

JUST LIKE IN THE TIME OF REHOBOAM: CORRUPTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE. IS THERE ANYTHING THE CHURCH CAN DO?

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Abstract

This article examines the various cases of corruption and other human rights abuses by the Nigerian police force and what the church can do to help victims and their aggressors. There are so many cases of police brutality, harassment, intimidation, and illegal detention. There are also many cases where innocent Nigerians are shot with guns before they tend to refuse to give bribes at checkpoints on the highway. Notwithstanding the abundance of literature on police brutality and corruption, existing literature has failed to provide the role that faith-based communities such as the church could play in providing a solution to the problem. This research utilized content analysis through a phenomenological approach. Also, the narrative of Rehoboam in the Old Testament was used as a lens in analysing the consequences of harsh police procedures. Findings reveal that some of these corrupt actions and harassment orchestrated by policemen and women are due to poor salary structure, lack of training and retraining, and the engagement of touts and cultists as policemen. The recommendations will provide adequate insight into the church's roles.

Keywords: Nigerian Police, Human Right, the Church, ENDSARS, Justice, Corruption

1. Introduction

The Church in Nigeria has been involved in social welfare in Nigeria. They are involved in poverty eradication, the fight against female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence. However, the Church appears to be aloof in the current activities of the police, as evidenced by massive human rights abuses and other corrupt practices in the Nigeria police. It is important to define human rights at this point. Human rights are "rights which people have simply as human beings irrespective of their nationalities, religion, citizenship, marital status, occupation, income or any other social or cultural activities" (Ehinder, 1998). It is the corruption in the Nigerian police force that has led to the increased cases of human rights abuses. Corruption refers to the manipulation of a process for personal or group gains. It is the abuse of power for selfish motives.

The Nigerian Police Force is an arm of the government's paramilitary forces. As an arm of the government, it has the responsibility of recognizing the fundamental human rights of Nigerians as enshrined in the constitution. The police are supposed to protect battered citizens, directing some cases to non-governmental organizations and providing shelter and medical help. The Nigerian police are also supposed to protect potential victims and stop dangerous practices (Greene, 2010). Unfortunately, these human rights are being abused by the same police force. Madubuikwe-Ekwe et al (2019:29) explain that "these rights encompass the individual sense of dignity, respect, and free participation in society, as well as a

government's role to facilitate social exchange" . Although, the courts are meant to serve as a mechanism for the protection of Nigerian rights, the police are placed to serve as a middle man between the courts and the citizens.

There are several cases of corruption and human rights abuses by the Nigerian police. There is the extortion of money at police checkpoints, arbitrary arrests and detention, mass arrests and detention, prolonged unlawful detention, extortion using threats and acts of physical abuse, and even the shooting of Nigerians. These oppressive tendencies and features of the Nigerian police force are similar to what the people of Israel suffered under the reign of Rehoboam. After the death of Solomon, Rehoboam became king of Israel. He molested and trampled upon the rights of the Israelites. According to Uroko & Obiorah (2021:2) "the response of Rehoboam to the cry of the northern Israelites was demeaning, abusive, tribalized, and threatening". He maltreated them, and it resulted in a revolt that saw him lose the entire 10 kingdoms. He even sent his chief security to go and molest the Israelites. Testing the Israelites' determination, Rehoboam dispatched Adoram, his minister of forced labor, to conscript Israelite men. Adoram, however, was stoned to death, and Rehoboam himself fled in haste to Jerusalem (Galil, 1996). This is the state of Israel that even the tyrant Rehoboam and his security were overwhelmed by the cry of the masses. The government of Nigeria has also, to a great extent, kept mute on these human rights violations carried out by policemen. Due to the lack of concern on the part of the Nigerian government, Nigerian citizens are hapless considering the state of the nation due to the fact that those in leadership positions have made a mockery of democracy (Uroko, 2018).

Research studies have been done on the Nigerian police (Aremu & Tejumola, 2008; Aborisade, 2021; Ike, Singh, Jidong, Ike,& Ayobi, 2022). This article examines the corruption and human rights abuses in the Nigerian police force, and what the church can do on the part of the victims and their aggressors. First, this article assesses the church and social welfare in Nigeria. Second, it examines the narrative of Rehoboam and his harsh policies. Thirdly, the various human rights abuses, as well as the corrupt practices of the Nigerian police were explored. This article adopted content analysis as its research lens.

2. The Church and Social Welfare

The Church is an offshoot of the Pharisaic traditions of the Bible. The Pharisees were also an offshoot of the serious persecution the church suffered under various empires, especially Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Thus, the church is now new to issues of human rights abuses and other sorts of persecution. The Old Testament birthed the New Testament. The Old Testament laws and ethics mention the church's response to the deprived or abused. Poe (2022:65) explains that:

God's people were supposed to be hospitable to strangers and foreigners (Exodus 22:21; Hebrews 13:2). The Sabbath and Jubilee years restored property and maintained a more equitable distribution of resources (Leviticus 25; Exodus 21: 1-11; Deuteronomy 15: 12-18). Those with wealth were supposed to leave grains in the fields for the poor (Leviticus 19: 9-10). Communities and families cared for widows and orphans (Deuteronomy 14: 28-29; 26:12).

The church has been involved in poverty eradication in Nigeria. The church engages in church rehabilitation programmes, scholarships for students, and paying for the health needs of the poor. According to Duke & Okafor (2020:50), the church has the "social capital and

ability to properly manage the development of the less privileged and the poor, making ecclesiastical institutions veritable partners in poverty alleviation initiatives". The church has, through the work of different congregations, built and successfully managed hospitals, schools, orphanages, hospices, rural health centres, and microfinance banks (Casmir & Nwankwo, 2015).

However, the church has not really played its role in helping those who were abused by the Nigeria police and also helping the government in curbing corruption in the Nigeria police force. In Nigeria, corruption and human rights abuses have continued to be critical challenges facing the Nigerian police force. For Nigeria to attain its sustainable development goals, there is a need for the protection of human rights of the people. As an emerging democracy, it is imperative that the police in Nigeria promote human rights through the practice of policing with a focus on protecting human rights and thus help to institutionalize and sustain democratic practice (Madubuike-Ekwe & Obayemi, 2019:22). Biblical faith calls Christians who make up the church to practice good citizenship by being engaged in the public discourse about social welfare policies and programs and the impact of all policies on the poor in the world (Poe, 2022).

3. Human Rights Abuses of Rehoboam

Rehoboam is the son of Solomon. Rehoboam's father, Solomon, also carried out harsh policies against Israel. According to Lash (2020), one of those other sins is the high taxes he levied on the people, taxes which were clearly higher than they needed to be—for Solomon's household was exceedingly rich, and taxes which eventually led to Israel's rebellion against his son Rehoboam. Rehoboam instead increased the harassment and human rights abuses against the people of Israel. In fact, the sins of the father were carried on to an even higher degree by the son. Lash (2020) explains that Rehoboam saw how it worked for his father, and he thought, "If a little bit of tyranny worked a little bit for my father, then a lot of tyranny will work a lot for me."

This is what those intoxicated with power do to sustain their actions. Rehoboam thought that using force was the answer to anything they wanted. He used bullying and hate speech. Tyrants such as Rehoboam thought that using harassment, hard labour, guns, and bullets was the only way of coercing people to do their bid. Unfortunately, Rehoboam is motivated by the fact that he finds it pleasing to increase the suffering and oppression of his people. The insensitive, sadistic nature of the new king thus vindicates the initial negative evaluation of Rehoboam that 'he did evil in the sight of the Lord' (Shaw, 1997:59).

The result was the separation of Israel from Jordan, caused by the lack of sympathy of Rehoboam for the human rights abuses Israelites were suffering at the hands of his security team. Ten tribes revolted, leaving Rehoboam with only two tribes. Rehoboam furthermore underrated the protest of the people, and he sent one of his security to continue harassing the people. The result was the death of Adoram, and Rehoboam himself was chased and ran for his life. When Rehoboam sent Adoram to collect taxes and other illegal and harsh levies from the ten tribes, not only did they refuse to pay, but they killed and, in their anger, attempted to do away with King Rehoboam (Weiss, 2004:13). In fact, he fled Jerusalem and wanted to wage war on Jeroboam and the ten tribes, but was prevented from moving against his own people by the prophet Shemaya.

4. Human Right Violation by the Nigerian Police

The Nigeria Police Force, otherwise known as the NPF was established in 1930. It was constitutionally created for the protection of the fundamental human rights of the citizens and to sustain security in the country. On the contrary, the NPF has a long history of engaging in unprofessional, corrupt, and criminal conduct, and over the years, this unwieldy force—Africa's largest—has proved difficult to effectively manage and control and has become largely unaccountable to the citizens it is meant to serve (Human Rights Watch, 2010). All these corrupt practices of the Nigerian police force threaten the fundamental human rights of the citizens. The police are the enforcers of specific rights policies, either through the protection of rights where violations are threatened, or through the carrying out of official acts of malefaction when these are prescribed by a regime (Carter & Marenin, 2022).

It seems that the Nigerian police have seen violence, intimidation as the only ways of coercing the Nigerian populace into accepting their modus operandi. This is the reason that policemen can shoot anyone in Nigeria without any feeling of remorse, making Nigerians see the police as a violent organization. The use of violence marked a dislocation between the police and the local community, which has characterised the law enforcement practices (by the police) in Nigeria of lethal force and brutality as a hall mark of their profession (Barnabas & Fred, 2015).

The cases of corruption and human rights abuses in the Nigerian police force cannot be underestimated. There is high extortion of money at police checkpoints and police stations across the country. There is hardly a police checkpoint where motorists are not stopped and money is requested from them. In fact, the youths are the worst hit, because they are forced to use their bank apps on their phones to make the necessary transfer to the police men's account. For instance, Babatola Ogunedina shares a receipt as he accuses a police officer of extorting N130,000 from him after falsely accusing him of being a Yahoo Boy. He claimed one of the officers, named Festus Akele, eventually provided his account number and N130,000 was transferred to the officer (Ikeji, 2022).

There are also illegal arrests, molestation, and even detention, without court permission of Nigerians. Sometimes, policemen go to the street, arrest innocent bystanders after any incident, and take them to the station. Sometimes the family of these people do not even know that their relation has been detained. There was one Chibueze Chukwuwho *relocated from Ebonyi State to Lagos at the age of 24. He got a shop where he was trading in footstuff, until one fateful afternoon when the Police stormed his shop and arrested him for a crime – armed robbery – allegedly committed by his friend.* He was released in June 2022 (Ojelu, 2022). Furthermore, Onuh-Yahaya (2021) explains that in Nigeria, over 70 per cent of detainees await trial, which is an affront to Nigeria's laws that require suspects to be arraigned within 24 hours of their arrest. Also, Onuh-Yahaya explains that police detention facilities remain overcrowded with pre-trial detainees who are kept in custody for a period ranging from one week to two years.

Police are also known to use torture on their victims who have not been proven to be guilty. Sometimes, they use wood, rods, and even their guns to shoot the legs of the Nigerians. Sometimes the person is allowed to bleed to death, or he is even killed by the policemen. A Frazer (2022) explains the story of a police officer who was on illegal duty and allegedly killed two people at a birthday party in Gowon Estate in the Egbeda area of Alimosho, Lagos State. Also, in October 2018,

a harmless 31-year-old Nigerian lady, Anita Akapson, who just returned to the country after bagging a degree abroad, was killed by the police in cold blood. A member of the National Youth Service Corps, Linda Igwetu, was killed by the police on July 3, 2018, on her way home from her place of primary assignment in the Mabushi area of Abuja (Omilana, 2019:1).

Cases of sexual molestation and assault on Nigerian women abound. Policemen have been recorded to have abused their female victims sexually. This can be through the use of sexually abused words, or rape. In Rivers State, a police Inspector with the Rivers Command of the Nigeria Police, Salihu Kazeem was arrested and detained for allegedly raping teenage girls and also videoing the assault (Sahara, 2022). Also, in Abia state, academic activities were halted at the Polytechnic as students took over the Aba -Owerri road protesting the alleged rape of three students by Policemen attached to the Rapid Response Squad (Ugochukwu, 2021). To a great extent, most of the errant policemen were neither sanctioned, questioned or even prosecuted.

So many reasons have been given for the increasing corruption and human rights abuses carried out by the men of the Nigerian police. There is no proper training for people who want to enter the Nigerian police. Nigerian policemen and women are inadequately screened and tested before recruitment, poorly trained – before and throughout their career. Sometimes, people who are touts or even cultists are employed by the Nigerian police due to a lack of proper groundwork. There was a narrative of Corporal Matthew Isaac, attached to the Ebonyi State Police Command, who was caught in a viral video, singing, dancing, and brandishing a rifle in praise of a particular confraternity (cult) (Omonobi, 2022).

Also, there is poor funding for the Nigerian police force. There are reports of policemen being paid as little as 40 thousand naira, which in present day Nigerian society cannot go anywhere. Providing more evidence, Odira (2015) explains that "a Nigerian police constable was said to be earning between N22, 000 and N27, 000, depending on his length of service and accommodation plan; a sergeant's pay is about N30, 000, after deductions of tax, accommodation allowance and others; a police inspector now earns at least N50, 000 monthly". When one is recruited into the Nigerian Police, they are made to buy their police uniforms, shoes, and other police requirements with their own funds. So, in order to recover what these recruited policemen felt they had lost, it was necessary for them to involve themselves in bribery, corruption, and harassment of the citizens. Physical hunger is easier to diagnose than moral weakness. Lack of money is easier to discern than spiritual poverty.

Lack of political will by the authorities in the prosecution of officers caught in corruption and human rights abuses. Most times, these policemen say it openly that nothing will happen to them no matter what they do. Little wonder, in a small provocation they will snap, kicked and kill their victims. According to Amnesty international (2014), constant and consistent reports are received from lawyers, human rights activists, social analysts, and journalists about police regularly demanding bribes, stealing, extorting money, and engaging in different forms of brutality and abuse of rights. Releasing more facts, Omilana (2019)

The Nigeria Legal Defence and Assistance Project found 2,987 extrajudicial executions by police in 2004, but no force member was convicted. The Police Service Commission, which is responsible for police discipline, routinely refers all extrajudicial police killings to the police for investigation, and the Commission's quarterly reports to the President are not published.

Okonkwo mentions other reasons for the failure of the Nigerian police to include “poor super-vision and leadership, weak disciplinary control, poor information management, poor remuneration and working environment, produce orientation and attitudes that are inappropriate to policing in a civilized and democratic society”(Okonkwo, 1997).

5. Impacts of the activities of the Nigerian Police Force

The corrupt activities vis a vis other human rights abuses carried out by the Nigerian police force cannot be underestimated. First, it has made Nigerians have little or no respect for members of the Nigerian police. In fact, children are ashamed of telling friends that their father or mother is a policeman or woman due to the various sad narratives heard about them. Babalola (2022) "Unemployment is on the increase, innocent citizens are killed mercilessly, poverty is on the increase, the rich are gnashing their teeth, the police whose duty is to protect their lives and properties, have lost their fear factor and respect".

Second, it has caused some Nigerians to be physically disabled. This is based on the fact that some people who were shot with a gun were unable to walk again. Some had teargas on their eyes, hence they are partially or fully blind. Some were detained based on false information, and when they are released, they have already lost their source of livelihood. Contributing to this argument, Okeshola (2013:242) explains that there is the decapitation of suspects, untold human suffering occasioned, and generally the violation of the dignity and liberties of these citizens.

Third, the poverty level in Nigeria is also affected. Some of the victims killed or incapacitated by torture also become liabilities to their respective families. Apriori, these victims were the breadwinners of their families, paying the school fees, house rent, and feeding of their families. But after they are killed, the families fall into poverty and agony. There is the devastating effect on the economy as some of these suspects that have been killed or maimed in the process of investigation have turned out to be economically productive and liabilities to their families and society at large (Okeshola, 2013:248).

Fourth, it has led to love lost and also enmity between the Nigerian police force and the citizens. This could be seen in the ENDSARS movement in Lagos, Nigeria. The #EndSARS protests saw young Nigerians united toward a common goal, a singular purpose: to put a definite end to police brutality in Nigeria (Onuh-Yahaya, 2021). The Nigerian police have a slogan that says "police is your friend." However, the corruption and human rights abuses of the members of the Nigerian police have made them enemies of Nigeria. Thus, "the violent attitude of some policemen has affected police-civilian relationships. Victims of police brutality have developed a lack of trust towards the Nigerian police and are unwilling to share some vital intelligence information that can help police in fighting crimes for fear of being victimized" (Chikadibia Onwunyirimadu, 2022:19). Indirectly, the hatred taht Nigerians have towards to the Nigerian police was extended to the Nigerian government because it is believe that the Nigerian police is an instrument of the government for subjugation of the people and putting them in perpetual fear of protesting their poor and sad situation in the country. In the words of Carter & Marenin (1979:19) it has "undermine the popularity of the government".

6. The Role of the Church in the fight against Police Brutality

The role of the church in mitigating the many human rights abuses carried out by the Nigerian police force cannot be overemphasised. First, the church should start with its congregants by telling them to see other human beings as their neighbours as started in the Bible. When these policemen, who are their congregants, are made to understand the spiritual implications of respect for other people's rights and privileges, they tend to obey, rather than the conventional acts of the Nigerian constitution.

Second, there is the need for the church to liaise with the Police Service Commission and the Inspector General of Police to organise seminars for the various police units on the need for them to shun bribery, intimidation, and harassment of Nigerians. They should also educate them on the fact that when they start treating Nigerians as their neighbour, they will be gifted with many things from the same Nigerians who are trying to coerce and get things.

Also, the church should join hands with the many human rights organisations spread across the various states in Nigeria. As part of this agreement, the police service commission should send new recruits to human rights organizations for training on civil engagement.

The church should also encourage the government to increase police salaries due to the cost of living in Nigeria. Also, there should be prompt payment of police salaries. The church should also advise the government on the need for the rehabilitation of residential quotas of policemen in police quarters in Nigeria.

7. Conclusion

The various corrupt practices going on in the Nigerian police force and human beings can be curbed through proactive and reactive methods. Although, there is no doubt that the poor funding of the Nigerian police force is part of the motivating factors to police human rights abuses, the fact remains that the citizens should not be used as scape-goat to voiced their dissatisfaction with their poor funding. Although the government has rarely involved the church in matters of this nature, this research is a clarion call on the church to make itself available as the middle man between the citizens on one hand and the Nigerian police and government on the other hand.

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