
THE ROLE OF AGE GRADE IN CRIME CONTROL IN TIV SOCIETY OF CENTRAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Every age grade has its own means of controlling the society conduct of its citizens in order to reach its desired goals. The importance of the age grade in this regard cannot be gainsaid. Thus, the age grade provides, among other things, the penal technique by which those who are found guilty of acts prohibited by the society are punished. The age grade in Tiv society of central Nigeria has in its body of customary laws a rich penal system. Though largely unwritten, the deterrence theory of punishment is adopted in this work. The reason for this theory is that its best captured the operation of age grade in Tiv society of central Nigeria. The paper discovered that factors like migration and apathy has been a major challenge to age grade operation. The paper recommends that, security agents should collaborate with age grade in the rural areas to tackle security situations envisaged in Nigeria today. More the national assembly should make law that will give legal backing to age grade operation in Nigeria to tackle the current security challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Certain agencies are basic in the evolution of humankind. These agencies become overly visible as soon as societies take shape. They are therefore referred to as traditional agencies because they are fundamental to the existence of human societies. In Nigeria and indeed most of African countries age grades are not left out development, they mobilized themselves to form large town unions. In an attempt to improve the security need of the rural areas. This organization adopts a security approach geared towards crime control in the rural communities. The age grade has exemplifies the heightened need for security control of their community. This is due to the fact that the need every community wants to be self-sufficient in the provision of the much desired peace in its domain. The age grades have helped in maintaining peace and orderliness. Considering the fact that economic and social development of communities is threatened if peace and safety is not maintained. The age grade therefore maintains peace and order protect public as well as private property of individuals and government. Otite and Ogionwo (2001) recognized the place of age grades in the pre-colonial as well as colonial times by saying that:

The age grades organization in Africa was a system of government prior to colonial rule it involved the youths and elders in the making and maintenance of law and order... (Otite and Ogionwo 2001:52)

Otite and Ogionwo (2001) further maintain that members of an age grade are socially compelled to behave within the norms of the society. Age grades attempt to exert both direct and individual pressure on members in order to secure strict compliance to the accepted norms of the particular society in which they lives. They produce a structure by which people involve themselves in the daily affairs of social life in the society. This informal agency

participates directly and indirectly, in crime controlling the communities through patron. Membership into age grades generally gender separated is often marked by an initiation rite, which is crown of a long and complex preparation sometimes in retreat. After a period of years during which they often perform certain common activities, alone, or senior guidance, members are initiated either collectively or individually in a more senior cadre. The progression is often accompanied by the relation of secret knowledge. In most cultures, age grade systems, as with age sets, are the preserve of men, and it is the older men who control a society's secret knowledge, collectively or restricted to a council of elders and specific positions such as shaman entrusted with the preparation of initiates. It is on this premise that the paper periscopes on the role of age grade in crime control in Tiv society of central Nigeria. The paper is divided into five parts. The next part delineates the definition of concepts. The third explores the theoretical premise, while fourth part highlights the methods and strategies used by age grade in crime control. The last section which is concluding part dwells on recommendations and conclusion.

Conceptual Terrain

Age grade: Otite and Ogionwo (2001) defined age grade as a group of people who are roughly of the same age. Ikechukwu (1992) also looked age grade as a group of persons who according to the society concerned, are regarded as people of the same age. He further maintained that age brackets of the age grades vary from one community to the other. In some communities, persons born within a specified period of three, four or five years usually form an age grade. But the most important thing is that each age grade is clearly distinguished from one another (Ikechukwu 1992). It is then means that a man can only belong to one age grade at a time, and each of course is usually associated with specific roles like the control of anti social behaviour especially crime. Regarding this work age grade denotes a group of people in a society who are of the both sex and approximately the same age having certain definite duties and privileges in common and constituting a division of a tribe society. Age grade sets type of solidarity of non-residential groups that cut across kinship ties and thus promote broader special solidarity of young men who are usually co-operates in secret, ritual or craft performances together. Individuals generally remain closely associated with their age grades through out their life to be part of this association.

Crime Control

Crime control on the other hand is defined as a reconfigured complex of interlocking structures and strategies that are themselves composed of old and new elements, the old revised and reoriented by a new operation context (Garland 2001). Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia looked at crime control as methods and strategies taken to reduce crime in a society. In respect to this paper crime control refers to both formal and informal strategies or techniques put in place by government or other social groups aimed at reducing crime in that particular society like Tiv society of central Nigeria. Penology often focuses on the use of criminal penalties as means of deterring people from committing crimes and temporarily incapacitating those who have already committed crimes from re-offending. The age grade also seeks to control crime using deterrence.

Theoretical Exploration

There are a number of theories that accounts for punishment in any society. These range from existentialist theory, classical theory, to Marxist cum critical theories of punishment. A theory punishment essentially captures the basic objectives and justifications of punishment as well as supplies the guiding rationale by which the criminal justice system (CJS) deals with an adjudicated criminal. For the purpose of this discussion the deterrence theory of punishment will be used to examining the role of age grade in crime control.

Deterrence Theory

The deterrence model was developed within the deterrence of classical school of criminology in the 18th and 19th Centuries (Igbo 2006). Deterrence is borne out of the need to make the offender an example to others. The idea is people will learn from the punishment and would be deterred from committing such offence in the future (Alubo 2012). Historically, the chief objective of the deterrence paradigm was to provide maximum protection for the individual against the extreme capriciousness of the penal systems of the late 17th century, and thereby achieve greatest happiness for the greatest number in society (Igbo 2006). Deterrence perspective takes a rational view of man as a free thinking and acting pain – avoiding creature that choose from among his behavioural options and willfully take decisions after calculating his gains and losses. Against this view of man, deterrence paradigm recognizes the goals of punishment as one inflicting an amount of pain on the offender such that will deter or discourage him or other potential offenders from choosing to commit crime or criminality.

The theory argues that deterrence from crime is achieved through the fear of imposition of punishment. The perspective maintains that potentials offenders in the community, or indeed an offender who has already been punished will retrain from committing crime in future when they remember that punishment will follow in consequence. The model focuses on the assignment of that exact penalty which will deter people from engaging in crime. The founding fathers of this theoretical paradigm attempted to achieve this through the application of a definite scale of penalties which assigns a specific penalty for a specific crime. In addition, deterrence theory specifies the optimum conditions under which deterrence will be successful. These include the conditions of celerity, sufficient. Deterrence is both general and specific; where the first is to the range of crimes/offences and the second is specific to the type. Severity of punishment and certainty of apprehension, in punishment, in the absence of these basic conditions of celerity, sufficient severity, certainty of apprehension and punishment deterrence will not hold water. In the absence of these is the like hood of deterrence failure. This philosophy is wildly held and judges age grade usually preface their sentence with “in order to make you in example to others evil minded people. In this regard, the age grade is an informal agent of criminal justice system that helped in enforcing the accepted norms and values of the society using deterrence. It is charge with the responsibility of punishing its member that deviated from the accepted norms and value of the society in order to ensure the smooth running of the society. They punished through the process called pepper symbolically meaning Mkem this implies fine.

This Mkem fine is aimed at reducing behaviour associate with crime of its members in present and future times.

The Role of Age Grade in Crime Control in Tiv Society of Central Nigeria

In every human society, irrespective of the level of development, there are some common denominators. In addition to existing every where, these denominators ensure that societies survive and are able and to raise and bring up off springs in orderly manner, who will carry on after the old generation. The emergence of age grade as a social institution in crime control is unplanned products of meeting our security needs in contemporary society. Alemika (2009) argues that laws aggregation or embodiments of the values and norms of the diverse groups in society regarding conducts that should be prohibited so that peace safety and security can be guaranteed. To Igbo (2006) traditional societies are mostly organized according to the age grade system. By this principle each society divides up its population into various age grade groupings mutually distinguishable by age grade names and uniforms. In most of these societies different age grades from the youngest grade to the most senior grade are charged with different functions towards the overall organization and maintenance of the community. In our present day's age grade is also use for maintaining social control in Tiv society. For instance in Tiv society each age grades has a responsibility of ensuring that each of her members comports himself or herself well and does not engage in shameful acts.

Okafor (2007) maintains that in traditional African societies, security maintenance, crime prevention, and general law enforcement was based on each society's historical circumstance and desire. Thus, most members of each society willfully partake in programmes and activities aim at preventing and controlling criminality. Community members, individually and collectively, play roles in crime control in each society. Law enforcement effort community members generally accept the groups' methods and procedures for security maintenance, crime prevention, and general law enforcement. One of the main reasons for the wide acceptance and celebration of the age grade methods and procedures is that citizens tend to know their society's control justice and law personnel well. In Tiv society for instance citizens have reasonable knowledge of each office holder's moral, values and ethnics. Since member of the age grade have direct and indirect linked to the people, so influences on their control, justice and law personnel, persons who are moral, values and ethnics are at variance with the general societal standards of living of the society. Ikechukwu (1992) points that age grade is usually made up of an organized people who share an ideology and whose activities because centered on a set of goals and a set of belief which regulate their mutual conduct. The age grade has an established practices and usages which govern the relationships between an individual and the other with established form of conditions of procedure. These conditions help maintaining crime and criminality especially in rural areas were the activities of age grade are mostly known. Any member who subscribed to the established pattern of age grade is vowed not to misbehave or commit evil. The age grade in Tiv society of central considered punishment as the only means that will inflict an amount of pain on the offender such that will deter or discourage him or other potential offenders from choosing to commit crime and criminality. The sanction applied by age grade in Tiv society to its erring offender

is done to achieve fear. Igbo (2006) again posits that every age grade guards its name and reputation jealously hence each grade takes all the necessary actions to make sure that her members live up to the community expectations. They settle disputes between their members. They also punish erring members who engage in acts that bring disrepute to its name. For instance an erring member may be sentence with publicly shaming and humiliating the criminal that is the person that commit crime. Members will invade a culprit's home, and size all his belongings such as goats, hens even house holder properties, until the owner paid the stipulated Mkem for his crime, and again reclaimed his property.

The Mkem for age grade takes many forms it could be buying of big pig, supply of crate of beers and minerals, physical cash, among others as that age grade may deem fit. Alubo (2012) also maintains that age grade may discipline an erring member by requiring the payment of fine or placing a ban on interactions with him/her for a certain period. He further asserts that when the situation graduates from age grades to elders, it usually assumes more serious dimension the community "court" is being summoned to hear the case and decides on the kind of punishment wrong doer will get. In many cases these punishments take the form of songs, specifically composed to unearth the misdeeds and thereby tarnish the reputation of the evil doer. Funning no names are called by in close knit communities, the identity of the person in the song is obvious disclosed. The idea of age grade behind this is to restrain its members who have already been punished from committing crime in future when they remember that punishment will follow in consequence. Violators of laws are punished by the age grade in order to protect societal norms and values. In these ways the age grade system functions as a veritable agent of crime control.

Challenges Confronting the Age Grade in Crime Control

The age grade is inhibited with several factors that limit its role in crime control. For instance migration, there is no longer able bodied men duty effecting arrest of erring members. Most of them have migrated to the town to search for white collar jobs like police, military among others. Otite and Ogionwo (2001) maintains that most of the able young men that performs that the function of police duties in age grade have engage in self defence or local community development programmes when required and abandon the age grade. They further asserted in law and order, police and other law enjoy cement agency home telling over so many people one move comfortable going to the law enforcement agents than the age grade. Ikechukwu (1991) also remarks that despite the numerous made by the age grade institution in crime control, It is yet beset with a number of problems. The impact of urbanization, the emergence of denominational groups and their doctrines, chieftaincy tussle and the present economic demands home dealt some dead by blows the cohesiveness of the age grade as a social institution. Rural-urban migration has depletion in population of the village while on the other hand to the rapid urban growth rate. The depopulation of villages which are traditionally supposed to serves as major agent of law enforcement, presently facing insecurity. The old men and women who are left behind to work as security agents are no longer physically able to serve as security agents to secure the country's teeming population. The institution of age grade is no longer effective in Tiv land due to the nature of

urban migration and the subsequent take over of security by the government in the rural areas. Apathy people now refused joining age grade because of their dubious characters as such age is not effective to them.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The security agents should collaborate with age grade in order to secured the lives and property of citizens especially in the rural areas where is inadequate law enforcement agencies. The police should empower the age grade to prosecute it erring members of the society. The natural assembly should make laws that will give a legal backing to the operation of age grade in Nigeria. The government should improve the social-economic development of rural dwellers; this will reduce the rate of mouth migration that we are experiencing in the rural areas. This will go a long way in make the youth to stay within their kinship to form age grade association, to prevent social ills. On the part of age grade association home we can still get in touch. There in need for us all, the good citizens of Nigeria to return to our primordial convictions, this will pressure the body after throwing away bath water. With the aid of age grade the issue of Boko Haram and other related violence will be over in Nigeria as no age group will want it member to involve in any heinous crime or te

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