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State, vigilantism and youth violence in Nigeria: A study of ‘Onyabo’ in Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos State

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Studies and institutional reports have argued that youth violence is a precursor to national insecurity in Nigeria. Contrary to youth as an agent of transformation and national development, their recurrence in violent conflicts has continued to undermine the national security of the country. Such security backlash is further conflated by the protracted Boko Haram insurgency which has ruptured the nation building, but also tugs on the sovereignty of the Nigerian state. While these phenomena have increasing implication for the country stability; youth violence across various communities in Lagos State, a megacity; the economic nerve centre of the country has further put Nigeria’s economic prosperity and security architecture in dire strait. This security deficit is the prevalence of anomie and lawlessness in Ikorodu Local Government area of Lagos State, instigated by the crisis of urbanisation, land grabbing, demographic pressure and cultism. This study examines youth violence and the failure of the Nigerian state, with focus on Onyabo Vigilante Groups (OVG), as a crucial actor in curtailing violence in Ikorodu Local Government of Lagos State. Using a qualitative method as a frame of analysis, the study argues that the lack of state capacity, resulting in unemployment, abject poverty and poor socio-condition is responsible for the widespread incidences of youth violence instigated by land grabbing and cultism in Ikorodu Local Government. The study concludes on the imperative of overhauling the security architecture of the state, to recognise vigilante groups legally and institutionally, as a complementary security outfit to the Nigerian police. More importantly, questions of poverty, unemployment and social dislocation should be put on the front burner of government developmental agenda to forestall hopelessness and frustration which are frequent condition breeding violence in Nigeria.

Key words: State, vigilante, youth violence, *Onyabo*, Ikorodu.

INTRODUCTION

One major crisis that has characterized the Nigerian state since its reconnection with democratic rule in 1999 is the problem of violent conflicts. This crisis is embedded in a sequence of structural, historical and socio-economic

issues. As Ogbeifun (2007) rightly noted, every geopolitical region of Nigeria is characterized by entrenched structures of violent conflicts, with the youths as the principal agent. For example, the youth has been at the

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centre of the restiveness, demand for resource control and environmental conflicts in the oil-producing region of the south-south. In the three geo-political zones of the old northern region, the enormous damage inflicted on different communities and peoples by the incessant outbreak of ethno-religious conflicts and disputes relating to land rights and identity issues (community squabbles between “indigenes” and “settlers”) as well as the perennial Boko Haram insurgencies have been the cursor to the damaging conflicts ravaging the Northern part of the country. In the south-east, organized crime and political turbulence have compounded the problem of societal fragmentation, promoting anarchy and lawlessness. In the south-western part of Nigeria, the youths are the principal protagonists of the majority of the ethnic and communal violence which have bedevilled the region. Indeed, conflict is gaining momentum and many states in Nigeria are suffering from the scourges of violent conflicts and disorder

The prevalence of violent conflicts, evinced by the rising wave of cult clashes and youth violence among young generations in many parts of Lagos State is suggestive of how violence is eating deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. Contrary to the expectation that youths are the fulcrum of development and societal transformation, cultism and violence in many local communities within a particularized segment of the youth¹ raises serious concern for the already overarched and stressed security situations in many parts of the country. Youth violence is a constant phenomenon in many communities, destroying properties and loss of life. As stated by the Impact Newspaper 2017 ‘not less than 20 incidences of cult gang clashes between “Eiye” and “Aiye” confraternities had taken place between, 2011-2015’ in Ikorodu Local government, recording serious casualties and death (Impact, April 25th 2017). The increasing warfare among these groups has not only undermined the peace and stability of the community, it has also dangerously set a new mode of conflicts resulting from violence response from the vigilante group.

Providing the socio-political context in which crime appears to be increasing in Nigeria, Shearing and Kempa (2000:33) argue that ‘the time of political transition from a repressive authoritarian state to a more open democratic society is associated with high degree of crime and disorder that comes with any attempt to break with established repressive modes of policing’. While this position provides a fertile ground for the emergence of crime and democratisation of violence in Nigeria, a causal factor which clearly explains the preponderance and protracted nature of conflicts in many communities is the increasing level of poverty and unemployment in the country. These issues are the predisposing factors of conflicts especially as the quest for survival for youth not formally engaged has become sacrosanct. Indeed, the

thriving land grabbing activities in Ikorodu division; a rural-urban community of Lagos state provides a clear explanation of how youths have engaged in violent conflicts because of the quest for economic survival and primitive accumulation of wealth.

Given the rentier benefit and wealth accumulation which land grabbing activities attracts, unemployed youths are often mobilised, viewing land grabbing activities as a leeway to escaping unemployment and poverty. Indeed, it is the case that youth groups have drawn a connection between poverty, unemployment and land grabbing. The instrument of violence with these groups also provides a fertile ground through which they serve as ready-made agent of violence for ambitious politicians whose aim is to manipulate the electoral process. While it is expected that the Nigerian police which is constitutionally and institutionally mandated to ensure an orderly society should curb the activities of these groups, it has been grossly inefficient, lacking societal trust and confidence. In some cases, the Nigerian police have been accused of allowing the activities of these groups to go uncontrolled, partly because of their poor capacity or barefaced corruption characterizing the operations of the Nigerian police. Several of these youths caught in the act by the Nigerian police or arrested by vigilante group and handed over to the police have been released without prosecution.

However, youth militias and community vigilantes have cashed in on the vacuum created by the dysfunction and legitimacy crisis of government’s law enforcement agencies to ostensibly substitute in the function of law enforcement and crime control. This has given rise to the ‘Onyabo Vigilante Group’². Although there were initial apprehensions on the perception on Onyabo, their emergence at a time when the police have failed or needed support further confer legitimacy on the group. The ascendancy of Onyabo as a vigilante group was therefore seen as a ‘proactive philosophy that solves the problems that are either criminal, affects the quality of life, or increases citizens’ fear of crime’ (Okeshola and Mudiare, 2013: 134). Onyabo extra-judicial killings, intimidation and highhandedness, raise serious issues of concerns; they are however a potent force in ensuring peace and security in many communities. Given this, the study examines youth violence and the failure of the Nigerian state, with a corresponding emergence of Onyabo vigilante groups as crucial actor in stemming violence in Ikorodu Local Government of Lagos State. The paper is divided into five parts. Following the introduction part, the paper reviewed extant literature on

¹ These particularized elements include motor mechanics, carpenters, welders, vulcanizes and okada riders among others.

² Onyabo is a local vigilante group whose objective is to ensure the safety and general security of Ikorodu people and environ. Their objective is to prevent crime and security control. Initially, Onyabo started as a cultural Oro singer to stem theft and property crime under the leadership of Kamoru Bombata Oshikabala popularly known as-Baba Ruka. Their approach was to go after petty and local thieves who were in the habit of cutting window nets to gain access and steal from people’s houses.

the concepts of the state and informal policing structures. The next part discusses the ethnography of Ikorodu, to set the context for understanding factors responsible for youth violence in Ikorodu Local government. Part four examines land grabbing activities and the emergence of violence in Ikorodu, while the final part underpins the State, Onyabo and youth violence in Ikorodu. We then conclude and offer recommendations.

Research questions

General research question

(i) What accounted for the emergence of community policing in the security of life and property in Nigeria in Ikorodu Local Government.

Specific research questions

(i) Why are cult clashes and youth violence so rampant among youth population in Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos State?

(ii) How has the activity of the vigilante groups substituted or complemented the role of the police in securing life and property?

(iii) What are the motivations of Onyabo in controlling crime and security?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts qualitative method and approach mainly because of the nature of the research questions developed for this study. The qualitative method entails the development of explanations for a social and political phenomenon through an analysis of a given research problem from the perspectives, values opinions, behaviours of the research participants and within the social and political context of the population, to answer a particular question' (Hancock, 2002: 2). Thus, the goal of this methodology is to answer question of 'how and why'. In other words, the study aims to investigate the emergence of Onyabo vigilante groups in the control of crime and security.

Under the qualitative methods, In-depth semi structured interviews and documentary analysis were used to source information from respondents in their social context, based on a set of open-ended questions rather than the use of standardized questions in quantitative surveys (Babbie, 2008: 336). The open-ended questions allow for qualitative analysis of the views of the respondents. As an explorative study, this method would ensure effective participation of the research subject and flexibility which allows the probing of the research participants to gain the underlying assumptions and varieties of perspectives from them. This method is then followed by the area of study, selection of sample and size; in-depth interviews and ethical issues and limitation of the study.

Area of study

The study took place in Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos

State. The selected areas of the study are limited to Aga, Isikalu, Obun-ale, Ladega, Jaladugbo, Solomade, Igbogbo areas within Ikorodu division where the stronghold of the cult groups and youth violence are prevalent. Notwithstanding, the study explores other areas of the community where useful data and information vital to the study were sourced.

Sample and sampling size

The sampling method used for the in-depth Interviews was quota sampling. The significance of this method is that there is no need for call-backs and time-wasting is reduced (Gilbert, 1993:76). The variables used in allocating the quota include geographical areas, gender, age and occupation/non-occupation. Two focus group discussions were organised separately with a total of 10 participants in each of the discussion. Participants comprise a broad spectrum of members of cult groups and members of the community in the local government area where the study took place. The objective was to capture a range of different perspectives on Onyabo and the causes of youth violence. Participants were thus selected from:

- (i) Youth associations,
- (ii) Cult groups [Eiye and Aiye confraternity],
- (iii) Traditional chiefs,
- (iv) Land grabbers/agents,
- (v) Onyabo vigilante group, and
- (vi) Members of the community.

The study adopted the in-depth face to face interview for its inquiry. This method is advantageous than the postal or telephoning survey, because of its higher completion rate as well as its ability to elicit more information when used by skilled interviewers (Newell, 1993: 97). Also, the high level of illiteracy in the country means that using a postal or telephonic survey in conducting an interview will exclude participant, and thus, likely to call to question the validity of the findings. During the interview a total number of 60 participants were interviewed at the rate of 10 per the areas mentioned above. The interview schedule was divided into two sections. The first section was on the descriptive profile of the respondents, while the second parts contained questions on causes of youth violence, perception of Onyabo in safety and security and the role of the state (police) in crime and security control. The interviews were written down and recorded in audio tapes with total cooperation of respondents and they were transcribed immediately. The focus group discussions were well-coordinated, and all the FGD questions were put to the respondents simply and openly, motivating respondents to relate, discuss freely and presents their experiences and views without sensitivity of apprehension.

Data analysis

After the fieldwork, thematic structures and analytical frame were developed to facilitate the sorting and grouping of evidence in a manner which provides clear organisation for the interpretation and analysis of data. Data were therefore analysed within the context of the thematic framework generated in a way which reflected the main sections of the interview schedule which was drawn up to generate cross-cutting themes and patterns from the respondents' answers to the questions. The results of these were presented in narrative and descriptive form.

Ethical consideration

Several issues arose in the course of data collection which

borders on confidentiality and anonymity. As noted by Babbie (2008: 66-77) qualitative research is more critical of ethical issues given that it 'fulfils the principles of voluntary participation, inoffensiveness to participants, anonymity and confidentiality and avoidance of deception'. As a result of this the research participants were assured that whatever information they disclose in the course of the interviews and discussions would be held in strict confidence and would not be revealed to a third party. The study guarantees the principle of anonymity, by protecting the image of the respondents. Their names were not mentioned in the study to ensure their safety. Through the consent form filled by the respondents, the research participants enjoy the liberty to opt-out of the study. While interviews and discussions were not forced on research participants, the study considers the safety of respondents concerning the ethical issues raised in this study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptualising the state and state failure

The state, according to Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006: 28), is "the central agency in regulating citizens' conduct, setting rules and procedure and ensuring fairness in social interactions and bargaining amongst the people". As a central agency, it is a human community that successfully claims for itself the 'monopoly of the legitimate use of violence' within a given 'territory' (Weber, 1918). Buttressing Max Weber, Midgal (1988:23) conceives the state as 'organisation, which is composed of numerous agencies led and coordinated by the state leadership that has the ability or authority to make and implement the binding rules for all the people as well as the parameters of rulemaking for other social organisations in a given territory, using force if necessary to have its way'.

Critical to these conceptions is that the most important characteristic of the state is a definite territory through which effective legitimate control of its areas is exercised. Not only that, but the state must also have and maintain the capacity to provide for the welfare of its public, provision that should include the protection of lives and properties. The inability of the state to provide these public goods, often predispose violence as other groups contest the security space with the state. The enduring nature of such contest, as a consequence of this, a state becomes weaker and often edge towards emasculation and failure (Akinyele, 2008; Ajayi and Aderinto, 2008; Alemika and Chukwuma, 2008).

The literature on state failure has been vigorously debated by scholars (Onapajo, Maiangwa, Uzodike and Whetho, 2012; Aloziuwun, 2012; Rotberg, 2002). The central argument of these scholars is that the erosion of state capacity is the bane of increasing violence in many transitional societies. According to Rotberg (2002:85) a failed state is the state that cannot provide political goods to her citizens. The government of such state loses 'their legitimacy, and in the eyes and hearts of a growing plurality of its citizens, the nation state itself becomes

illegitimate' (Rotberg, 2002: 85). A failed state therefore presupposes a demonstration of incompetence and weakness on the part of the state to promote the basic functions, needs and safety of the people (Christian, 2016). Some of the core issues responsible for state failure include but not limited to the growth of criminal violence, porous border, weak institutions, and lack of essential public goods (Rotberg, 2003). The combination of these factors explains the growing insecurity in many transitional societies, as many civilian groups not only contend with the state for the inability to provide public goods, they also fill the void left by the incapacity of the state. This is the basis upon the emergence of vigilantism in Nigeria on the need to either occupy the vacuum left by the police or complement them.

Vigilantism and informal policing

The notion of vigilantism is a typology of informal policing and it evolved in several societies as a consequence of local specificity and the quest to ensure the safety and security of the people. While vigilantism has been argued within the 'retraditionalisation thesis' (Bayart et al., 1999; Kagwanja, 2002; Ellis, 2005), which explains vigilantism as merely a return to youth power or the communal justice system; it is more of a reflection of the people's determination to safeguard themselves as a consequence of state failure than a mere glorification of social-cultural and historical trajectories. According to Baker (2002:223-224) vigilantism is a form of non-state self-help characterised by reactive, ad hoc and often violent methods of control. This violent attribute is what Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1974:542) referred to as 'established violence'. To them vigilantism connotes 'rowdy cowboys lynching an unfortunate horse thief; it however amounts to the establishment of violence which consists of acts or threat of coercion in violation of the formal boundaries of an established socio-political order' (Rosenbaum and Sederberg, 1974:543). By this, it means vigilantism is the product of violence which they are determined to erase. Despite this inadequacy, vigilantism has filled the vacuum left as a result of the inefficiency of the state (Nigerian police). As noted by Titeca (2009:306) in his study of Massai tribe of Uganda, 'vigilantism is a means to ensure peace and security of the people, even though they also pursue their selfish interest in the process of securing the society'. Such selfish interest is the basis of the negative perception against vigilante groups.

In a study conducted by the Pretoria-based Institute of Security Studies in 2002, a major reason adduced for the rising activities of vigilante groups include 'perceived rise in crime, poor perception about the inability of the criminal justice system to respond to the needs of victims of crimes, and inadequacies of the formal police service' (Sekhonyane, 2002: 1). This argument is further reinforced by Scharf (2000) 'community-initiated policing'

which was coined as a consequence of the perceived failure of the state to provide citizens with adequate and effective protection (Ajayi and Aderinto, 2008; Akinyele, 2008; Shaw, 2002). The view that police are so weak, vulnerable and ill-equipped to fight crimes considering the dramatic transformation of many communities further explains the growth of crime (Shaw, 2002). A contextual socio-political understanding of state failure was provided by Shearings and Kempa (2000:33) when they noted that 'the time of political transition from a repressive authoritarian state to a more open democratic society is associated with a high degree of crime and disorder that comes with any attempt to break with established repressive modes of policing'.

Based on membership, methodology, ideology and communalism, Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1974: 548-559) identified several strands of vigilantism to include; the crime control vigilantism, social group vigilantism and regime control vigilantism, ethnic vigilantism, state-sponsored vigilantism among others. The crime control vigilantism is 'directed against individual involved in act proscribed by the formal legal system' (Momoh, 2011: 47). A group such as the *Esquadrao da Morte* (Death Squad) in Brazil and Argentina, the Afro-American Group Attack in Chicago and *Masais* groups in Uganda are under this category. *Ku Klux Klan* in the US and 'Brown Shirts' under Adolf Hitler in the 1930s are classical examples. The regime control vigilantism exists to control administrations. Under this category, vigilantism becomes so influential to the extent that they determine political leadership and often effect regime-change using organised or established violence to evoke political change. The military coup of Ayub Khan in 1958 aimed at regime sustenance than the revolutionary takeover of Nasser in Egypt which is a clear example (Momoh, 2011).

The ethnic vigilantism is organised along ethnic or tribal lines and is established to defend the pedestrian or narrow interest through crime control or ethnic bigotry (Chukwuma, 2002). An example includes the Odua's People Congress (OPC) based in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. They were initially created for self-determination struggle for the Yoruba people in 1994 which were occasioned by the quest for restructuring and tension which the skewed nature of the Nigerian federalism generated. The resolution of some of those questions after the disengagement of the military and reincarnation of democracy in 1999 led to the changing role of the group. Many of them operated as a crime fighter and also contracted as community policing or vigilantism under the OPC structure (Tertsakian, 2003).

There is also the neighbourhood community vigilantism whose goal is to ensure crime and social control (Chukwuma, 2002: 11-12). Such vigilante groups are volunteer informal community policing operating under community mandate to fight crime and ensure security. This informal policing emerged as a consequence of the

desire of the community to ensure their safety and security, especially if they have been under consecutive security threats and disorderliness. The Onyabo vigilante group falls in this category of vigilantism. They evolved from the society and their operations are controlled by the traditional structure which serves as the backbone for the success of their operations. The attempt at classifying vigilantism above, are by no means exclusive; the trajectories and sometimes metamorphoses of vigilantism as an instrument of social dysfunctionality or instrument of oppression against those they swore to protect further reinforce the argument that vigilantism is a product and evolution of their agenda. This is why the government should ensure that the activities of vigilante group or community policing are supervised, providing support and legal framework that view them as a complementary force to the Nigerian police.

One major observation in the mainstream literature and extant studies of vigilantism is an obsession with the immoderations or excesses of the informal security group. Most of these studies seem to blacklist the vigilante group, without looking at their contribution to security. Given that crime has a way of fighting back, many of these studies hardly provide sufficient information that may be useful in institutionalizing why vigilante groups requires government support in crime and security control. Considering that vigilante group is fast occupying the vacuum left by the state in providing security to life and property, it is only apt that this group requires support and cooperation in complementing the formal policing (Okafor, 2007).

While it cannot be denied that some vigilante group may go beyond the limit of the law in crime control, a major gap in the literature is lack of concrete and systematic studies that show government support for vigilante groups, despite putting their life on the line to rescue the community from insecurity. This study fills the gap left by the literature to canvas the role of informal policing (Onyabo Vigilante Group) as a crucial actor in complementing the Nigerian police force in the effort to control crime and security.

History and ethnological development of Ikorodu

Ikorodu lies on a plateau, and is bounded in the south by the Lagos lagoon. In the North it is bordered with Ogun State, and further to the East with Epe division of Lagos State. Ikorodu is approximately about 36 km north of Lagos State (Asaju, 2006). Historically, Ikorodu came into existence between 1500 A.D and 1600 A.D. It was founded by the son of Akarigbo, who was said to have migrated from *Offin-Ile* in the present day Shagamu (Yusuf, 2017). Several historical accounts have it that one of the sons of Akarigbo embarked on hunting expedition which led to the discovery of a place called *Oko-Odu* (vegetable farm). As it is presently defined Oko-

Odu is the entire area called Agbele in Ikorodu, the same place where the first settlers in Ikorodu were domesticated³. While this account was acceptable as the major source to the emergence of Ikorodu, the *Ogborin* account by the people of *Itunmoja* which suggests that they were the first settlers in Ikorodu, having migrated from *Ijebu Idowa*; was much less episodic but has not undermined the generally accepted view that Oga, one of the Akarigbo son founded Ikorodu. One account has it that Oga invited his brothers *Lasunwon, Rademo, Anoko, Osonusi (alias Ogbonyari) Igmisoje, Otutubiosun, Oladepo and Sekunmade* to join him in Ikorodu and they all settled in the heart of the massive forest, with farming and hunting being their major occupation. They were later met by another set of migrants led by *Eregbouwa* (referred to as *Rebugbawa*) around 1630 A.D from the ancient royal family of Oliha in Benin. According to the oral account from Oba Salaudeen Afolabi Oyefusi; Oguntade II [the former Ayangbure of Ikorodu], 'the legendary Oga accommodated the migrant from Benin largely due to his kind hearted disposition'⁴. This foisted a cordial relationship between the Akarigbo-Oga stock and the Bini migrants.

However, this relationship culminated in the internalization of traditional hierarchy and stratification which makes Oga descendants as the number one traditional position defined by their being the first *Oloja*; now known as *Oba* till date. In the same pact, the Second-in-Command called *Olisa* was conceded to the Benin migrants. While this was happening, several other migrants' settlers joined to boost the hitherto settlement pattern in Ikorodu. As argued by Matthew Awolesi, the former Chairman, Ikorodu Local Government, the settlement patterns of Ikorodu will never be completed without mentioning migrants from other parts of Yoruba land including the *Ijesh*a people, *Egba* people and some *Ijebu* stocks among other races from the Yoruba dynasty. These migrants clustered around the nucleus of settlement called '*Itun*' in *Ijebu* dialects, otherwise known as quarters in the English language; located within the three administrative areas of Ikorodu [Aga, Ijomu and Isele]. For example, it was believed that *Itun-layeode* people in Ikorodu are migrants from Ode-Remo, whereas, *Itun-soku* quarter in Ikorodu is mainly occupied by migrants from Isokun in Shagamu. Similarly, *Ita-gbodo* people are settlers from *Oke-Gbodo* in Ogun State. In the case of *Itun-Elepe*, it was mainly occupied by migrants from *Elepe* stock in Ishagamu while *Itun-waiye* was originally the quarter of people from *Iwaye* in Ogun State; *Itun-soku* was originally migrants whose roots could be traced to Isokun quarters in Ishagamu and *Itun-ojoru* was the quarters dominated by migrants of *Egba* origin from Abeokuta⁵.

The changing phase of development in Ikorodu Local Government

The area of Lagos State called Ikorodu Local Government is a rural-urban community which is witnessing tremendous migration and rural-urban development. The development is evinced by the opening up of landmass and increasing population. As it is, Ikorodu is unofficially estimated to be about 5 million people⁶. This population constituted about one-fifth of Lagos State, deemed to be in the region of 20 million people. This is further evinced by the proximity and access to Lagos Island; the economic nerve centre of Lagos state. Indeed, Ikorodu provides the sea and land route to the island which houses the country's major economic activities, business districts and government offices. For this reason, people view Ikorodu as a major residential area where they can retire following hectic business activities on the island. Many people working on the island prefer to be domiciled in Ikorodu, using opportunity to access cheap land and built houses in Ikorodu. Estate agents have leveraged on such opportunities to acquire land for their business and easily established a housing scheme or estate in Ikorodu. This factor has largely been responsible for the increasing demand and ownership of landed properties in Ikorodu.

Although, there are other divisions like Badagry and Epe divisions, which are also rural-urban communities, and also share similar characteristics with Ikorodu, they however lack the proximity, urbanisation drive and industrial capacity which Ikorodu possesses. For Badagry, is connected by the Lagos lagoon, but boasts a gateway community to neighbouring countries. In the same vein, Epe like Badagry in terms of access to Lagos lagoon is just opening up to the island through Lekki-Ajah axis where properties are quite exorbitant. Unequivocally, Ikorodu is by far the most developed among these divisions. It is closer to the Island. As noted by Odewunmi (2006: 14) 'Ikorodu is closer to greater Lagos more than Badagry and Epe. It is also the most developed outside Lagos; its location along Lagos-Sagamu-Ibadan Express Road, sanctuary role for population spillover from Lagos and thriving family activities have helped its growth'.

Ikorodu is the largest industrial estate in West Africa, parading foremost government establishment including Nitel, Voice of Nigeria, Egbin Thermal stations, Radio Lagos, Port Authority. It also parades multinational coy like Paterson and Zochonics Plc, Nichemtex Nigeria Limited, Spintex Nigerian Limited, Lucky Fibre, Ocean Fisheries, Dangote Nig Plc among others. These industries are one of the largest employers of labour in the state.

While it can be said that Ikorodu has benefited from the population influx, it has also suffers the consequence of Lagos congestion as the spill-over effect and the serial migration no doubt opened Ikorodu to crime and

³ Interview conducted with a prominent indigene of Ikorodu in 2017

⁴ Personal Interview with late Oba Salawu Oyefusi, 2013.

⁵ Interview conducted with a former chairman of Ikorodu Local government in 2015.

⁶ Interview conducted with a prominent indigene of Ikorodu in 2017

nefarious activities. Many criminals use Ikorodu as a hideout and safe haven for their heinous activities outside Ikorodu. For example, it has been claimed that after the demolition of Ajelogo market in Mile 12 (which often used to be the hideout of criminals), the crime rate has increased in Ikorodu. The major factor adduced is that most of these criminals had relocated to Ikorodu which is deemed to be safer because of its rural nature⁷. As stated by a prominent member of a Community Development Association in Ikorodu (CDA):

We are appealing to Governor Ambode to come to our rescue. There is no day that criminals do not operate in Ikorodu especially at Igboolomu because of our proximity to the oil pipelines. All the criminals chased from other parts of Lagos State find their abode here in Ikorodu and this has increased crime rate.

No doubt criminal activities such as bunkering, pipeline vandalism, ritual killings, cultism and land grabbing have become prevalent in Ikorodu in recent time. This background offers the lens to the rising waves of crime, urbanisation, demographic pressure and conflicting land tenure system which has not only rocked the security, but has also instigated crime such as ritual killing, cultism and land grabbing among other dreadful criminalities in Ikorodu Local Government.

Land grabbing and youth violence in Ikorodu Local Government

Following the urbanisation and development, land became a valuable asset and essential commodity in Ikorodu Local Government. Families began to give attention to histories, oral traditions and ownership of lands. A major reason was the lucrateness and economic proceeds families are realising from the land because of the influx of people from different parts of the adjoining areas, including the South Western part of the country. Many people are driven by the ambition to come to Lagos State due to the economic opportunities it possesses. However, the high rents and scarcity of accommodation owing to over-bloated population of the island make many people to stay in Ikorodu for its cheap accommodation and proximity to Lagos.

Poverty, unemployment and low social economic status

The excruciating socio-economic conditions resulting from lack of employment and economic opportunities have further exacerbated the rent-seeking activities and businesses on land (Alozioenwu, 2012). This no doubt

offers an opportunity for unemployed youths and poverty-stricken young people who view land business as opportunity to solve their immediate problem and depressing condition of living. A major finding in the study is the impact of unemployment on violent conflicts. Many unemployed youths, neither working in formal employee-employer arrangements, nor occupied independent income-generating activities became vulnerable because of the thriving land businesses. Many of them left their employment in the hope of making quick money through land grabbing; including artisans (mechanic, welder, panel beater, Bike-rider, painter among others) of middle-aged, whose work has not been yielding because of the hardship and frustration imposed by the country's economic crisis. According to the Nigeria's federal government report, '80 per cent of youths are unemployed, 10 per cent of them are underemployed in 2008' (Daily Trust, 2008). In a similar vein, the chairman of the House Committee on Youth and Social Development revealed that of the over 40 million unemployed youths in the country, 23 million of them are under-employment and therefore susceptible to crime and criminal activities (Daily Trust, 2008). This situation has provided a potential 'source of discontent among youth, contributing to a sense of frustration and hopelessness and undermining their sense of social identity and recognition in the society' (Nyiayaana, 2011:20). The claim of one of the respondents suggests that not that many of these youths do not have a job, but they are vulnerable because of the social dislocation in the country. According to him:

Many of us don't have anything doing. As an example, I am not educated, because my parent cannot afford to educate me. Though, I was trained as a welder, but the absence of electricity has affected me to the extent that I cannot pay for my shop until the landlord evicted me. I have a wife, and two children which I must feed and take responsibility for them. The reality of survival is what led me to land grabbing activities to see money to feed my family. It was in the process that I was inducted into a cult group.

The factors above make it easy for land grabbers or agents to mobilise young people in the community and initiate them into cultism. Oath-taking is a major part of this initiation. The most dreaded of these cult groups are the Eiye and Aiye confraternities. According to a security respondent, 'the tactics of the land speculators or the *Ajagungbale* (land grabbers) is usually to storm villages, induce young people with money and material gifts and initiate them into cultism. Many of these initiators were former cultists during their university days. A number of them are drop-outs and could not fit into society and so needed criminal activities to survive'. Apart from cult members, some members of the Odua People's Congress (OPC) are also recruited. Those recruited are usually the disgruntled or those without character. The

⁷ Personal Interview with a CDA member in Igboolomu area of Ikorodu in 2017

involvement of many of them is often unknown to their coordinators or zones⁸. A traditional chief has traced the genesis of conflicts in Ikorodu to land grabbing when he posited that:

I can authoritatively say that the emergence of 'Ajagungbale' is the genesis of the problem of insecurity Ikorodu is facing. The emergence of the land grabbers brought about the issue of cultism. These 'Ajagungbale' usually engage the services of different cult groups on lands. By recruiting jobless youths into cultism, they created rivalry among different cult groups in the community⁹.

The government's lack of sensitivity to the plight of the masses has been the bane of youth frustration, and vulnerability to crime. Following Burton (2010)'s conception of basic human needs to include security, identity and recognition, it is argued that these needs are the drivers of human dignity and pride. Recognition and social identity are functional to self-esteem, a quality of being relevant and recognised in society (Ronald, 1990). Individual self-esteem is consequent on the ability of people to access opportunities provided by the state or the social structure, such as the family. In the absence of this, conflict becomes inevitable, because of the inexorable tendency to redress or negotiate survival where the social structure cannot provide it (Burton, 2010). The need to realize self-esteem and improvement in socio-economic survival is responsible for youths' participation in cultism and land grabbing. As argued by Oyefusi (2008: 539) in his study of youths in the Niger-Delta, factors such as poverty, unemployment, marginalisation and low education attainment predispose youths to militant and cult-related activities because of the gains derived from its socio-economic benefits (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2004). In the same lens, Burton (2010) has argued that conflicts flourished in poor communities in large part of Nigeria, because of the absence of good jobs and structural economic conditions which results in declining employment opportunities, empowerment and abject poverty. Finding revealed that the vacuum created by poverty, unemployment, and low social status therefore is the entry point of youths' involvement in crime and social menace, as demonstrated by the rising wave of cultism and land grabbing activities in Ikorodu Local Government. These findings validated the question that cult clashes and youth violence were so rampant among youth population in Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos state because of the social dislocation resulting in the land grabbing activities as an alternative to improvement in the

social condition of the youth.

The interface between land grabbing and cultism

The idea of a land tenure system or ownership has become a major problem in many traditional communities in Lagos and Ogun states. This is so because claims of ownership or conflicting claims of ownership by different families have been the bane of conflicts in many of these communities. Those laying genuine claims to land are often referred to as Omo-Onile. Their claims of ownership are backed up by oral history and documentary evidence; Omo Onile exercises the right to sell, collect payment, compensation, rents and levies from those considered their tenants, buyers or settlers (Owoeye, 2018). Their presence is becoming more noticeable with the swift development and transformation of many rural communities in Lagos metropolis, especially that mainstream Lagos is becoming congested with housing and economic activities. In asserting authority over lands, Omo Onile regularly employs force, intimidation and deception to gain access and control over lands. Although Omo Onile are different from land grabbers, they sometimes operate like land grabbers over scarce land, frequently exacerbating tensions and widespread insecurity in the community.

Under their vantage position over lands, Omo Onile often sell the same parcel of lands to multiple buyers as well as encroaching on those acquired legitimately. Finding revealed that the pressure which these illegal activities drive on the scarce and economic value of lands and landed properties in rural-urban areas has been the basis of insecurity in communities in Lagos State. Dispute over lands often results in the invitation of land grabber or agents to fight for possession of the land. Invitation of land grabbers is driven by greed and avarice among family members laying claims to a land. According to a respondent, the emergence of Ajagungbale is caused by greed and avarice of Omonile:

The habit of selling land to more than one person is the root causes of land grabbing and violence. The same people that Kunle Ibrahim claimed sold the land to him were the same people that I purchased my lands from. You can't sell land to two people and expect them not to fight over the land. This is not good at all; families in Ikorodu should be warned and desist from doing so. The case of the Omonile is such that the Baale wants to eat more than the Olotu (the family head) and the children who are supposed to go and work want to deny their fathers of selling those lands. They want to live an expensive life, riding exotic cars, marrying many wives and spending money on Fuji musicians.

⁸ Personal interview conducted with a leader of Onyabo Vigilante Group in March 2018

⁹ Personal interview conducted with a prominent Ikorodu traditional chief in March 2018

Notable land grabbing kingpins in Ikorodu division include Mr. Anifowose (aka Sir. K. Offin), Sir. K Legba and Mr. Kamoru Lamina (aka Sir. K. Oluwo). The latter has been

alleged to be the brain behind many of the land grabbing activities and youth violence currently engulfing Ikorodu¹⁰. Land grabbers and family usually have an agreement which is principally based on knowledge of the total hectares of lands and sharing percentage. After, a surveyor has been used to determine the number of hectares of lands, agreement is frequently based on '40-60 sharing percentage. Whereas, in some cases, agreement is made that 60 per cent accrues to the family, and 40 per cent to the land grabbers. In other cases, agreement is based on ceding of some portion of lands to the land grabbers for sale as their share'¹¹. Where the land grabbers are the ones supplying the ammunitions for fighting on the land, the agreement takes 50/50 percent share. This agreement is noted to the law because they are drawn by legal experts who have the power of attorney to enforce the agreement should any of the party breach it. Drawing his own experience a land-grabbing kingpin¹² noted that 'agreement is usually based on a plot to a hectare of the land'. What this suggests is those illegal activities of land grabbing are equally legalised by legal experts who are themselves supposed to be the custodian of the law, but choose to be partly because of the economic benefits and rent-seeking accruable from the land business. Under these circumstances, land grabbers exercise high level of impunity, bearing in mind the legal and extra-legal support.

In rural communities where land grabbing activities are prevalent in Ikorodu, respondents noted that their activities have thrown a new dimension of displacement, land tenure conflicts and destruction of life and properties. Land-grabbers use sophisticated weapons and firearms such as AK 47, riffles, submachine guns, machete, spear and arrow among others to cause mayhem during land dispute¹³. As noted by a land grabber:

Fighting to take control of lands is like war. The kind of sophisticated weapons we used in fighting to take control is scary under such local land disputes. Several lives were usually lost, and lots of properties destroyed. We habitually bury the dead one below the earth surface, with their whereabouts unknown. Large casualties and injuries are also recorded in the fights. I thank God that I am still in existence, because no one's safety is guaranteed under land grabbing dispute.

The impact of such land grabbing dispute is typified by the 7 days violence in *Mowo-kekere* area of Ikorodu in

¹⁰ Personal Interview conducted with a prominent traditional chief in 2017

¹¹ Interview conducted with a notable land grabbing kingpin in 2018

¹² Kamoru Lamina (aka Sir K Oluwo) claimed to be a land/estate agent and developer, who is into hiring of equipment like tractors used for mapping, layout and clearing of lands. He is also a car dealer and Hotelier; GB Hotel, Odogunyan, a suburb of Ikorodu.

¹³ Personal interview conducted with a vigilante security leader in security in February 2018

2014, between Sir K Oluwo and *Omo Onile*. In this landmark violence, not less than 15 people died from both sides and over 50 people sustained serious injuries¹⁴. Similarly, the 15 people that died alongside 30 other casualties on the 20th April 2015 in Gberigbe area in Ikorodu have been attributed to the violence between land grabbers (Impact, 2015). The concern is that, innocent citizens are often victims of this violence, which promote anomie and disorderliness leading to intra and inter migration of people.

Finding also revealed that the violence induced land grabbing activities, also promote extortion and rent-seeking regime where landowners or buyers are forced to pay all sort of monies to avoid violence, despite paying the legitimate and required money to the family. In circumstances where another agent displaced the existing ones, all sort of levy including ratification, job card and security levy are forcefully paid to the land grabbers¹⁵. These levies are neither accounted for nor duly receipted. The co-author of this study is a victim of such extortion and had to pay to different land agents after several threats and attacks despite legitimately purchasing the land with evidence of receipt, survey plans and deeds from the family. The scenario of a respondent who legitimately bought land from the family was particularly disturbing. According to her:

I bought a plot of land in 2014 at Mowo Kekere, Ikorodu from the Ladugba family. It was duly receipted and all papers were perfected on the claim that there would not be a problem when I am ready to develop it, only for thugs linked to Sir K Oluwo to stop us from doing the foundation. They claimed that it is a stolen land. Despite presenting my documents, they told me that those that sold the land to me from the family are illegitimate; they have been sacked and that they are the new owner. I had to repurchase the land again at the cost of N350, 000 naira. After this scenario and we started work, a week after another group came again and threatened to kill us if we don't pay them. I had to cough out money. Throughout the completion of the house, I was paying all kinds of money or the other, and even the workers are not free from this ignoble extortion.

These harrowing experiences further demonstrate the high level of impunity being displayed by land grabbers to terrorise land owners, displacing them of their property and engaging in rent seeking activities. The implications of these have been responsible to the lack of economic development, as viable investments in agriculture and industrialisation cannot be cited due largely to the problems of land grabbers, who would rather see such opportunity for making money than development. This has implication for the economic development of Lagos

¹⁴ Interview conducted with a land speculator in 2017

¹⁵ The broad spectrum of respondents confirmed this statement.

State in terms of taxes and revenue which could have been accrued from such business initiatives.

The State, Onyabo and violence control in Ikorodu

The current waves of land grabbing and youth violence in Ikorodu Local government are the signpost of the failure of the state in addressing crime and insecurity in several communities in the country. Studies have also stressed the argument through a state failure theoretical lens on how inability of the government has culminated in security deficit (Onapajo and Babalola, 2018; Reno, cited in Prattens, 2008). State failure and/ or weakness are the basis of the rising impunity and the democratisation of violence in different parts of local communities in Nigeria. A state has failed or failing when it cannot deliver public needs and aspiration, which security is the central component (Rotberg, 2002). The state is required to ensure the protection of the people through effective security and provisioning of social-economic wellbeing (Milliken and Keith, 2002). The Nigerian state has the peculiarity of failings because of its perennial failure in promoting the security and welfare of the people. Its failure is not unconnected to the corruption and lack of accountability, which is why it cannot fulfil its basic security functions (Wellington, 2007). The direct consequence of government failure and its agency the police is the basis upon which several vigilante or community policing systems are emerging (Ekeh, 2010; Reno, cited in Prattens, 2008). There are several inadequacies on the part of the Nigerian Police resulting in their abysmal performance, ranging from the issues of lack of professionalism, ineptitudes. The issue of widespread corruption and practices is undeniably the greatest causative of police aiding and abetting of crimes. There are several cases of police connivance with criminals to frustrate justice, selling arms and engaging in extra-judicial killings among other shortcomings of the Nigerian police (Reno, cited in Prattens, 2008). This backdrop has provided the platform for the emergence of informal policing structure to occupy the void left by the police in terms of efficiency; the Onyabo vigilante group in Ikorodu is not an exception especially against the backdrop of security deficit orchestrated by the activities of land grabbers and cult groups. Thus, the study answered the questions by arguing that the emergence of Onyabo is the consequence of the security vacuum left by the Nigerian police in allowing crime and social menace including land grabbing and cultism to fester.

Onyabo vigilante: Establishment, membership, structure and mode of operations

As stated in the literature, the attempts at classifying vigilantism are by no means exclusive. By their trajectories they are product and evolution of their agenda. Broadly speaking, apart from Onyabo which

represents an organised form of community policing, the study discovered two other forms of community policing; the house-owners/occupant security guards and the neighbourhood watch guard¹⁶. While the latter is an initiative of individual or group of individuals for security of a place or an area, the former is a collective security outfit created by the government to watch over a community. Though they are sometimes used interchangeably, the difference is in terms of their sponsors, structure and modus operandi. The individual/group vigilante is an informal security operation commonly referred to as *Olode* in Yoruba dialect, *Mai-guard* in Hausa or even OPC. As an informal security arrangement, they are sponsored by a landlord or group of landlords or residents and are not structured under any legislation. The neighbourhood watch is a formal community watch, sponsored by the government and regulated by a legal framework enacted by the Lagos State Government in 1996 to 'complement the police through surveillance and intelligence information gathering' (Adejoh, 2014: 199). Unlike the two forms of community policing mentioned above, the Onyabo is a not for profit community policing outfit. It is neither created by an individual landlord or groups of landlords or residents nor established by the government; it is a community self-help initiative for addressing crime and security threat affecting the community. As a community policing, it is supported by the traditional rulers and the town and gown¹⁷.

Establishment, membership and training

Onyabo activities and operations started in 1992 as a community intervention to the increasing level of crime and criminal activities, such as robbery, arson, theft looting and window burglary among ravaging Ikorodu Local Government Area. This period climaxed with the early period of population increase, demographic pressure, urbanisation, property rights, land tenure systems etc in Ikorodu Local Government Area. Concerned by the spate of these criminal activities, the United Area Club, a conglomeration of club and base in Ikorodu (under the leadership of Lanre Olabinjo and Rado Pelumi as Chairman and Secretary respectively), decided to set up a security council to deal with this challenge¹⁸. The resolution of the Area Club was backed by the *Olombas*, the traditional worshipper and chieftaincy institutions. After several consultations with the gods and oath-taking, an informal vigilante community policing was formed, with the core objective of controlling crime and ensuring community security. The Onyabo security outfit has his sister organisations in other parts of the state including Epe local government

¹⁶ Interview conducted with a prominent security analysts in Ikorodu 2018

¹⁷ Interview conducted with the commander of Onyabo in 2017.

¹⁸ Interview conducted with the secretary of Ikorodu area club in 2017.

Table 1. Members of Onyabo Vigilante Group, Ikorodu Local Government Chapter.

| S/N | Zones | Members |
|-----|-----------------|------------|
| 1 | Ikorodu Central | 200 |
| 2 | Igbogbo | 62 |
| 3 | Isawo | 100 |
| 4 | Agura | 50 |
| 5 | Odogunyan | 80 |
| 6 | Isiu | 50 |
| 7 | Parafa | 35 |
| 8 | Ibeshe | 35 |
| 9 | Owode-Ibeshe | 30 |
| 10 | First Gate | 30 |
| 11 | Odonla | 50 |
| 12 | Eyin-Egbe | 30 |
| 13 | Oreta | 25 |
| 14 | Adamo | 50 |
| 15 | Ijede | 50 |
| 16 | Ogolonto | 40 |
| | Total | 947 |

Source: Adapted from the Field work (2018).

where it is christened *Muwon*. It is called *Yaago* in Odogunyan, Ogijo in Ogun State. They are all part of the Onyabo vigilante groups.

In terms of membership, willing youths and able-bodied men who are fit to contribute to the operations of the group signify interest to be a member. Religion is not a serious condition, but the integrity of members is extremely crucial for mobilisation. In order to enlist the commitment of members, oaths of good character and loyalty are taken. A member of the group shared his own experience during the fieldwork,¹⁹

Once you have interest in joining the group, you are not required to pay a dime; your religion has nothing to do with your participation, but you are placed on oath of trust, confidence and traditional fortification to ensure your safety and loyalty. Before becoming a member of Onyabo, you need to be person of unquestionable character. 'We cannot use a thief to be hunting a thief'. You must be a member of the area and must not have been accused of any criminal activities; we investigate the past life of intending members and be double sure of their membership.

After the screening, their information are retrieved and documented, they are issued a uniform, an ID card with their passport photo embossed on it. An intending member must be mature, able-bodied and above 18 years of age. Interested women are expected to seek the

approval of their husbands and fathers before they can become members. New recruits are trained by retired security officials and security consultants, with a focus on community safety and security. There are about 947 members of Onyabo across Ikorodu Local Government Area (Table 1).

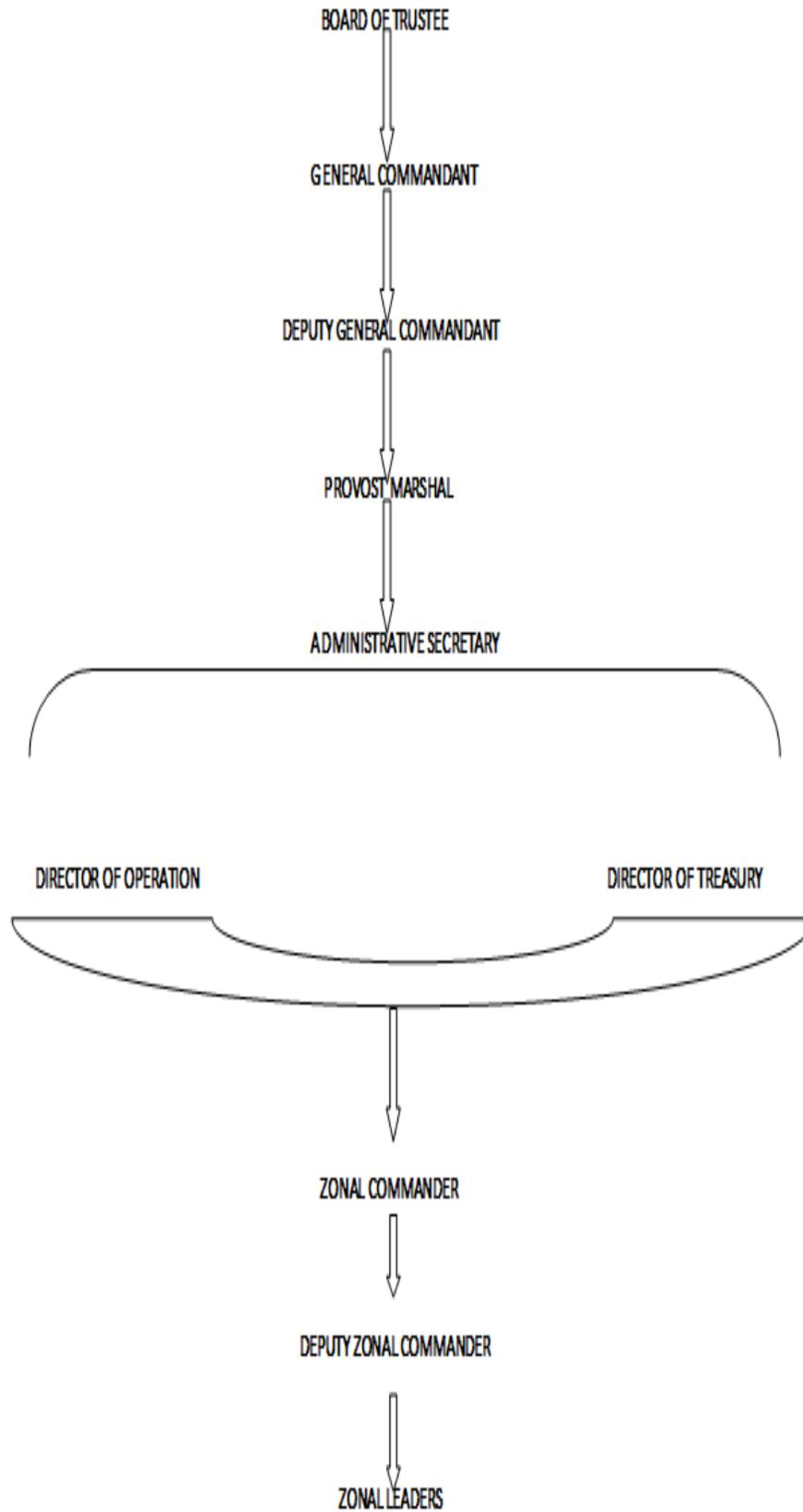
Structure and mode of operations

As a form of community policing, the structure of vigilante groups varies from one social context to another. Although Onyabo did not have any legal structure or legal mandate, they have a well-structured chain of command which depicts it as a viable security organisation. The status of Onyabo as a not-for-profit organisation mirrors the discernment of social-cultural and welfare organisation. In the absence of official acknowledgement by the state, its legitimacy is derived from the inefficiency of the police. The core functions of Onyabo like every other vigilante group is to safeguard life and property in their communities, gather intelligent information and complement the police in ensuring general order and stability in the community (Figure 1).

The intervention of Onyabo in crime control and security in Ikorodu

Informal security policing plays a significant role in Nigeria. Unfortunately, most research often focuses on their negative aspects, which includes highhandedness,

¹⁹ Interviewed conducted with a prominent security analysts in Ikorodu 2018.



| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|----------|--------|-------|------------|--------|------|-------|----------|-------|-------|--------|-------|---------|---------|
| Owutu | Isawo | Ogolonto | Parafa | Agura | First Gate | Odonla | Isiu | Adamo | Eyi Egbe | Ijede | Oreta | Ibeshe | Owode | Ikorodu | Igbogbo |
|-------|-------|----------|--------|-------|------------|--------|------|-------|----------|-------|-------|--------|-------|---------|---------|

Figure 1. The Operational Structure of Onyabo in Ikorodu Local Government.

violation of human rights, extra-judicial killings rather than their positive contribution to the safety and security of the community. Their contribution to security has been very remarkable intervening against cult clashes and gang war, scuttling of the armed robbery attack and constituting a strong intelligent network through which the police can access security information. Between 2015 and 2019, Onyabo has nipped in the bud several cult clashes, and called the attention of the police to the menace of street urchins in areas like Itun-meko, Aga and Ladega in Ikorodu Local Government. Their rapid response to calls and intervention at crime spot has been the more reason for the respite in the community. These have promoted trust and confidence in Onyabo security organisation. According to one of the research respondents, Onyabo has taken the place of the police in terms of prompt intervention in crime control in the community. Although respondents express some concerns such as extra-judicial killings, claiming that Onyabo frequently uses forces and sophisticated weapons.

However, it has been argued that Onyabo initially started with whip or cane, called *Pankere* in Yoruba parlance to deal with crime perpetrators, reporting community criminals to their family to reproach them. The volatility of crimes and vigilante members being victims necessitated the need for self-defence, leading to the use of more sophisticated tools including machetes, sword, clubs, arrows and Dane or locally made guns. As stated by one of the vigilante security commanders;

Though there are cases of death during some of Onyabo operations, they are attributable to self-defence. We only apprehend in the hope that we hand over suspects to the police, we tend to defend us whenever they confront us with superior firearms. Though we do not take laws into our hands, we are sometimes confronted by the situation where we need to defend ourselves, otherwise we would be killed. Under the circumstance that our life is under threat, we try as much as possible to defend ourselves.

While the Nigerian police have also expressed misgivings about vigilante use of arms, jazz and traditional protection devise to identify suspects, the often-common allegation is that some informal security groups are quick to resort to high-handedness, showmanship and abuse of fundamental freedoms of persons arrested by them (Etannibi et al., 2018). Respondents however feel that if Onyabo is guided by a legal framework, they would be by far more efficient and trustworthy than the police. Some of the respondents prefer local dispute resolution by Onyabo than recourse to the police who they believe will be biased and unfair. Moreso, the understanding of the community terrains and local knowledge of trouble spot have made vigilante more effective in local policing and security. No doubt the broad spectrum of the respondents has approved of Onyabo as contributing to the security and safety of the community. As stated by one of the

interviewers;

The Onyabo is a good initiative, better than the initial watchman and neighbourhood guard. They confront and intervene in criminal cases. Their office is near us and we can easily give information, for them to respond to an emergency. They protect the immediate neighbourhood from criminal attacks, provide speedy safety and security service which formal police are unable to offer partly because of factors related to corruption, inefficiency and logistic.

In the same vein, some of the interviewers also endorsed the contribution of Onyabo on the ground that the Nigerian Police Force is not adequate in terms of numbers, adequate preparation and efficiency. As stated by a CDA chairman in Ikorodu area;

There was a case of armed robbery that we invited the police. They claimed that their officers were on patrol. Before they could turn up, the criminals have had a free day. There is little the police can be blamed for, in truth they are sometimes constrained by lack of logistics and preparation. On many occasions, the Onyabo has been our saviour because of their prompt response. They have been very effective in checking the activities of the dreaded cultists and other criminal activities dangerous to the community. They are truly complementing the effort of the Nigerian Police and this will go a long way in addressing crimes in our society if the government encourage them.

Reduction of crime and community safety

The perceptions of Onyabo in some quarters have not been palatable. To some, Onyabo is a Gestapo social institution of intimidation, creating fear and threats and sometimes acting outside the limits of its scope²⁰. It was opined that Onyabo usually goes against perceived opponents and have illegally exterminated many victims and innocent people during their operations²¹. This view became prevalent during the serious confrontation between the cult groups and Onyabo. It must be stressed that cult groups involved in land grabbing activities often attack themselves in town, with areas like Aga, Itun meko, Solomade, Obun Ale Ejina, Solomade, Benson and Ladega becoming hotbeds of conflicts and cult clashes. It was even more pronounced in a neighbouring town of Ikorodu, Igbogbo-Bayeiku where members of Aiye confraternity are domiciled and often launch attack from their base. These cult groups clustered around different areas in Ikorodu. Apart from Igbogbo, Solomade and Elepe Street, Aga that is deemed the base of Aiye

²⁰ Personal interview with a high-ranking member of Eiye confraternity in 2017.

²¹ Personal interview with a high-ranking member of Eiye confraternity in 2017.

confraternity in Ikorodu, areas like Isikalu Street, Ladega and Obun-ale and Ipakodo and Ijede another neighbouring community were noted as the base of Eiye confraternity. Foot soldiers of these cult groups attack their opponents, launching day and night assaults to catch them unaware. In doing this, they rely on intelligence reports. Secondary school students and unengaged youths are mobilised on espionage and intelligence purpose. This factor explains the creeping influence of cultism in and youth violence in post primary schools in Ikorodu division. The consequence has been unprecedented conflicts and violence across Ikorodu division, undermining peace and stability of the community. Economic activities are frequently suspended during periods of cult attacks due largely to the fear of arson and looting, which these cult groups frequently exploit during attacks.

The widespread insecurity which enveloped the town led to the response of the Onyabo vigilante group. The group engages the cult groups in a serious confrontational war, arresting and handing them over to the police. However, the release of arrested culprits by the police allege of collecting bribe led to the backlash leading to the attacks on Onyabo. A classic case of one Afeez Oseni (aka Geleti) an Onyabo coordinator; who was gruesomely murdered at Aga where he was playing draft by gunmen suspected to be cultist, was suggestive of the backlash of fighting crime. Although, some respondents claimed that members of Onyabo vigilante group often compromises, collecting bribe from culprits (especially cult boys and internet fraudsters who are members or backers of these groups), instead of handing them to the police²². From this perspective, Geleti's death was the result of the betrayer of the Aiye group, whose member was handed to the police while releasing those of Eiye because of bribe. There has been another perception which claimed that Geleti was a very reliable Onyabo officer, going by the assessment of a prominent politician after his demise:

As I speak with you, we fear the worst. Onyabo men may decide to go after these cultists. These cultists have made life unbearable for us in Ikorodu and it is these Vigilante men like Geleti that has been helping to ensure sanity around here. His death is a sad development.

The several unsuccessful attempts made on the life of several Onyabo leaders, particularly, Mr. Lanre Olabinjo, the Provost Marshal of Onyabo and Mr Lekan Pelumi (Aka Rado), the Secretary of area base further suggest that crime also fight back. One would wonder the motivation of Onyabo, despite lack of support from the government. As stated by a respondent member of Onyabo; 'our motivation was borne out of the

consequence of local specificity and the determination to ensure safety and security of the community'. Such motivation is the product of prestige and goodwill than monetary gain. Such goodwill is derived from the Yoruba race principle of 'Omoluabi'; a well-groomed responsible and patriotic community citizen.

Findings revealed Onyabo have played a tremendous role in crime control and community safety. Despite the backlash and in the absence of police response, Onyabo has confronted the cult groups and ensuring that their menace is brought to the barest minimum. They often identify black spots where criminals are based and join hands with the police to arrests criminals. The constant presence of Onyabo on the street of Ikorodu had stemmed crime, especially armed robbery. It should be recalled that before the advent of Onyabo, Ikorodu has been a haven of nefarious activities owing to the prevalence of land grabbing, bunkering and cultism. Through their corrective measure and interventions, crime has reduced and Ikorodu division has become safer (Authors' Field Research).

Complementing the formal police in crime reduction and control

Although, it has been alleged that there is a sore relationship between the Nigerian police and vigilante organisation because of the belief that they are not trained or legitimised. Perhaps, they are viewed from taking over their lawful duties (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2018). In the case of Onyabo, the severance in the relationship is the unprofessional attitude of the Nigerian police and their inefficiency. Despite efforts demonstrated by Onyabo to arrest criminal and hand them over to the police, law enforcement agency habitually collects bribe and released these criminals²³. A case of an Aiye cult member who was handed over to the police for prosecution after he was apprehended with a dangerous firearm was a classic example. The arrested cultist was released by the police, only for the boy to come back and threatens to kill an Onyabo Commander. There is an argument in some quarters that the cultism was responsible for the killing of Geleti, an Onyabo security coordinator. According to the Provost Marshal of Onyabo, 'the act where police release criminal without prosecution, has been frustrating the effort of Onyabo in curbing crime and ensuring the security of the people in the neighbourhood'. This notwithstanding, findings revealed there is a cordial relationship between Onyabo and police in curbing crimes and insecurity in Ikorodu. Onyabo and police have conducted several raids and arrested many criminals, foiling cult's strikes several times. This finding is in line with a study which noted that the effective partnership between vigilante and Nigerian police have drastically reduced crime rates in many local

²² Personal interview with a high-ranking member of Eiye confraternity in 2017.

²³ Personal interview with a community social-cultural activist in 2017.

communities (Adegbusi, 2009). A respondent in Area N ljede, had claimed that Onyabo has helped halt crime in Ikorodu. According to him,

'Onyabo Vigilante group has been quite useful in complementing community policing; apart from alerting us whenever there are security issues, they also participate in combing areas that requires local knowledge'.

This has helped us to answer the question the activities of the Onyabo vigilante group has complemented the role of the police in securing life and property. With a total of 974 members of the Onyabo vigilante group in Ikorodu Local Government Area, the strength of the Nigerian police is enhanced in crime control, especially that the statutory 29,122 police force of Lagos is inadequate in manning 20 million population of Lagos state.

Peace talks and conflict resolutions

In their bid to stem youth violence and crime, Onyabo has also curtailed the menace of cultism. It should be recalled that the activities of cult groups have constituted a danger to the people of Ikorodu and its various neighbourhoods. As a consequence of this, Onyabo has taken a bold step in ensuring that cultism is put in check. This has been accomplished through many programmes including peace talks, renunciation, demobilisation and reintegration of youth into the society. In terms of peace talks, various conflicting cult groups and other serial organisations in disputes have been engaged in meaningful discussion under the involvement and supervision of Divisional Police Officer (DPO), traditional rulers and eminent personality in the community. As stated by the provost marshal of Onyabo, 'we have organised about three peace talks between the Eiye, Buccaneers and Aiye cult groups. The essence of this talk is to settle the rift among cult groups and ensure we know them in case of relapse in talks and agreement, we then know who to hold responsible'²⁴. This process usually involves a traditional measure of oath taking to scare parties in dispute from returning to conflicts. According to the provost marshal, 'Twice or thrice in the past, we have organised peace talks between the Eiye and Aiye cult groups. This meeting is usually to know them and at the same time encourage them to drop their sword and embrace peace'. Through this kind of initiative, Onyabo has become the frontline organisation in conflict resolutions and peaceful coexistence among groups.

Renunciation, demobilisation and reintegration of cult groups

Membership of cult groups and other deadly youth

organisations are also encouraged to renounce their membership. Several numbers of cult groups have been suffering from traumatic stress and depression due to fear of their activities in the past. They needed support to overcome this phase in their life. As a result, Onyabo uses the opportunity to offer support by advising and offering safety in case of backlash from their members or society during and after the process. The intervention of the government and other relevant stakeholders are seeking to ensure the renunciation is a success. Several cultists have renounced their membership. The first phase of demobilisation is renunciations. By demobilisation many of these cultist and land grabbers have been motivated to drop their guns and ammunition. As soon as they do, a process of their reintegration is also facilitated by the Onyabo, by encouraging the government (local and state) and other key stakeholders in promoting the reintegration through empowerment opportunities, job creation, and education among other opportunities that can fully ward them off crime. The praxis of financing the reintegration programmes and empowerment often faces challenges, because the bulk of the support is gotten from the politicians who are themselves using cultists as a foot soldier during the electoral process. The Nigerian state has reinvented itself as the arena of violence institution for the expropriation of economic values and personal aggrandizement (Mabogunje, 1990). Under such circumstances, cult groups have become a force, using violence to attain the political goals for politicians (Nyiayaana, 2011). A notable politician was responsible for the death of three cult members, where cultist clashed at a convergence aimed at sharing patronage and empowerment to his allies after his electoral victory²⁵. Thus, the success of the reintegration process relies on an independent source of funding, laced with in-depth government commitment to the issue of national security.

Collaboration in the prohibition of land grabbing activities

The Onyabo Vigilante group has also collaborated with stakeholders and the State House of Assembly to outlaw land grabbing activities which have been the bane of increasing violence in Ikorodu. Apart from the fact that Onyabo has declared war against land agents, responsible for growing cult activities and youth violence in Ikorodu, they have also influenced some members of the State House of Assembly to sponsor bill against land grabbing activities. Through constant pressure and petitions against land grabbing kingpins, particularly Sir K Oluwo, the Lagos State Government signed the Lagos State Properties Protection Bill on August 2016. The bill was sponsored by Hon. Sanai Agunbiade and Hon. Bayo Osinowo; it prohibits land grabbing and recommends stiff

²⁴ Personal interview with prominent leader of Onyabo in 2017.

²⁵ Personal interview with prominent leader of Onyabo in 2017.

penalties for infringement. According to the law 'forcibly entry and occupation of landed properties, violence and fraudulent conducts concerning landed properties, armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism and allied matters incidental thereto', shall be prosecuted. The bill has a taskforce component which is mandated to implement the land grabbing law. The taskforce follows four phases before activating the law. Parties to the land conflict are engaged in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) based on the evidence presented by them. Where unsatisfied, the taskforce graduates to the second phase, which is the on-site inspection for geographical evidence. Where the decision is not acceptable to the parties, the case is taken to court as the third phase, and court verdict is enforced by the relevant government agencies as the final phase (Owoeye, 2018). Empirical evidence collected through fieldwork in different parts of Ikorodu local government areas where the fieldwork takes place, particularly Mowo-Kerere, Gberigbe, Mowo-nla, Gbaga, Bagidan, Oko-Ito, demonstrated that the task force has been able to curtail the menace of land grabbing. Many of the land grabbers and agents have been arrested, charged to the court of competent jurisdiction. A noteworthy one is the incarceration of Kamoru Lamina; aka Sir K Oluwo and his gangs for 6 months and subsequently charged on a five-count charges, which include forceful and illegal possession of the land, fraudulent claim to the progeny of Ifegbuwa family to seize land in Ikorodu, unleashing of violence, cultism and stealing (Owoeye, 2018). Most of the Onyabo, traditional rulers, land buyers and even some of the cult groups were satisfied with the steps taken by the government. This further explained reduction in the activities of land grabbers.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While the failure of the Nigerian state in addressing unemployment and poverty has been responsible for the increasing rate of youth violence and cultism in Ikorodu Local Government of Lagos State, the security deficit in the area is further reinforced by the crisis of land grabbing, demographic pressures, urbanisation and conflicts of the land tenure system and ownership. The intervention of Onyabo, as a viable informal community policing has been remarkable in stemming crime through its security intervention and support to the Nigeria police in ensuring orderliness, but also through some noteworthy initiatives including, renunciation, demobilisation and reintegration of cult groups, peace talk and conflicts resolution among serial violent groups in the community. This idea is geared towards eradication of violence in Ikorodu local government. Despite their tendency to deploy extra-judicial means, it has been argued that where there are legal framework and

financial support, those inadequacies could be addressed. Indeed, the significance of Onyabo as a potent and complementing social institution to the Nigerian police in ensuring crime and violence-free society cannot be overemphasised. The Lagos State government land grabbing law which seeks to prohibit all sources of illegal land acquisition, violence and cultism have a great impact promoting peaceful environment devoid of violence and insecurity. While, the failure of the state is largely responsible to the resurgence of crime, more research is needed on the dynamics and survival of cultism in many communities in Lagos states, Nigeria, despite government effort in halting it.

There is therefore the need to organise a formal training and reorientation programme to equip Onyabo with contemporary security skills and tactics concerning crime control. Most times the challenge has always been that vigilante groups are not properly schooled in the proper knowledge of crime control, explaining their overzealousness, highhandedness and human rights abuse. Also, there should be an overhaul of the security architecture of the Nigerian police, by reviewing their philosophy, orientations, operations and logistics requirements. Most times, the Nigerian police suffer from porous structure and inadequate logistics which often result in their inefficiency. The relationship between the police and Vigilante groups (Onyabo) should be redefined through a legislation that defines their collaboration or long term partnership agreement on the principles of cooperation. In addition, Besides, the Nigerian state should strengthen its capacity, to promote viable institutions which address poverty and unemployment. More importantly, vigilante group should be made accountable to the community and a reward system be instituted by their recognition which could be in form of salary and compensation.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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