Policing Social Crimes in Exploring: In Henry Bell-Gam's *The Hidden Treasure*

By

Chizenum George Ohia
Department Of Theatre and Film Studies
Faculty of Humanities
University Of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Abstract

This paper examines the use of traditional/local contents in policing the teething social crimes that enveloped Rivers State of Nigeria in recent past. The concept of local contents in this work implies the use of traditional institutions (belief system) and its methods of crime control such as oath taking, divination, traditional security architecture (community policing, amongst others) in eradicating social disturbances to include: cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery, to mention but a few. The analysis of this topic under examination will be critically investigated and discussed in Henry Bell-Gam's *The Hidden Treasure*. To this end, the paper employs sociological and analytical methods in realizing the aim of the study. It is the modest recommendation of this work to strengthen the collaboration between the conventional Police force (Nigeria Police and other security agencies), local vigilantes, the judiciary and traditional authorities in the fight against the scourge of social crimes in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria at large.

Keywords: Social Crime, Police, Rivers State, Drama, Theatre, Traditional Institution and Local Content.

Introduction

There is no gainsaying the fact that peaceful co-existence and social decorum are recipes for national development in an orderly society. Therefore, the maintenance of order in the society is a task that befalls on every individual despite his or her position, religion or ethnic alliances. To realize a stable social order in the society, constitutional rules and ethical principles that regulate human conduct must be obeyed. Unfortunately, there seems to be lacuna in the adherence to the lay down values and moral guidelines in the society. This gap, in a large proportion has contributed to social crimes in Nigerian nation at large and Rivers State in particular.

Rivers State, the oil hub of Nigeria, has recorded series of crimes and criminalities in recent past. The unquantifiable social violence in the state has claimed lives and property and left many wounded. To contain the excesses, the Nigeria Police and other security agencies such as Nigeria Army, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps and the Nigeria Navy

amongst others have fought the criminals to the teeth. The duty of Police force is first and foremost to protect lives and property of citizens. Emphasizing on the provision of section 4 of the Police Act, Otubu informs that "the police shall be employed for the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property…" (3). While explaining the concept of criminal and criminality, Kagbaranee asserts that:

> Every criminal act is illegal or unlawful but illegal or unlawful act may not be always criminal. Offences against public law are criminal while offences against private rights are illegal or unlawful. Hence, all acts punishable by fine, imprisonment or both are criminal in view of the law (4).

The heinous violent crimes carried out by criminals in the state, in recent times have caused the well-meaning individuals and the government of the state to seek possible solutions in making the state safe for living. To control the increase of criminalities in Rivers State, punishable legislations such as imprisonment and outright prosecution of criminals with capital offences have been advocated by the government yet criminals continued to unleash terror to the inhabitants of the state. The East/West road and other adjoining routes in the state have become dens of criminals, especially the cultists and kidnappers. This undesirable social condition has spurred critics, crime-watchers and traditional rulers to condemn the nefarious activities and call for an alternative means of curtailing social violence in the state. In the search for social remedy, the call for the use of traditional/ local contents (such as divination, oath taking and local security apparatus among others) in curbing criminalities in the state became imperative. It is therefore on the forgoing that this paper interrogates the use of traditional/local contents in Henry Bell-Gam's *The Hidden Treasure* as study guide.

Plot Summary of *The Hidden Treasure*:

Set in Ikwerre ethnic nationality; in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, the play re-echoes the oil politics and it's attendant youth violence that characterized the region in recent years. As the dramatic action of the play unfolds, three oil company workers; namely: a Geologist, Surveyor and an Administrator take soil sample from Kohia farmland to verify its contents. As the event progresses, Eze Kohia holds meeting of elders in council to intimate them of the letter he received from an oil company (Schepetrolina Research Company Limited) and the government indicating interests to drill oil in their land. As the oil company arrive Kohia community, they demand to know how much to be paid as compensation for the land but Eze Kohia refuses to accept money for the land. However,

his Deputy Eze Omasi considers the offer from the oil company as a good bargain. He says "Why not. This is an opportunity for us to eradicate poverty in the land. I suggest we accept the offer quickly" (25). To reaffirm his stands on the refusal to accept financial compensation for their ancestral land, Eze Kohia tells his Deputy that he doesn't take bribe of any sort.

To ensure that they acquire the land, oil company workers decide to negotiate with the Deputy Eze Omasi; not through Eze Kohia any longer. Deputy Eze Omasi tells them that Eze Kohia does not collect money for the land directly, hence, the need to go through him. At this juncture, the oil company workers paid the sum of Ten Million Naira to him with the hope that the money would finally get to Eze Kohia through his Deputy as they agreed. In the presence of every body, Deputy Eze Omasi tells a "self-acclaimed" youth leader to send the money to Eze Kohia but he rather secretly directs him to divert the money to his house. Ironically the youth leader diverts the money to his criminal gang members in the forest.

As Eze Omasi returns home, he tells Chisa, his wife to bring the bag of money that a youth leader gave to her. Chisa becomes perplexed because she did not receive money from youth leader. It is at this moment, that Eze Omasi realizes that all is not well with him; thus, he has been duped by a fake youth leader. To cover up his deeds, Eze Omasi tells the "original" youth leader that Eze Kohia has collected the sum of Ten Million Naira paid to the community by the oil company workers. He spurs them to kill him for embezzling public funds. As a Journalist comes in to reveal a letter to Eze Kohia, claiming that he has embezzled compensation money paid for their land, the oil company workers come in too, to request for the receipt of the money paid for the land from Eze Kohia. However, Eze Kohia is shocked over the allegations as he never collected money from anybody in that regards.

When the news got to Eze Kohia, informing him that the Omasi youths have started clearing the land under the instruction of his Deputy, he quickly alerted the Commissioner of Police on telephone but their conversation was intercepted by Deputy Eze Omasi who instructs some youths to dress in Police uniform and kidnap Eze Kohia. As the Police officers sent by the Commissioner of Police arrives Eze Kohia's palace, they were told that some men dressed in Police uniform have whisked him away.

In order to discover the whereabouts of Eze Kohia, the services of a Diviner is consulted. Knowing that he will be implicated in the matter, the Deputy Eze Omasi makes to stop the exercise but was ritualistically conjured by the Diviner to fall on the ground. Through the

Diviner's necromancy (divination) the kidnappers were arrested and Eze Kohia rescued by the Nigeria Police Force. Having been arrested, Deputy Eze Omasi and the kidnappers were taken to the Court of law for adjudication. At this juncture, a youth leader enters the Court room with a bag containing money. Upon interrogation, he admits that he is the person that the Deputy Eze Omasi gave the money. He reveals "I am an agent of truth and vindication for the youths of Kohia and Omasi communities. This bag containing something which Eze Omasi himself asked me to give to his wife. On the grounds of conscience and the dignity of the youths, I kept the money safely waiting for this day" (91). In the end, the Deputy Eze Omasi realizes that the youth leader is the person that carted away the bag of money he asked him to divert to his house as the Judge directs that the Court be adjourned and ensures that the suspects be kept under custody.

Thematic Analysis:

Traditional/Local Contents: The idea of traditional/local contents in the play is the use of cultural ribaldries: custom, tradition and other locally sourced alternative means of social control which include divination, oath taking and the security architecture of the people among others. In the play, the playwright reveals that apart from the conventional security agencies (Police amongst others), spiritual essence (divination etc.) of the people can help in arresting criminals and curbing social vices in the society. Through the use of a Diviner, Eze Kohia was released from the hands of his kidnappers

Social Violence: It is no longer news that most part of Rivers State has recorded a number of social crimes; among which are kidnapping and cultism in recent past. It is worrisome to note that oil politics and leadership tussle are among the factors that contribute to social violence in the state. In the play, the disagreement between Eze Kohia and his Deputy Eze Omasi over the acquisition of their land by oil company operatives spur Deputy Eze Omasi into instigating the youths against Eze Kohia. Hear him:

> Now listen, your task is simple. Move in a taxi to the Eze's house. Pretend you've been sent to him by the Commissioner of Police. Ask him to accompany you to the site in question. As he goes out with you, divert your movement and kidnap him! Keep him in the hideout, and wait for the next command. You may now move! (70).

Corruption: Deputy Eze Omasi and his fake youth leader cannot be exonerated from corrupt practices. He masterminded the kidnap of Eze Kohia to cover his evil deeds. He connived with the oil company workers to embezzle the money brought by the company to their community and consequently handed it over to a fake youth leader who in turn

diverted the money to his criminal gang members. The dubious attitude of the Deputy Eze Omasi brought crisis in the community.

Character and Characterization in *The Hidden Treasure*

Eze Kohia: He is the Paramount Ruler of Kohia community. He believes in the protection and reservation of their ancestral land. This is why he refuses to give away their land to the oil company workers. In his discussion with Deputy Eze Omasi, he says "And so you will be so greedy and give out the land of your ancestors for peanuts even without the approval of your mandators. Thief!" (30). He is an honest man who does not take bribe. This is evident when he castigates him thus "you mean for all these, I should reduce myself to accept a bribe" (29).

Deputy Eze Omasi: He is one of the corrupt, greedy and deceitful indigenes of Kohia community. He does not have respect for the Paramount Ruler of the kingdom, Eze Kohia. He connived with his cohorts to embezzle money meant for the development of the community. He says "See, my people, this method is simple. I will collect the money, give it to you to go and deliver to Eze Kohia. You will in turn divert the money to my wife who at that time will be waiting anxiously for it…" (36). Deputy Eze Omasi masterminds the kidnap of Eze Kohia. This attitude qualifies him as a criminal who violates ethical and moral conducts governing human existence.

Chief Owhor: He is one of the prominent chiefs in Kohia kingdom. Very often, Chief Owhor supports the activities of Deputy Eze Omasi. When Eze Kohia places a curse on his Deputy, Chief Owhor reacted thus "…Even the ancestors did not render curses so easily on their subjects. If they did, so many would have joined them before now. I support the Deputy Eze, withdraw the curse" (20). Chief Owhor is a corrupt chief who collaborates with Deputy Eze Omasi to dupe the community.

Elder Chinda: He is a law abiding citizen in the play. He has respect for the King, Eze Kohia and the community at large. He is very careful when it comes to analyzing critical issues. This is quite evident when Deputy Eze Omasi informs him that his wife Nene, sees Eze Kohia selling the land to the company workers as elder Chinda laments "The whole thing is getting complicated. Was it not that day we all accompanied the Eze and the people to the bush that your wife went to farm? How come she saw what we did not see?" (45).

Chief Wenike: The play reveals that Chief Wenike is one of the respected chiefs in the Kohia community. He works with Eze Kohia to ensure peace and progress is maintained

in the community. However, Deputy Eze Omasi betrayed him by telling him that Eze Kohia has rejected the money offered to him.

A Geologist, Surveyor and Administrator: These are staff of Schepetrolina Company who carried out an oil exploration in the Kohia kingdom. In their adventure to discover crude oil in the community, they say:

> GEOLOGIST: What a beautiful terrain?
> SURVEYOR: Suitable for the venture?
> ADMINISTRATOR: Nature has favoured this people; yes favoured them.

Fake Youth Leader: Ironically, this character was used by Deputy Eze Omasi to perfect his financial dealings with the oil company workers in the absence of His Royal Majesty, Eze Kohia. The Deputy Eze Omasi sees him as a criminal and untrusted youth leader that caused a lot of trouble to him. In a dramatic twist, however, the youth leader returns the stolen money to the Court of law as an evidence to attest to the unquestionable character of Deputy Eze Omasi. He tells the Court:

> My Lord, I am an agent of truth and vindication for the youths of Kohia and Omasi communities. This bag contains something which Eze Omasi himself asked me to give to his wife. On the grounds of conscience and for the dignity of the youths, I kept the money safely, waiting for this day… (90-91).

The above confession re-writes the earlier character damage of the self-acclaimed youth leader. The Deputy Eze Omasi describes him as a thief and untrusted fellow who criminally diverted the money he asked him to give to Chisa, his wife. Put differently, this singular act of returning the said bag containing money to the Court of law exonerates him from the character assassination.

Geographical Location of Rivers State:

Rivers State of Nigeria is one of the richest states in terms of human and natural endowments. It is located in the Niger Delta region, in the South-South Nigeria. Rivers State produces large quantity of crude oil that empowers the nation's economy. Its natural vegetation is surrounded by aquatic minerals such as fishes and other edible economic creatures. The state has fertile agricultural lands that produce yams, cassava, and palm fruits amongst others. This therefore, suffices that Rivers State is one of the states in Nigeria that hosts the treasure base of the nation; hence, its strategic economic importance to the

country. Revealing the location of Rivers State, Kari contends that "Rivers State, sometimes simply referred to as Rivers is one of the 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It was created on 27 May, 1967. The state is located in the southern part of Nigeria and has a population of 5,198,716 million people (National Population Commission, 2006)" (*researchgate.net*).

Rivers State shares common boundaries with other neighboring states. It is bounded by Imo State on the North, Abia State on the East, and Bayelsa State on the West. Many scholars and traditional historians have explained the historical account of the creation of Rivers State. According to Akpogomeh the geographical location known as Port Harcourt today was a product of an agreement reached between the Ikwerre and Okrika land owners on one hand and the Colonial Masters on the other hand. The agreement was signed in May 1913 which saw the ceding of 30 acres of land to the Colonial Masters. Before the agreement, the area was a meeting point for trade between the agricultural upland communities and the fishing and trading communities of the riverine areas (as cited in Kio-Lawson *et al*, (151).



Abua-Odual (Abua)
Ahoada East (Ahoada)
Ahoada West (Akinma)
Akuku-Toru (Abonnema)
Andoni (Ngo)
Asari-Toru (Buguma)
Bonny (Bonny)
Degema (Degema)
Eleme (Nchia)
Emohua (Emohua)
Etche (Okehi)
Gokana (Kpor)
Ikwerre (Isiokpo)
Khana (Bori)
Obio/Akpor (Rumuodumaya)
Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni (Omuku)
Ogu Bolo (Ogu)
Okrika (Okrika)
Omumma (Eberi)
Opobo/Nkoro (Opobo)
Oyigbo (Afam)
Port Harcourt (Port Harcourt)
Tai (Saakpenwa)

Map of Rivers State of Nigeria Showing the 23 Local Government Areas and Headquarters.

Some Causes of Social Violence are:

Unemployment: Lack of unemployment is one of the causes of social crimes in the society.

Social Inequality: Unequal distribution of opportunities is yet another factor that leads to social crime.

Corrupt Socialization: Wrong association of people in the society contributes to social disturbances.

Some Traditional/ Local Methods of Crime Prevention:

(i) Divination: The use of divination helps to unearth and arrest criminals.

(ii) **Oath Taking:** Placing the criminals on oath will help to checkmate their conscience and activities.

(iii) **The Use of Local Vigilante** (Community policing): Local security architecture in the society helps in combating criminalities.

Collaboration between the Conventional Police System and Traditional/ Local Contents in Crime Control: The Theatre Option.

Security of lives and property is everybody's business, thus should not be left in the hands of Nigeria Police alone. The deliberate collaboration between the Police and other stakeholders is a panacea in curbing crime and criminalities in the society. Institutions such as the media, churches, mosques, traditional rulers, civil society and artiste amongst others have the responsibility to checkmate social violence in their domains. However, the theatre artiste and other critical stakeholders in the entertainment industry are not resting on their oars in making sure they device means of controlling crimes through their works. Theatre practitioners and dramatists have written and staged performances to curb social violence in society. It is noteworthy to mention, that the aim of any theatrical/dramatic activities is to entertain, inform and also educate the members of audience. Revealing the need for theatrical performances, Kernodle & Kernodle, posit that:

> The theatre is an invitation to see life lived at a higher intensity, not frittered away but concentrated and filled with meaning. Each kind of play presents a different attitude toward life, shaped by the intent of the playwright and the production (3).

It suffices therefore to state that theatre mirrors the society and sues for edification. As a responsible institution, theatre ensures that social order is maintained in the society. To be frank, it is important to state that theatre presents and represents live activities. What therefore constitute theatre are the activities of man. It is on this score that Brockett avers that theatre is man in action. While corroborating Brockett's opinion, Johnson states that

"Man in action" can only be truly represented by another man – the actor. This "action" is taking place somewhere called a stage and there are people there who see the actions – the audience." (8). To say, therefore that theatrical activities cannot function without the involvement of man is to emphasize the obvious. As a platform that ventilates the opinions of man, theatre allows group and individual participations. Quoting Nwamuo, Ohiri informs that:

> Theatre is a demonstration of any action by any one or group of people at a particular place and moment in time, with or without makeup, costume, rehearsal or improvisation before an audience gathered for interest, to share and celebrate Ohiri (6).

Theatrical engagements harness the activities of other institutions; be it traditional, contemporary and otherwise in its dramatic performances. In the traditional society, theatre, presents its ribaldries to entertain and checkmate social vices. Also, in the contemporary society, theatre serves as mechanism that propagates policies and institutions of government and criticizes social follies. To this end therefore, the Police force is one of the agencies of government that checkmates crime and criminality in society. Quoting Reiner, Chikwendu *et al*, say:

> Formal policing structures, a body or men recruited and paid by the state to enforce law and maintain order is a recent development in human history. Traditionally and historically, policing was the responsibility of every adult in the community (65).

Implicit in this paper is the synergy between the conventional Police force and the use of traditional methods in crime control in the society. It is apropos to reemphases that traditional/ local content implies traditional methods of crime control such as spirituality, local security apparatus (organized vigilante groups), oath taking and other traditional measures capable of controlling social violence in the society.

In the play-*The Hidden Treasure*, the playwright advocates for traditional methods (divination) in arresting criminals. The release of Eze Kohia from the hands of his kidnappers in the forest was possible through the Diviner's necromancy. As a way of spurring the Diviner into unraveling the whereabouts of Eze Omasi, Chief Chindah says "Chie! Ojukwu diobu, the god of the land. Show your powers. Let those hooligans be rendered powerless. Yes, let them Sleep! Sleep!! Sleep!!!" (82). Knowing that Deputy Eze Omai sponsored the kidnap of Eze Kohia, the Diviner got angry and yells at him "Good.

Tell the people where the Eze is; I conjure you, move, move, to the hidden place move I say, move move. (***Deputy Eze Omsi, apparently in trance begins to stager slowly to the jungle while the crowd follows behind him keeping a reasonable distance, chanting and hooting at him***)."

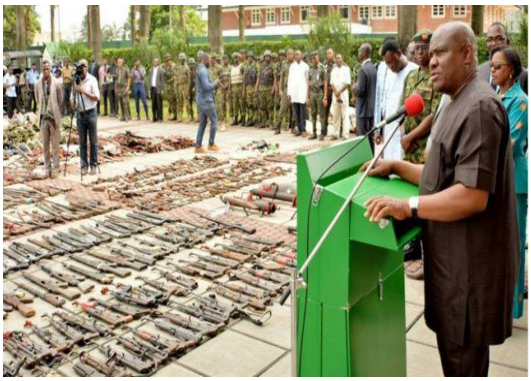
The spiritual potency of the medicine man is one of the traditional means of crime control in traditional society. In the traditional society, oath taking and invocation of deities (*juju*) to the criminals leaves them in check. Onwe & Eze posit that "generally, trial by ordeals involves oath taking, invocation of juju, the use of boiling palm oil, and the administration of traditional medicinal concoction in different forms which were usually taken either by drinking or rubbing on the body" (47).



A Diviner Places Repented Cultists on Oath

Corroborating the opinions of Onwe & Eze, Tade and Olaitan agree that:

> Traditional structures used include: traditional spiritualists who provide measured to reduce victimization; the family courts where adjudication takes place involving elders and family chiefs. Traditional extrajudicial measures involve the invocation of ancestral spirits at shrines (1).

Arms and Ammunitions Recovered from Cultist/ Kidnappers by the Military

Crimes committed in the traditional society may not be sophisticated like that which happens in the urban society. This is because, in the traditional society, "the fear of the ancestors/deities is the beginning of wisdom." In the mechanical society (rural areas) people conform to social order because of the belief system. In this society, the "gods" acts as the police. In this direction, Durkhein views religion as united system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things (things set apart and forbidden) beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community "(as cited in Ayuk *et al*, (62).

This paper advocates for collaboration between the traditional institutions (methods of crime control) and the Nigeria Police force in combating social violence in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria in general. Evidence in the play (*The Hidden Treasure*) under examination shows the need for synergy between traditional authorities and the Police force in crime control. While thanking Chief Owhor for his assistance in unraveling the criminals, the Diviner says:

> Thank you Owhor, the gods are not asleep. And now the Police.
> **An Official Police: (*Salutes*)** Yes Sir.
> **Diviner:** Do your work! Perform your social and judicial functions. Let the community be purge of corruption.
> ***(The official police invade the jungle; arrest the Fake police, Eze Kohia, now awake regains his freedom.***

Deputy Eze Omasi and the fake* police *are marched to the police station).

In the end, the criminals were taken to Court of law for adjudication. In his judgment, the Judge declares that:

> The accused persons are jointly standing trail on a 7 count charge of conspiracy to commit felony to wit: kidnapping and illegal possession of fire arms contrary to Section 516 of the criminal code of the Federal Republic, applicable in this state. The other counts of the charge are kidnapping of HRH EZE KOHIA contrary to Section 364 Subsection (2) of the aforesaid criminal code; obtaining money by false pretense contrary to Section 419 also of the same criminal code; impersonation as the Paramount Ruler of Kohia community and as Police officers contrary to Section 356 Subsection (1) of the same criminal code, assault occasioning harm of HRM EZE KOHIA contrary to Section 356 Subsection (1) of the criminal code, and illegal possession of fire arms contrary of Section 3 of the fire arms Act Cap. 146 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990 (*The Hidden…*, p. 86).

As the Court progresses, a youth leader enters the Court room with a bag containing money. Upon interrogation, he admits that he is the person that Deputy Eze Omasi gave the money to. He reveals:

> I am an agent of truth and vindication for the youths of Kohia and Omasi communities. This bag containing something which Eze Omasi himself asked me to give to his wife. On the grounds of conscience and the dignity of the youths, I kept the money safely waiting for this day (*The Hidden…*, p. 91).

The collaboration between the traditional institutions and Nigeria Police in the play—*The Hidden Treasure* enhance social order and adherence to rule of law. To this end, those found capable were prosecuted accordingly. The application of criminal justice system in the play was achieved through the instrumentality of traditional methods of crime control. Therefore, it is the expectation of this paper that traditional methods of crime control in the society be strengthened to police the prevalent social crimes in Rivers State and the Nigeria in general.

Revealing the causes of social crimes in the society, Ohia & Iloma contend that "The oil politics in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been a long while issue, while the kidnapping and hostage taking are the aftermath of oil politics" (237). These issues have contributed to economic crisis in the region, thus the need for collaboration with traditional institutions. The cooperation between these institutions will always help in minimizing crime in the state. While the uses of spiritual elements are essential; the local vigilante groups should be in cooperated in the fight against social crimes in the society. For the purpose of clarity, it is imperative to say that referring to the local vigilantes, as local, traditional/content used in crime control is not out of place. This is because the members are individuals who are indigenes of such locality as such cannot be referred to as foreigners. Some of them are drawn from masquerade groups, hunters association, fishermen/women amongst others. Again, this vigilante groups are often placed on oath not to derail from their responsibility of protecting lives and property of the people. It is also interesting to know that they are fortified spiritually against attacks from criminals. Commenting on the importance of vigilante groups in their paper, Obidiegwu & Elekwa assert that "Collaboration in this paper implies cooperative arrangement between the vigilante and the Police in order to minimize crime and protect lives and properties, collaboration requires platform for joint deliberation, decision making and action" (4).

In River State, the establishment of local vigilante groups by interested Local Government Areas has helped in checkmating the activities of criminal gangs, especially cultism and kidnapping. One of the famous local vigilante groups that collaborated with the Nigeria Police in fighting cultism in the state is the ONELG Security, Peace and Advisory Committee (OSPAC). Since the establishment of OSPAC in the Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State, other L.G.As such as Emohua, Obio/Akpor and Ikwerre amongst others have followed suit. Reacting to the importance of OSPAC vigilante groups, Ndah, in an open letter to Governor Wike, wrote:

> Limiting the OSPAC, the local security outfit fighting crime in Rivers State, has led to a surge in cult-related killings, kidnapping and armed robberies. Many of us can no longer feel safe going home or doing business in many parts of Rivers State. OSPAC gives residents a sense of security that has been lacking. Government should not restrict them to Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA alone, but allow them operate freely (*www.change.org*).



OSPAC Arrests a Criminal



OSPAC Leader, late Dr. Marwell Ahiakwo



Armed Cultists

The operation of OSPAC security in Rivers State has created relief to the inhabitants of some Local Government Areas in the state. This is sequel to the ruthless and drastic measures employed by the operatives in dealing with the criminal gangs in the state. With the collaboration of Nigeria Police force, OSPAC has been able to reduce the level of criminalities (cultism and kidnapping) in the state. This assertion is captured in the publication of *The Tide* newspaper thus:

> Following the recent return of peace to all the nooks and crannies of Rivers State where development thrives; many residents of the state were able to express their feelings to the Rivers State Government in collaboration with the Police, which resulted in the quelling of militancy, killings,

> kidnapping, armed robbery and cultism, among others…Those of us who live in places like Ogbogoro, Ozuoba and parts of Emohua can attest to the efficiency of the OSPAC vigilante group imported from Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area. (*www.thetidenewsonline.com*)

Recommendations:

Having critically interrogated the use of traditional/local contents in the fight against social crimes in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria in general with detailed focus on Henry Bell-Gam' *The Hidden Treasure*, the paper puts forward the following recommendations thus:

- **Socio-economic Empowerment of the Youths:** It is the kind recommendations of this paper that government and well-meaning individuals should be encouraged to empower the youths with sustainable economic skills and also integrate them into the governance of the state. This singular action will go a long way in removing them from the streets.
- **Placing on Oaths, the Youths and Public Office Holders (Politicians):** This paper elicits for placing the repented criminals on oath. As a way of de-radicalization, oath taking will go a long way in checkmating their conscience thus curbing social crimes in the society. Similarly, it is also the modest recommendation of this paper to encourage the use of oath taking during the inauguration of public office holders into various positions in the society. This condition will discourage them from sponsoring criminals to perpetuate crimes in the state.
- **Constant Synergy between Nigeria Police and Local Vigilante Groups:** The thrust of this paper anchors on the need for cordial relationships between the conventional securities agencies in combating crime in the state. The paper reveals the continuous collaboration between Nigeria Police and the local security vigilante groups as panacea in curbing social violence.
- **Constitutional Backing to Local Vigilante Groups:** The paper also advocates for legal empowerment of the operations of the local vigilante groups to avoid unnecessary confrontations with the civil society.
- **Recognition of Traditional Medicine Men/Women by Government:** It is important to respect and recognize the activities of traditional institutions and medicine men/women in the adjudication of justice in the society. There is no doubt to state that traditional/local methods of crime control have contributed to the peaceful coexistence and social-economic advancement of the society.

- **Welfare Package for Local Vigilante Groups:** The effort of the vigilantes should be recognized and financially compensated. They should be placed on monthly salary by the state government. Apart from the monthly salary, their medical/health conditions should be taken care of by the government.
- **Provision of Gadgets, Arms and Ammunitions:** The 21st century security watch demands sophisticated gadgets to combat crimes. This is why it is importance for the local vigilante groups to be empowered with modern day gadgets such as telephone system and vehicle amongst others. In the same vein, government should be encouraged to supply them with the required arms and ammunitions to combat the criminals.

Conclusion:

Crime is a social problem that deters progress in the society. In Rivers State, issues relating to cultism, armed robbery and kidnapping amongst others have contributed to socio-economic and security challenges in recent past. The Nigeria Police force and other conventional security agencies worked tirelessly to save lives and property of the citizen in the state, yet criminalities continued unabated. This seemly helpless situation has prompted the Government and other well-spirited individuals to sort for collaboration with traditional institutions to proffer alternative means of crime control. Among the traditional/local methods of crime control advocated for is the introduction of local security operatives, oath taking, invocation of deities, and divination amongst others. It is on the foregoing that the work interrogates the use of traditional/local contents in Henry Bell-Gam's *The Hidden Treasure* as mechanism for social control in the society. The paper agrees that collaboration between conventional security agencies and the traditional institutions will serve as panacea in policing social crimes in Rivers State of Nigeria.

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