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## **A new name for an old practice: vigilante in South-western Nigeria**

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“We keep learning strange names such as vigilante  
for something traditional but vigilante has been long here.

I told you, I did it when I was young”.

Alhadji Alimi Buraimo Bello, 85 years, Ibadan, January 2003.

Since the 1980s, the phenomenon of vigilante and vigilantism have been widely studied through an analysis of the rise of crime and insecurity, the involvement of local groups in political conflicts and in a more general framework of a possible decline of law enforcement state agencies. Despite the fact that vigilante and vigilantism have acquired a renewed interest especially in the African literature, Michael L. Fleisher (2000: 209) points out the fact that there is as yet no scholarly consensus on what exactly vigilantism is,

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented at the African Studies Seminar at St Anthony College, University of Oxford on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2006. I want to thank Prof. David Anderson for suggesting me long time ago the idea of studying the historical forms of vigilantism in Nigeria. I also want to thank David Pratten, Vincent Foucher, the two anonymous reviewers of *Africa* and the audience of the African Studies Seminar for their comments on a former version of this paper.

especially as regards the nature of its relationship with the state. The word has been used to describe movements of different nature and composition across the world. Africa is no exception if we only mention movements such as white farmers in the 1910s and the 1920s Orange Free state in South Africa (Murray, 1989), anti-thieves and anti-witches organisations in Bugisu district in Ouganda in the 1960s (Heald, 1986), anti-cattle raiding movements in Tanzania in the 1980s and 1990s (Abrahams, 1987), state sponsored groups fighting ANC members in the 1980s South Africa (Haysom, 1986), or political militia with an ethnocentric and strong religious agenda such as the Mungiki in Nairobi (Anderson, 2002, Maupeu, 2002) or the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) in South-western Nigerian cities today (Akinyele, 2001, 2007, Adewanmi 2005, Guichaoua, 2007). In any case, vigilante groups interrogate the relationships between the society and law enforcement agents, the issue being to know whether such groups are tolerated or even supported by the police or if they are forbidden because they are considered to be a threat to the state monopole of legitimate violence.

More recently, some works have interrogated the use of community policing within the African continent. This notion is considered to have popularized in the United States and in the UK from the 1980s onwards and to have recently being sold to English speaking Africa and to South-Asian societies (Brogden, 2004). Community Oriented Police (COP), based on the principle of a better co-ordination and consultation between the police and the policed, has been portrayed as 'a success story in the West' (Brogden, 2004: 635) whereas vigilante groups seem in many cases to undermine the legitimacy of the police and to retort to extra-judicial killings. However, ambiguities around the notion of community police have also been enhanced. In Kenya, COP has served to reinforce oppressive structures and could also be seen as decentralizing repression (Ruteere and Pommerolle, 2003). In many cases, the line between community police and vigilante groups is blurring.

This is especially the case in Nigeria. This article would like to retrace community responses to crime and insecurity using, south-western Nigeria and Ibadan as a case study. We estimate that the apparent recent rise of vigilante groups in Nigeria and more generally of what is considered the privatisation of state violence can be understood through an analysis of changing forms of non state policing. Effectively, vigilante in Nigeria is a denomination initially proposed by the police in the mid 1980s to substitute an older practice present since the colonial period and referred to as the ‘hunter guard system’ or the ‘night guard system’. Colonial administration has either authorized it or legalised it in the West and there has been since then a continuity of these non state forms of policing. Hence, instead of looking at vigilante groups as a response to a supposed increase of crime or of a supposed decline of police force, we should consider them - initially at least - as a first attempt of introducing some forms of community policing in order to improve the appalling image of the police. As such vigilante in South-western Nigeria is not only a response ‘to the Nigerian ‘politics of plunder’ endemic since the beginning of the oil boom’ (Gore and Pratten, 2003: 212). It is also a new name for an old practice of policing which should be considered in a larger historical sequence (from the 1930s onward), a period in which violent crime has been perceived as a conjectural danger for various communities. This paper is based on administrative reports, Nigerian newspapers and oral sources collected among elders in one neighbourhood in central Ibadan. It first considers history of crime and policing in Nigeria before examining the hunter guard system used in Western Nigeria during the colonial period. It then looks at one neighbourhood in Ibadan where night guard system is locally referred as *sode sode*. It also analyses the political use of night guards in the 1960s and their official change into vigilante groups sponsored by some southern states in 1985-1987. The last section eventually proposes to include this issue within the on-going debate on the privatisation of state in Africa.

## VIOLENT CRIME AND STATE POLICING IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA

People's discontents about inequality, corruption and injustice have fuelled throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century alternative solutions to state policing. In this general framework, more immediate origins which led to the setting up of non state organisations are most of the time violent crime such as armed robbery and armed burglary. Generally, most of researchers consider the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and the 1970s as a starting point for the history of violent crime in the country. Central to this argument is the rising number of armed robbery cases which were supposedly little known before the war and which became epidemic throughout post civil war, a common view shared by researchers (Fabiya, 2004:11-12 Montclos, 1997:243; Tamuno, 1989:92-93), top police officers (Jemibewon, 2001: 79; Inyang, 1989:75) and journalists (Akparanta, 1994). Moreover most of the studies are generally based on a very short period in which crime is always perceived as increasing while research done on history of crime in Europe or in South Africa are able to situate a specific period in a more general criminal trend.<sup>2</sup> Issue of crime in Nigeria is dominated either by conjectural analysis or by a post-conflict explanation which totally underestimates the situation that was prevalent before the civil war. Of course, armed conflicts do not lead automatically to wave of violent crime and the peculiar consequences of each conflict should be analysed accordingly. In the South African case for instance, Gary Kynoch (2005: 494-5) has convincingly argued that the current high level of criminality is a 'deeply entrenched culture of violence produced by decades of repressive racial policing, violent crime and social conflict'. In the Nigeria case, we would also like to state that civil war only widespread and

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<sup>2</sup> For South Africa, see for instance (Kynoch, 1999; Glaser, 2000).

changed some former criminal practices enshrined in the social and political history of the country. Yet, it is difficult to assess precisely the rise of crime because of the well known bias introduced by criminal statistics collected by the police.<sup>3</sup> Two elements can however help to consider the historical crime landscape in Nigeria. First, violent crime has a long history especially in South-western Nigeria where historians have emphasised the prevalence of both rural banditry and armed robbery organised by warlords in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Watson, 2000; Falola and Oguntomisin, 1999). In the 1930s and the 1940s, recurrent thefts and burglaries organised by gangs were also becoming a worrying issue both for colonial administrators, the Nigerian press and Native Authorities (Fourchard, 2005; Falola 1995). Hence, the number of armed robbery cases reported to the police was already very important before the civil war (table 1). Actually reported to the Nigerian population, there is a general increase in armed robbery cases from the 1930s onward to date and civil war does not appear as an historical rupture.

Table 1 Armed robbery cases reported to the NPF (1920- 1997)<sup>4</sup>

Years	1920-29	1936-39	1945-47	1960-65	1970-6	1993-7
Armed robbery cases reported (average a year)	10	124	231	897	1112	2145
Offences relative to Nigerian pop. (for 100,000)	0,06	0,62	0,85	1,63	1,69	2,38

<sup>3</sup> Police statistics represent both crime and police activities. For instance the creation of the category of the ‘juvenile delinquent’ in 1945 in Nigeria led to their sudden increase in police statistics (Fourchard, 2006a: 133-135).

<sup>4</sup> As indicated before, these statistics are a mere trend. They underestimate the period in which CID was not operating (before the 1930s) and they do not take into consideration robbery reported to Native Authority Police.

Sources: (Fourchard, 2005: 300, Tamuno, 1989: 93-94; Tamuno, 1985: 10).

Second, the general feeling in reading some Nigerian newspapers from the 1920s to 2000 is a gradual rather than a brutal change in criminal practices.<sup>5</sup> During the colonial period, armed robbers operated generally by night in a few neighborhoods which were not covered by the police, the most well-known being the outskirts of Lagos, the large pre-colonial parts of Abeokuta or Ibadan and the under policed countryside (Fourchard, 2005: 299-307, Falola, 1995: 10). In between the 1960s and the 1970s, the areas of violent crime operations became larger involving commercial, industrial and residential areas, main city streets and main country roads. This extension is the result of a major change in criminal practices in the last forty years. Criminal practices became more mobile with the extensive use of the car (from the late 1950s onward), with the more common use of guns (from the 1960s onward). They also became more radical and violent (with the release of soldiers and fire arms after the civil war in the 1970s) targeting the beneficiaries of oil revenues (middle and upper class) (Fourchard, 2006 b). In Lagos, for instance, the Agege area on the northern outskirts was considered in the 1930s as the most dangerous in the region (with 30 armed robberies reported in one year in 1933-1934) while in the late 1970s, crime rate was considered to be higher in rich residential areas.<sup>6</sup>

Like violent crime, the state policing system in Nigeria has witnessed more continuity than change. Three features could be briefly summarised. First, collaboration with the public was problematic since the colonial period because ‘the prevention and detection of crime in police work was not matched by any move towards policing by consent’ in most African

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<sup>5</sup> *West African Pilot* from 1937 to 1960, *Nigerian Daily Times* from 1930 to 2000, *Nigerian Tribune* from 1949 to 2000.

<sup>6</sup> National Archives Ibadan (thereafter called NAI), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Civil Secretary’s Office, 26/3, Report on Armed Raids, Agege Area, 1933-1934, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1934. (Ebbe Obbi, 1989).

colonies (Anderson and Killingray, 1991: 9). The police public relations deteriorated further with the increasing allegations of corruption officially considered very high in Nigeria as soon as 1966 (Marenin, 1985: 81). The setting up of state vigilante movements from the mid 1980s onward was thus a response to the popular perception of police corruption (see below) while more recent movements of vigilantism could also be considered as a response to “widespread perceptions that the police, the courts, and other institutions of the state were too corrupt to curtail crime” (Smith, 2007: 167). Second, the centralisation of police services was progressively achieved in Nigeria (creation of the Nigeria Police Force, NPF in 1930). However, the British administration kept, whenever possible, a Native Authority (NA) to act as a police force: this was the case in South-west where Native Authority policemen (called *Olopa*) were responsible for the maintenance of order, the prevention and detection of crimes, throughout the African part of the city (Rotimi, 2001). The NPF was paid, trained, and managed directly by the British since 1906 and operated throughout the Lagos colony and where European interests were located, mainly in residential and commercial areas of major cities. This double policing system was a way for the administration to save money and was largely discriminatory: large ‘indigenous’ cities were under the control of a police considered poorly trained, not educated and attached to local political interests. Third, the creation of a finger print section and of a Crime Investigation Department (CID) in the 1930s indicate a new interest in dealing with criminal practices but was however limited because the fight against delinquency and serious crimes was never considered a priority. Like many French or other British colonies, maintaining law and order, anticipating riots and fighting political opposition was a growing concern of the administration in Nigeria especially after 1945 (Anderson and Killingray, 1991: 1-21; Fourchard, 2003: 31-32). The inadequate policing system led to the emergence of other forms of policing as soon as insecurity feelings became considered as a direct menace by communities.



## THE HUNTER GUARD SYSTEM

Works on the colonial and the postcolonial police in Nigeria have hardly informed non state forms of policing under colonial rule. Private guards used by Native authorities in Northern province and in the former Yoruba city are mentioned but not the institution of night guards which became however central in between the 1930s and the 1950s in western Nigeria. The movement was initially unofficial before being authorised by the colonial administration during World War II and then legalised in some parts of the Western province in the 1950s. The Lagos newspapers and the colonial administration have used quite indifferently two expressions, i.e. 'night guard system' and 'hunter guard system' probably because the later could designate both an organisation specifically composed by hunters and an organisation in which night guard activities could be assumed by various community members.

Hunters from the country were often used as night guards in many Yoruba cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century before being forbidden by the British administration.<sup>7</sup> The district officer suppressed them in Ibadan in 1903, where they were considered too dangerous, and replaced them with a civil police force (Watson, 2003:76-8). Some community soon re-introduced night guards in areas where criminal activities were important and the police absent on the border area between Dahomey and Nigeria, as early as the 1920s, and in Ikeja district (North of Lagos) in the early 1930s. In Mushin, a small locality within the district, migrant leaders banded together, formed seven Village Group Councils, asked for more police protection and finally set up night patrols using themselves and hiring guards (Barnes, 1986: 39-40). In 1940, the *Nigerian Daily Times* asserted that 'an organisation of armed night guards composed of

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<sup>7</sup> For the various polices used in pre-colonial Nigeria see (Tamuno, 1993).

native hunters has been adopted in most of the Yoruba towns for many years'.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the *Yoruba News* indicated that 'the best measure to protect Ibadan is to entrust the job to hunters as it is done in other towns', a measure which was taken a few weeks later.<sup>9</sup> Other articles and administrative reports state that a similar system was operating during World War II both in Lagos and in many other smaller towns of the region and notably, Oshogbo, Ede, Ogbomosho, Ife and Oyo.<sup>10</sup> Apparently, night guards, first introduced informally in many south-western cities in the 1930s, were then authorized after some hesitations by the colonial administration in various cities of the provinces and even in the Lagos colony at the beginning of the war. The context was actually quite particular: wave of armed burglaries in Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta were largely reported by the press whereas the NPF and NA policemen were depleted because they were enrolled in military service.

According to oral and written sources, at least two types of night patrols could have functioned during this period: the ones organised by existing local authority and the ones set up by new associations of residents. In several wards of Ibadan, residents constituted themselves as 'neighbourhood associations' or 'anti-thieves units' asked some *Olopa* to patrol their area, adopted a curfew or imposed guidelines for the admittance of strangers<sup>11</sup>. In January 1942, the district officer eventually authorized the Olubadan, the higher chief in the city, to set up a 'hunter guard system'.<sup>12</sup> Asking the assistance of the chieftaincy was probably

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<sup>8</sup> 'In the interest of public safety', *Nigerian Daily Times*, 3 January 1940.

<sup>9</sup> 'Robbers in Ibadan', *Yoruba News*, April 9, 1940; 'Hunters in town', *Yoruba News*, 30 April 1940.

<sup>10</sup> 'Robbery in Ibadan and District', *Nigerian Daily Times*, 16 May 1941 ; 'Wave of Burglaries in Provinces', *Nigerian Daily Times*, 19 August 1946. Comcol 1, 2498, Assistant Superintendent of Police to Superintendent, Nigeria Police, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1941.

<sup>11</sup> NAI, Ibadan Division (Ibadandiv), 1/1, 167, Petition of anti thieves units to District Officer in Ibadan, 5 August 1941. Letters Abebi auxiliary association to District Officer, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1941 and 21 April 1941.

<sup>12</sup> NAI, Ibadandiv, 1/1, 167, Letter of the District Officer to the Resident Oyo Province, 22 January 1942.

a mean for the colonial administration to regain control over a movement that tended to escape any form of administrative supervision. Night guard system already in use in Oshogbo town served as a pattern for Ibadan district both for villages and cities. The regulations were fixed by the Olubadan and approved by the district officer: 1) 'village heads must provide hunters for their villages and must instruct them to be guards'. 2) 'It should be made imperative that chiefs ... of such quarter should be responsible for providing hunters for their quarter and equip them with gun powder...' 3) 'At midnight, every one should keep indoor and anybody found roaming about should be arrested by the hunters'<sup>13</sup>. Quite similarly, in Lagos, Chief Ashogbon gathered heads of Lagos Island households in his palace in 1941, to organize night patrols supplied with armlets, whistles and torches to get rid of shop breakings and burglaries, an 'unofficial institution' known by Lagosians in 1946 as 'Ashogbon's Police Force'.<sup>14</sup>

Initially, this solution was seen as conjectural by local administrators who authorized the people to defend themselves against crime in the peculiar context of the war. After the war, many comments from the press and the administration were critical towards the night guards and their tendency to harass or kill innocent people. But instead of banning them, most of the examples indicate that night guards were either tolerated or even given a legal status. In Lagos colony, the government only forbade wearing police uniforms but tolerated 'night watchmen, customarily known as Night Guards'.<sup>15</sup> In Benin City, a petition circulated in 1953 asking restriction of movements after 10 pm in the whole city, control and search of lorries

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<sup>13</sup> NAI, Ibadandiv, 1/1, 167, Hunter guard instructions, 5 January 1942.

<sup>14</sup> NAI, Comcol 1, 2498, Assistant Superintendent of Police to Superintendent, Nigeria Police, 1 August 1941. 'Ashogbon's Police Force', *Daily Service*, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1946. 'Ashogbon Police', *Nigerian Daily Times*, 24 September 1946

<sup>15</sup> Comcol 1, 2498, Acting Commissioner of the Colony to Chief Ashogbon, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1946. 'Ashogbon Police' *Nigerian Daily Times*, 19 August 1946.

and cars coming into or leaving the town after midnight, repatriation of non native thieves (Falola, 1995: 18). If the Resident did not answer favourably, many dwellers engaged however a large number of night guards. Our best informed case is however Oyo province where the resident, after some hesitations, decided in 1948 to approve the use of night guards provided the following rules were adhere to:

- 1)'That a roster of Night Guards is kept.
- 2) That a head hunter is appointed whose duties are to supervise the arrangements made and be responsible to the local *baale* (chief) for the conduct of the guards.
- 3) That each hunter guard is clearly informed that firearms must only be used in self-defense. They must never be used against a suspected person merely because he runs away and does not answer a challenge;
- 4) If a hunter guard catches a thief or suspect, he should take him to the nearest Police station at once and hand him over to the police;
- 5) That no form of uniform is used by hunter guards'<sup>16</sup>

This was clearly a response to former abuses as well as an attempt to organize the system under responsible elders. These recommendations were sent to all districts and villagers in Oyo province already employing guards.<sup>17</sup> They also became the legal disposition to deliver authorization. Consequently, a movement of legalization of night guards grew rapidly in the province. In Ibadan division, many petitions were sent to the Olubadan or to the district officer. Generally, after a night burglary and a meeting of all the village adults, a collective delegation, generally composed by heads of lineages was sent to Ibadan to find a public writer who translated the demand from Yoruba to English. Advices were even

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<sup>16</sup> NAI, Ibadandiv, 1717, Acting resident Oyo Province to District Officer Ibadan, 23 October 1948.

<sup>17</sup> This includes Ife, Ilesha, Iwo, Oshun, Ibadan and Oyo divisions.

demanded: one petition asked for a ‘book of note to guide the hunter’, another one ‘a form of letter to guide the hunters from misbehavior’ (sic), another ‘to know how to catch the thieves’<sup>18</sup>. In Ibadan division only, 78 authorizations were granted to communities to use night guards in between 1948 and 1954.<sup>19</sup> The authorization was granted with an identical administrative and stereotyped document from the 1950s onward indicating that delegation of security was already routinised before independence. This example indicates the widespread use of non state police in different parts of Western Province in the 1950s. A more accurate example of night guard activities in Ibadan informed on the internal functioning of these groups.

#### SODE SODE IN BERE (IBADAN)

Bere is one of the numerous pre-colonial neighbourhoods formed in the 19th century when Ibadan developed as a war camp. Like other wards, it was constituted by large compounds for extended families and warrior lineages. With the development of the town, the core area ‘growth by fission’, compounds were broken up into a number of separate housing units (Mabogunje, 1962). According to Mabogunje, half of this core area in the 1960s was occupied by ‘slum dwellings characterised by no identifiable sanitation facilities, housing in mud, physical deterioration and the highest population density area of the town’ (Mabogunje, 1968: 233). This statement is still valid today: in 1985, 70 per cent of the derelict houses were found in the inner city, i.e. at less than two km from the centre (Abumere, 1987: 136).

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<sup>18</sup> NAI, Ibadandiv, 1714, Ayekunmi Kokobiogun village to District Officer, 1 October 1948. Mogaji Adewusi c/o Adekunle to the Olubadan, 20 October 1948.

<sup>19</sup> This number is largely underestimated because it does not take into consideration organizations already on ground before 1948, and because all villages and town district did not declare their night guards.

Moreover, this part of the city has a total absence of urban management and urban planning. However the inhabitants refused to consider their ward as a slum mainly because is the land of the grandfathers, founders of the city (Fourchard, 2003).

In 2003, 20 interviews were conducted in Bere<sup>20</sup>. Most of the people interviewed were men above 60, generally farmers, sometimes retired civil servants who have been living in the same area for more than 30 years. If most of them have not received any formal education, they generally have a good knowledge of the local history even if accurate dates are most often not reminded. The interviewers have all a good record of the organisation of night guard system in the neighbourhood.

In the past, night guard system in Bere was called *sode sode*. In Yoruba, *sode* is the contracted form of the verb *se* (which means to do) with its object *ode* (which means hunter). If *ode* originally means hunter in Yoruba, by extension, the term came to designate both a guard and a hunter.<sup>21</sup> Hence, *sode sode* can be approximately translated by ‘to keep watching’. Their date of apparition corresponds to a period of time in between the 1930s and the 1950s.<sup>22</sup> There was a chain of transmission of orders coming from the Olubadan and from heads of powerful lineages associated to the Olubadan (the *Mogaji*) who transmitted information to heads of compound (*baale*). ‘The *Mogaji* were in charge of *sode sode*; They will call the head of each household then they will tell them about the need to keep watch on the surroundings’<sup>23</sup>. In each household, the *baale* will volunteer at least one or two people.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> I want to express special thanks to Michael Eshiemokhai for assisting me in conducting these interviews and for translating from Yoruba into English.

<sup>21</sup> An *ode* today could be both a Yoruba hunter in a village and a night guard in town.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Vigilante here has been long, about fifty years. It was then called *sode sode*’, Interview with Raufu Ole, 12/2/2003. Interview with Shehu Tijani, 5 February 2003. Interview with Alimi Buraimo Bello, 30 January 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Alhadji Alimi Buraimo Bello, 30 January 2003

Such demand could also extend to the country where many members were living as farmer the larger part of the year.

Interestingly, the usual word used by elders to describe such organisation is ‘volunteer’ whereas the system was clearly imposed from above. Elders decided for younger members who were not paid, because ‘it was for the benefit of the community’ ; money collected by *baale* was used only to buy battery and torch light.<sup>25</sup> The number of people involved within the neighbourhood varies strongly from one person to another (4, 8, 10 or even 20 by night). So different estimates are not necessarily contradictory, the number of guards depending probably on the period referred to. At the beginning, the system may have functioned well but with the stress of night guard activities, some people may have found a way of escaping their duties (see below). Once the ‘volunteers’ were designated they used to gather at a meeting point where they decided to go watching the surrounding generally between 11 pm and 5.30 or 6 am. Simultaneously, the system imposed a self restriction of night movements, a practice that was apparently accepted by most members of the neighbourhood:

‘Volunteers go around with a bell saying ‘*Ko n ilé gbele*’ (people should stay in their houses), meaning that the guards are outside and people should stay indoor ... This will also discouraged thieves around by the sound of the bell’.<sup>26</sup>

The system was based on the capacity of elders to mobilize youth and to propose them some security guarantees. People did not use guns but sticks, canes, whistles and more

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Oyeyemi Ajani, 23 January 2003. Interview with Wahabi Lawal, 31 January 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Wahabi Lawal, 14 January 2003. Interview with Busari Asiru, 6 February 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Wahabi Lawal, 14 January 2003.

especially various anti-criminal charms. People had faith in charms because they were believed to be efficient in providing a large range of protection. ‘Local dane guns used by the thieves don’t used to have effect on *sode sode* because they had charms to control them’<sup>27</sup>. ‘What our fathers did was not to beat thieves but to put some charms in their hand that will lead to their death’.<sup>28</sup> ‘Once the robbers are ambushed, they could be ‘charmed’ and then arrested’.<sup>29</sup>

These anti-criminal charms were then supposed to be more efficient than the one used by robbers. Like the warriors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thieves believed in the efficacy of charms to succeed in their operations (Falola, 1995: 10). Thieves used charms to turn invisible when detected, resist gun shot and machete cut and to even escape from police cell. Burglars operating by night were generally using two kinds of charms: the most common one to prevent people from waking during the night; the other one prevented burglars from being arrested. Both of them were declared illegal by the British Law. In the 1930s, in Ikeja district (northern Lagos), not less than forty offenders were brought to court because of illegal possession of criminal charms (Fourchard, 2005: 305).

In Bere, *sode sode* was abandoned at a non determined date to be replaced by paid guards. Different reasons militated for the change of the system. The idea that charms were not working anymore is largely shared by elders. ‘Before charms were functioning, they were very efficient (...) nowadays; people are so deceitful that charms don’t work anymore’?<sup>30</sup> ‘Old people who had the charms to prevent the invasion of armed robbers are all dead and we don’t have people like them again... Instead of the government to support traditional

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Amusa Adedapo, 29 January 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Raliatu Adekanbi, 21 January 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Amusa Adedapo, 29 January 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Raliatu Adekanbi. 21 January 2003.



practices, they are even suppressing them’<sup>31</sup> The development since the 1960s of more violent criminal practices have considerably diminished the power of ancestors’ charms: ‘The local dane guns used by the thieves don’t used to have effect on the *sode sode* because they had charms to control it but with foreign guns, it is difficult, it kills’.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, armed robbers became a more real menace for members of the community and especially for the youth who were in front line during night patrols. Then the idea of hiring guards came to light.

The change of criminal practices are however not the only reasons why people changed from *sode sode* to paid guards. The process of individuation in African cities has accelerated all along the 20<sup>th</sup> century in African cities and especially in Ibadan with the development of cocoa culture and salary work, massive conversion to Christianity, the weakening of the powers of the head of families and increasing individualization of housing units. This is well mentioned by elders:

‘Before people were giving volunteers for *sode sode* from each household but when it becomes a situation when it is your turn, you give excuse that you are busy. That is when our fathers decided that we should start paying for *ode*...’<sup>33</sup> People used to pretend that they were sick or have to go to farm not to do *sode sode*, this lack of communitarism made the *sode sode* not functioning again.<sup>34</sup>

Actually, *sode sode* was both time consuming, exhausting, and dangerous while little compensation was given to the main actors of such system, i.e. youth and young adults. In this

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Oyeyemi Ajani, 23 January 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Amusa Adedapo, 29 January 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Raliatu Adekanbi. 21 January 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Amusa Adedapo, 29 January 2003.

sense, neighbourhood watches are not necessarily a way of reinforcing community identity but rather indicate that elders were gradually losing control over the members of the neighbourhood.

## FROM NIGHT GUARDS TO VIGILANTE

Local police as well as night guards became increasingly involved in the late 1950s and 1960s politics. The Western Region was initially dominated by the Awolowo political party, the Action Group (AG) created in 1951 and throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic (1960-1966) the party formed the opposition in the federal legislature. The Northern People Congress (NPC) formed the same year, was then the dominant coalition partner in the federal government from 1954 to 1966. By 1962 the AG split into two rival groups led by Awolowo and Akintola. This last one created a coalition with the NPC and founded a new party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) which soon dominated the government of the Western region.

Local authorities, NA police and customary courts became instruments of local political domination of the Western government controlled by Akintola faction until the fall of the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic in January 1966 (Marenin, 1985: 85; Vaughan, 2000: 109-112). During this period, thugs were also recruited by political parties but those in power enjoyed the advantage that their thugs could operate under the cover of the police (Rotimi, 2001: 140). The fact that some of the thugs went about in the uniforms, especially in the period between 1964 and 1966 earned the NA Police the sobriquet of 'thugs in uniform' (ibid). Actually, local police acquired undisputed notoriety for molesting and victimizing members and agents of political parties opposed to the party in power (Tamuno, 1989: 87).

Night guards did not escape this process of politicisation. In the 1950s and especially during the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic, night guards became an instrument of political domination. Issue around the necessary use of night guards came mainly within the context of the general elections of 1959 and 1964 and of the regional election of 1965. Each time before the beginning of the campaign the Ibadan City Council (ICC) dominated by the NNDP (and before 1962, by the AG) passed a Bye-Law concerning the ‘maintenance of order’ by night guards.<sup>35</sup> The Bye Law stipulated the necessity to keep intact the night guard system in Ibadan. Actually, night guards were becoming a useful tool in the hand of the regional premier. For instance, in September 1965, one month before the regional election, the NPF asked the ICC ‘to dispense with the services of its night guards’ in order ‘to give room for police to check on the wave of thuggery and hooliganism in the region’.<sup>36</sup> The Federal Government considered that since the police had intensified efforts to restore peace in the region, the services of the night guards were no longer necessary.<sup>37</sup> The ICC turned down the police request, a reaction which was considered by the new opposition regrouped into the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) to ‘a calculated attempt by the NNDP to arrest as many UGPA supporters as possible’.<sup>38</sup> Local police force, night guards and political thugs eventually assisted Akintola to win the elections with massive rigging and malpractices. This fuelled a wave of political violence both in the rural and the cities. In this framework, a faction of the military carried out the first Nigeria coup (15 January 1966).

Because of their involvement in political activities, local police forces in the Western region were suppressed in 1966 and progressively amalgamated with the NPF (Tamuno, 1989: 88). Simultaneously, night guards were not authorized to perform their role anymore.

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Nightguards. Law again ?’ *Nigerian Tribune*, 17 July 1965.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Police urged to rebut thuggery’, *Nigerian Tribune*, 2 September 1965.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Police, council clash over night guards’ services’, *West African Pilot*, 1 September 1965.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Even if there is no evidence in the sources, it is however highly probable that night guard patrols were not disbanded. A few press articles indicate that night guards were still performing their duties in the mid 1970s.<sup>39</sup> Moreover after the civil war insecurity feelings increased especially among the population directly or indirectly enriched by oil benefits. Landlord and tenant associations were set up in middle and upper class neighbourhoods and recruit guards and security company members to implement restriction of movements into their ward (Fabiya, 2004: 47). If the 1970s did not witness the disappearance of non state forms of policing in Nigeria, it is only in the mid 1980s that the so called vigilante groups came to be known. But unlike the 1930-1950 night guard movements which came from Native Authorities and community elders, vigilante groups of the mid 1980s, appeared as a political strategy implemented by the federal government to change the image of the police.

The political context should be kept in mind in this regard. After the coup of the 25 August 1985 against General Buhari, General Babangida became the president of Nigeria. One year later (October 1986), the police was restructured nationwide into seven area commands in place of a command structure based on the states (Hills, 2000: 42) and Babangida promised additional resources to fight armed robbers. In between these two dates, Anini gang was arrested in Benin city after a six month pursuit. The 'Anini saga' has largely been covered during several months by newspapers which tended to elevate Anini to 'the status of a folk hero' and more generally to 'the symbol of all the difficulties facing Nigeria' (Marenin, 1987: 261). Of course, such national interest for crime was not new: in 1981, a massive campaign was launched by the government and the press against the menace of 'crime wave' (Barber, 1983: 437). In 1986, however, the overemphasis by the media on a banal armed robber was perceived by the government as a conscious and concerted attack on the legitimacy of the military regime (Marenin, 1987: 278). Moreover the arrest, trial and

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<sup>39</sup> *Nigerian Tribune*, 16 January 1975. *Nigerian Tribune*, 16 May 1975.

execution of former Deputy Superintendent of Police of Bendel State, Georges Iyamu, a convicted associate of Anini, encouraged a strong belief that other superior police officers like him were not detected and punished the same way (Tamuno, 2003: 133). More than before there was a strong need to improve the police-public relations in the country. The idea of setting up a Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC) throughout the federation was actually proposed, in 1985, by Inspector General of Police, Etim O. Inyang (1984-1986). The idea of community policing has actually resurfaced in the United States and the United Kingdom at the beginning of the 1980s as a new partnership between the police and the community to fight crime and to improve quality life within neighbourhoods (Chalom, 1999). This new way of policing could have influenced Nigerian police officers who had established relationships with police officers in the USA in the 1960s and the 1970s (Marenin, 1986). First proposed in the 1985, the PCRC was gradually set up in all divisional police areas to enable the police and the public to interact regularly in the fight against crime (Roberts, 2003: 147; Inyang, 1989: 82). Obviously, community policing was mainly seen as one of the solutions to improve both the image and performance of the police. In this framework, vigilante groups came to be popularized by some military governors. In March 1986, Adetunji Olurin and David Mark, respectively Governor of Oyo State and Governor of Niger State announced that vigilante groups were to be encouraged in their respective state 'to fish out criminals in the community'<sup>40</sup>. These local news were soon followed by a more general announcement of Inspector General Inyang in August 1986, during the raging battle between Anini Gang and the police. He officially 'empowered communities to form vigilante groups in close collaboration with the divisional police officers who will give such groups adequate police protection. He also made special appeal to the mass media 'to stop disseminating

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<sup>40</sup> 'Vigilante to the rescue', *Nigerian Tribune*, 15 March 1986. 'Vigilante groups can probe', *Nigerian Tribune*, 22 March 1986.

sensational stories on crime which, he said, tended to alarm the public and demoralise the police'<sup>41</sup>.

All these declarations of top officials in the 1986 testify a real will to change the policing system in the country. Whereas in 1985, the federal state was still disapproving the formation of vigilante movements in Nigeria,<sup>42</sup> one year later it has embraced the opposite idea, in order to improve the dreadful image of the police.

Vigilante groups were officially launched in Oyo State in April 1987 by military governor Adetunji Olurin<sup>43</sup>. Vigilante as defined in the edict of 1987 was 'a group of people at the ward or local government level set up to collect information on suspected criminals in its area for use by the police in the detection and prevention of crimes'.<sup>44</sup> The Governor declared that 'unlike the previous vigilante groups, the activities of the groups being inaugurated were protected by the law'.<sup>45</sup> Their main objective was to keep watch over their area, to collect information in respect of persons with criminal tendencies and to pass such information to the police. Vigilante groups were also authorized to employ the service of paid watchmen.<sup>46</sup> An incredible number of duties were supposed to be implemented by vigilante groups. Some of them obviously remind the 1950s night guard regulations: 'monitoring movement of residents within the ward, keeping a register of guards in the wards, responding to distress alarm by neighbours, arresting and handing-over of suspects to law enforcement agents, preparing rosters of groups where residents serve as guards and registering them and

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<sup>41</sup> 'Bit to curb robbery Inspector General okays vigilantes', *Nigerian Tribune*, 30 August 1986.

<sup>42</sup> *Africa Confidential*, vol. 26, n° 13, 19 June 1985.

<sup>43</sup> *Africa Confidential*, vol. 28, n° 19, 13 May 1987.

<sup>44</sup> Mobilisation Community Development Committee Edict, 1987. Supplement to the Oyo State of Nigeria Gazette n° 14, vol. 12 of 2 April, 1987.

<sup>45</sup> 'Oyo Vigilantes launched', *Nigerian Tribune*, 7 April 1987.

<sup>46</sup> Mobilisation Community Development Committee Edict, 1987, op. cit.

all paid guards with the police.<sup>47</sup> Vigilante groups were not only vested in crime control activities but were also supposed to enforce a larger social control: registration of all tenants and landlords, scrutinising activities of the residents, monitoring the movements of strangers and people with sudden wealth, identification of every house in the ward and so on.<sup>48</sup> The creation of vigilante groups led to a multiplication of duties for the community whereas the role of the police remains largely undefined. Did the introduction of vigilante change policing practices?

At the local level, elders in Bere do actually consider the vigilante introduced in 1987 as a new name given by the police to refer to older policing practices as well as an apparent stronger involvement of police officers in neighbourhood affairs:

‘When the robbers started to attack us, *ode* were then employed and people contributed money at the end of the month to pay them. Police was not involved then. The police established a group called PCRC. It was in 1987 by Colonial Olowin, governor of Oyo state. What the police did was to refer to the system in the past’.<sup>49</sup> Government got involved in the Ode, reason why it became vigilante. Initially, it was a neighbourhood affair’<sup>50</sup>. ‘The neighbourhood organised a meeting ask for volunteers, they were given charms, gun powders, head lamp. Then nobody knows what is called vigilante. It’s a new thing in vogue’<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Governor of Oyo state insisted that tenants changing residence will be required to present a letter of clearance from their former landlord. ‘Oyo Vigilantes launched’, *Nigerian Tribune*, 7 April 1987.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Wahabi Lawal, 14 January 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Rasheed Aderinto, 22 January 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Asiru Aluokun, 6 February 2003.

We can thus consider vigilante groups as a legalization and institutionalisation of former night guard patrols (*sode sode* or paid *ode*) which exist in the region for more than 50 years in order to regain control over local communities. Like the night guards of the colonial period, vigilante of the 1980s were requested to keep watching the area, to hand over suspects and criminals to law enforcement agents and to give the police information of night guards. However this initiative did not fundamentally changed former practices. Most of the dispositions concerning registration of tenants and identification of houses have not been implemented and many elders in Bere consider the system of vigilante activities as not fundamentally different from the pre-existing neighbourhood watches or night guards. In this specific case, vigilante groups initiated by the government are only old actors with new names.

The only new practice which did not exist before PCRC is the monthly meeting organised with the community leaders at the local police station. Officially police officers keep teaching community members to hand over thieves to law enforcement agents while community leaders are supposed to report the state of crime in their neighbourhood. It should be noticed however that without this regular meeting, the police won't patrol the neighbourhood on a monthly basis.<sup>52</sup> Actually, in exchange of the police patrol each community members contribute 100 Naira monthly, an amount gathered by the *baale* and given at the police meeting. In this case, community policing has been a way of institutionalising corruption practices at the neighbourhood level.

Beyond this local case, the initial scope of the government in setting up vigilante groups has failed for at least two reasons. Firstly, vigilante groups and PCRC failed to modify the state policing pattern and the image of the police even if community policing and improving public perception of the force are two of the current 10 point programme of action

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Wahabi Lawal, 31 January 2003.



of the Nigeria Police today.<sup>53</sup> Obviously, the implementation of community police objectives was constrained by insufficient human and material resources (Roberts, 2003: 149). The main issue however was that PCRC did not match earlier expectations because the police did not change fundamentally its former practices. Civilian allegations of arbitrary arrests, police brutality, unconstitutional detention in police cells and prisons, corruption and collusion with suspected offenders, among others helped to sour relations between the NPF and the public, especially during the Babangida and the Abacha regimes (1985-1998) (Tamuno, 2003 : 135). Such practices have continued since Obansajo became president in 1999. The former Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun (2000-2005) has been accused in April 2005 to have stolen two billion Naira funds allocated to the Nigeria Police Force.<sup>54</sup> A Human Rights Watch investigation in March 2005 found the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment by the NPF to be widespread and perpetrated by and with the knowledge of senior police officers.<sup>55</sup>

## RECONSIDERING THE CHRONOLOGY OF VIGILANTISM AND THE PRIVATISATION OF THE STATE IN NIGERIA

The historical forms of vigilante organisations may help to reconsider two important issues in Nigeria. First the history of the state and its so called privatisation, second the legacy of such heritage in the nowadays forms of vigilantism in Nigeria.

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<sup>53</sup> See the official website of the Nigeria Police : <http://www.nigeriapolice.org/10point.htm>

<sup>54</sup> ‘Tafa Balogun in handcuffs faces 70 charges’, *The Guardian*, 5 April 2005. ‘Tafa Balogun regains freedom’, *The Vanguard*, 9 February 2006.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Rest in Pieces’ Police Torture and Deaths in Custody in Nigeria. A Human Rights Watch report, July 2005, <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/nigeria0705>

The increasing number of armed groups and the incapacity of the federal state to control the legitimate means of violence is part of a larger debate on the nature of the state in Africa. What is considered to be the process of 'privatisation' of state security agencies and the loss of sovereign control by the state over its territory has become a central issue within the last fifteen years with the rise of private security companies, private armies, warlords and powerful vigilante groups in many African countries, the privatisation of crime control being only one element in this larger debate. For instance, Crawford Young considers that 'the dramatic erosion of stateness in the 1990s opened space for a multitude of actors: informal traders, smugglers, warlords, arms traffickers, youth militia (Young, 2004: 23-25). Achille Mbembe (2005: 95-139) also considers the *Gouvernement privé indirect* (private indirect government) as a form of government different from the post-colonial state. The former has appeared as the result of lack of material goods, deinstitutionalisation, and emergence of new private institutions which administrate violence and constraint. I have recently indicated that such chronology did not fit in with the history and the nature the federal state in Nigeria which remains rich, powerful and neo-patrimonial, and which has historically tolerated or even encouraged the delegation of security functions to different private and community actors (Fourchard, 2007).

Actually, the colonial state did not fully exercise its monopole of legitimate violence. It is well known that under indirect rule, practices of coercion have been delegated to Native Authorities to collect taxes, to recruit force labour, to implement sanitary regulations and more generally to preserve law and order including, policing the city against criminals (Killingray, 1986: 416). Mahmood Mamdani has analysed indirect rule as a 'decentralised despotism' in 'which local custom within a larger colonial project was a way of achieving a hegemonic domination' (Mamdani, 2002: 286). Thomas Spear reminds however that 'colonial power was limited by chiefs' obligation to ensure community well-being to maintain the

legitimacy on which colonial authorities depended' (Spear, 2003: 3). In the Nigerian case, power of police was also transferred to local communities through the Native Authorities who were not always able to control them. It was neither imposed by the District Officer nor invented as a new tradition. The process of legalisation was rather a hesitant negotiation between public actors (colonial administration, Native authority) and between them and private ones (local communities). Of course, night guards were regarded by colonial administration as well as Nigerian journalists as 'customary' and 'traditional' as soon as the 1940s. But the law regulating their activity was typically customary in the sense proposed by Thomas Spear : 'Less invented than transformed, codified, expanded and criminalized under specific historical conditions, customary law was neither traditional nor modern, African nor European, but quintessentially colonial' (Spear, 2003: 14). Despite these regulations, NPF, NA Police and Native Authority did not have the means of controlling night guard activities on a daily routine whereas it was already the main policing actor in many villages and neighbourhoods in South-western Nigeria. Thus, the monopoly of legitimate means of violence and the control over the territory exercised directly by district officer or indirectly by Native Authorities was not achieved under colonial rule in Nigeria.

The independence of the country did not change this trend: non state forms of policing shows historical continuity from the colonial period to date. Forms of policing exercised under the leadership of community members (night guards, *sode sode*, *ode*) have mixed with community policing to initially formed state control vigilante groups in the late 1980s. In the 1990s a new wave of vigilante groups appear initially set without any police supervision such as the OPC in the West, the Bakassi Boys in the east, the Egbusu Boys in the Delta and the various Shari'a enforcement groups set up in 1999-2000 in some northern states. All these organisations have their own historical trajectory which cannot be analysed here. In many cases however, they can be analysed within the night guard heritage of ward level

organisation, large resort to anti-criminal charms, extra-killing justice, and conjectural use by political leaders. Such as *sode sode* and former hunter guards, the employment of various charms and occult abilities is central for Bakassi Boys (Eastern Nigeria) and OPC members (Pratten and Gore, 2003; Guichaoua, 2007). It is difficult to know whether charms are playing a more important role today than before. But like in Cameroon, charms have not been used to refuse change within the community (Geschiere, 1995). Instead, they have helped communities in the Nigerian case to adapt to more violent criminal practices.

Vigilantism in Nigeria has often been considered as a social or community reaction to crime whereas it is also a top down political response to policing issue. As indicated earlier the first official vigilante organisations in Nigeria were created by military governors under Babangida regime. The demand for a local police “closer to the people” has always been strong since the suppression of the regional police in 1966-1970 (Fourchard, 2007: 17). Because it is forbidden to create state police, civilian governors under the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic set up state vigilante organisations not very different from the previous ones (Agbola and Sobanjo, 2003; Sesay and al., 2003, 19). The Bakassi Boys – the once popular and well known vigilante groups in eastern cities - have been transformed in 2000 into Vigilante State Services by governors of Abia and Anambra States before being officially suppressed in 2002 (Meagher , 2007). In the South West, many governors have supported officially or unofficially vigilante activities of OPC (Akinyele, 2007). Undoubtedly, crime control organisations are part of an on-going struggle between the federal government and the newly elected governors since the return of a civilian regime in 1999. More generally, if vigilante organisations were sometimes fought by the state, they were more often tolerated and even promoted by military and civilian governors, mainly because it was a way to unload on the community the heavy price of protecting it. Instead of considering the rise of vigilantism in Nigeria, as the manifestation of state erosion, we

consider that vigilante practices are part of the historical and on-going formation of the state (Hibou 1999).

Taking into consideration the historical roots of vigilantism in Nigeria may also help to reconsider the history of crime in a less normative ways as well as to study the legacy of non state policing practices in contemporary forms of vigilantism. Indeed, most of the studies on vigilante organisations are dominated by conjectural and teleological approach. Crime is always perceived as increasing while community responses to insecurity should be analysed in a larger historical period in which solutions to fight crime considerably fluctuated. In many cases, night guards were abandoned as soon as the feeling of security was coming back before being recreated when necessary. In central Ibadan, night guards were set up in 1941, reinstalled in 1942, set up again in 1948, they were changed into vigilante groups in 1987, then abandoned later on in Bere before being resuscitated in 1998 after a massive armed robbery. Of course, movement of creation and abandon has nothing specifically 'African'. Mike Brogden (2004: 635) has indicated that Neighbourhood Watch Schemes have in the majority of cases a very short life in Western countries. Actually patrolling an area is boring, costly and dangerous, reasons why organisations can easily disappear. However, most of the studies on vigilante in Nigeria have focused almost exclusively on the organisation itself rather than on the practices developed over time. Instead of considering the rise of vigilante under the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic as a recent phenomenon as it is sometimes mentioned, it is worth considering it as the last wave of a movement which has started much earlier. One way of doing it is to look at the recycling of former organisations under a new name, a classical but undocumented process in Nigeria.

In the South West, the main current militia group which turned into a vigilante groups in 1999-2000 is the OPC. We have today numerous researches on this militia, but the current

literature has not been able to dissociate what is really new from what is older in the self defence practices of the organisation. At first glance, differences between the OPC and former vigilante groups appear very clearly. The organisation is apparently larger and more structured than any former vigilante groups.<sup>56</sup> More empirical research is however needed to understand the relationships between the different scales of the organisation. First, since 1999, there is an on-going struggle between two factions (Adewanmi, 2005) and which faction controls which city or part of the city remains unclear. Secondly and to a certain extent, the OPC only takes over former crime control practices at neighbourhood level. In some cases, OPC members have been invited by “traditional authorities” to take over security organisation at city level as was the case in Oworo in 2002, and Osogbo in 2003 (Akinyele, 2007: 154). In Lagos, Ibadan and Oshogbo, OPC members mainly patrol in low and medium income housing areas where police protection is lacking, whereas in richer areas the organisation is almost absent (Akinyele, 2007, Fourchard, 2006 b). Interestingly, security provision at grassroots level is almost identical in neighbourhoods patrolled by OPC members as those that do not rely on the OPC: the number of guards patrolling the ward is the same (from 2 to 4); guards patrol the area between 11 pm and 5 am, they have an equivalent salary as non OPC members (i.e. 5 000 to 8 000 Naira), with their salary generally being paid from a fee shared among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. Hence, it seems that OPC militia groups took over in certain cases former self defence organisations. To what extent, this has really changed the way the neighbourhood is policed should be properly evaluated in forthcoming researches.

## Conclusion

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<sup>56</sup> See Nolte in this issue.

Can we explain the development of other contemporary vigilante groups with such a local historical specificity? In other words, do south-western organisations are an exception in Nigeria contemporary vigilantism? Interestingly, the vast literature on the Bakassi Boys has not paid attention to past organisations. According to Yfeany Onyeonoru (2003: 380) “insecurity in Onitsha in the late 1970s led to “Operation Boys Oye-e’ in which traders went on a rampage, fishing out and burning alive suspected criminals. In related circumstances, in the 1980s and 1990s, members of the Onitsha Market Amalgamated Traders Association (OMATA), arrested, tried and executed suspected criminals”. In the North and especially in Kano, vigilante groups became official in the mid 1980s and according to Rasheed Olaniyi (2005: 55) they were offshoots of *Yantauri* (hunters)<sup>57</sup>. Appropriate empirical works on historical origins of vigilante organisations are thus necessary to confirm such approach.

Some elements of continuity since the colonial period could eventually be traced. OPC members like former night guards and vigilante did familiarise community members with extra-legal practices and using charms for crime control operations throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thieves caught by neighbourhood watches were sometimes handed over to Native Authority which repatriated them to the country, a policy which probably functioned until the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic. But in most cases, the suspect was seriously beaten or killed. Newspapers and police reports continuously mentioned cases in which thieves were burnt, forced to drink poison or nailed on the head. This accustomed local communities to get rid of ‘undesirable elements’ which could be criminals, recalcitrant to curfew practices, passers by, other ethnic members considered dangerous for the community or even political opponents during electoral campaigns. Undoubtedly, these policing forms largely contributed to the development of a culture of impunity probably because extra-judicial killing were done for

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<sup>57</sup> An in-depth analysis is provided in this issue by Murray Last.

the so called defence of the community. Significantly night guards and militia groups have never been forbidden on the ground of negation of human rights.

Finally, one central heritage of such policing practice is the curfew culture that all these organisations have continuously promoted throughout the last seven decades. Curfew practises present in so many south-western Nigerian cities today have affected first many villages and under policed neighbourhoods during the colonial period before concerning the city as a whole when criminal gangs did not fear anymore to challenge the police and more protected areas. The practise of staying indoor during the night is today a self accepted constraint everywhere even if criminal practices have changed and took place in broad day light. This has changed the pattern of city life. In most of southern cities, a gate system has been set in order to restraint the circulation of people by night but which is relatively open by day (Béni, Owuor and Fabiyi, 2007). Curfew practices have also affected cultural practices of familial, social and religious meetings in postponing them during day time and the week end, but this is another story.

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