. In discussions with community leaders from selected communities,¹⁸ it was clear that some communities had adopted collective strategies to manage and prevent conflicts from breaking out into violent clashes. They identified constant communication and meetings between community leaders, establishment of neighbourhood watch committees with youths from the diverse groups that make up the community working together with the VGN.¹⁹ The neighbourhood watch committees also serve as a quasi-early warning

committee, focused on identifying likely threats to community peace, the committees serve as a bridge between the two main groups. The community leaders identified rumour control and management as a major achievement of the neighbourhood watch committee; by its activities they argue the committee has on several occasions curbed the outbreak of violence by identifying, investigating and if necessary correcting and reversing damaging rumours.

The VGN actively participate in policing duties such as arrest, detention, and interrogation of suspected criminals. In most cases, they hand over the suspects to the police. Here the VGN members are not necessarily interested in what is captured in the respective laws and codes that guide policing; of importance is what they regard as practice, policing practice as carried out by the NPF. Here the police are again the authority that is regulating practice, plurality is therefore operating within a dynamic that has structure and is organised.

Conclusion

The main inquiry of this paper was to account for historical and contemporary violent hybrid dynamics of everyday policing practice in selected areas of central Nigeria. In approaching the conceptualisation and practice of policing, the operational concepts useful for our analysis are plurality and hybridity. Plurality described the actors engaged in policing practices, and hybridity captures what plurality creates, policing that embodies state and non-state practices. The paper has used methodologies of everyday policing; like the patrol, the practice of record keeping, and violent practices to show the manifestation of hybridity.

I have argued that the historical and contemporary context of the research area is characterised by plural processes that have created hybrid policing landscapes. This refers to the plural character of policing actors – state and non-state, and how hybridity manifests as part of policing practice, and how the convergence of state and non-state

actors constitutive parts of the policing landscape. For vigilante groups to continue to function alongside state security institutions within a context of accountability and transparency, there is a place for clear-cut rules and regulations guiding their activities.

To ensure that vigilante groups operate within legal frameworks, respect human rights, and other obligations, it is necessary to establish processes of monitoring and supervision. This would require all vigilante groups to register with relevant national and local authorities. In other words, clear implementation and oversight processes must accompany legal frameworks regulating vigilante practice. In this sense, the practice of licensing regimes for vigilante groups with provisions to renew such licenses periodically (annually) provided they meet certain requirements and minimum standards, becomes an interesting option to explore. Oversight mechanisms can be through traditional rulers, local government, local police, local civil society organisations, or the state government/province.²⁰ It is possible to improve the effectiveness and accountability of vigilante groups with oversight, supervision and close monitoring. These are processes that go beyond legal frameworks; oversight mechanisms seek to regulate practice and make sure vigilante groups are positively contributing to maintaining law and order and ensuring the security of citizens and communities.

Vigilante members for instance are aware that the Nigerian state through the police reserve the right and might to proscribe and dismantle vigilante practice, as was the case albeit for a brief period in some parts of Nigeria in the 1990s. This is informed by the understanding of constituted practices of the state bureaucracy and practices of bureaucrats (Bierschenk and De Sardan 2014). For instance, we may understand how the police and vigilante members (as bureaucrats) deal with the laws they are governed by (Otwin 1985). We can understand how officials negotiate formal rules. As a Divisional Police Officer in one of the local

governments within my study area noted – “We have policing as law and policing as practice. If you want to talk about policing in the law and rulebooks, you go talk to my Commissioner. However, if you want to talk about policing as practice, then I can help you.”²¹ In other words, policing practice is not always within the bounds of legal frameworks, it is equally the practices that individual actors engage with daily. Within a given social context, state-practice policing practice is conceived as a back and forth mediated negotiation.

Notes

- ¹ The Vigilante Group of Nigeria is currently factionalized. There is the Jahun Group and the Ali Sokoto Group.
- ² It is hard to verify the extent to which this network of vigilantes is organised and structured across the landscape of the country. I can however confirm that for states that I visited mainly Plateau and neighbouring Nassarawa, Kaduna, and Bauchi, there were vigilante groups that recognised Alhaji Ali Sokoto as the national leader.
- ³ For more on this please see Lar, J.T. 2015 *Vigilantism, State and Society: A History of Plural Policing in Plateau State, Nigeria, 1950 to the present*, (Dr. Phil) in African History and Politics, Bayreuth International Graduate School for African Studies (BIGSAS), University of Bayreuth, Germany. I have extensively discussed the conceptualisation and operationalization of violence.
- ⁴ The Penal Code (Northern States), Article 55, (1), a.
- ⁵ Group Interview, current and former vigilante members, Shimankar, by Jimam Lar, 15.11.2014; Group Interview, current VGN members, Pankshin, by Jimam Lar, 17.01.2017.
- ⁶ As much as I tried, none of the vigilante members interviewed could explain why the technique was named lilon Mecca.
- ⁷ Much of this section is drawn from Lar, J.T. 2015 *Vigilantism, State and Society: A History of Plural Policing in Plateau State, Nigeria, 1950 to the present*, (Dr. Phil) in African History and Politics, Bayreuth International Graduate School for African Studies (BIGSAS), University of Bayreuth, Germany, 194–198.
- ⁸ According to Walklate, grassing was the local colloquial name for snitching. The interesting point being that there were accepted offences of which gang members would not be expected to snitch about others.
- ⁹ For a similar comparative example of the practice, see Pratten, David “Singing thieves: history and practice in Nigerian popular justice”, in Pratten, David and Sen, Artreyee (Eds). *Global Vigilantes: Perspective on Justice and Violence*. London: Hurst, 2007, 195.
- ¹⁰ The Police officers’ I interviewed repeatedly made this point. They point out that such practices are particularly prevalent in the training and orientation of lower rank police officers.
- ¹¹ Daily Trust, Abuja, 22.12.2014, 46.
- ¹² Daily Trust, Abuja, 29.12.2014.
- ¹³ Daily Trust, Abuja, 20.11.2014, 48.
- ¹⁴ However, currently some local government councils have distributed patrol vans for the VGN in their local government areas.
- ¹⁵ Nicodemus Ngozi Chukwu, interviewed by Jimam Lar, Kabwir, Kanke Local Government Area, 09.01.2015.
- ¹⁶ Group Interview, VGN Kanke, by Jimam Lar, at Checkpoint, Pankshin -Kanke-Langtang Road, 10.01.2015. I recently (24.08.2017) visited the Checkpoint and it is still functional, the VGN members however complained that allowances are not paid regularly and commitment has waned.
- ¹⁷ Police Patrol and Guard Officer, interviewed by Jimam Lar, Langtang, 10.01.2015.
- ¹⁸ District Head of Angwan Rukuba/Farin Gada – Jos, and John Bot, District Head of Rikkos.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ However, it must be noted that the mere passage of a law by the state without its proper implementation may cause more problems. An example of such a scenario is Nigeria's Anambra state where the Bakassi Boys (a vigilante group) was incorporated and regulated by the state. A law was passed by the state House of Assembly to that effect providing for its funding, operations and relationship with the police. The group however, eventually got out of hand and had to be proscribed by the Nigerian government.

²¹ Interview DPO Shendam, LGA, 10.10.2012.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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