Police Culture in Nigeria: A Comparative Perspective

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Police culture denotes the complex system of attitudes which defines the normative and behavioral world of the police. The existence of a working police culture has been documented in numerous studies of police forces in various countries (Bailey and Mendelson, 1968; Belson, 1975; Berkley, 1969; Chevigny, 1969; Drummond, 1976; Muir, 1977; Niederhoffer, 1967; Reiner, 1978; Reiss, 1971; Rubinstein, 1973; and Skolnick, 1966). Yet most of these studies have been done in Western nations, with only a few in Third World countries (Bailey, 1969; Clinard and Abbott, 1974). In order to assess the accuracy of the orthodox conceptions of the content and development of police culture, and specifically the concept of the symbolic assailant (Skolnick, p. 45) data on a sample of Nigerian police will be presented below.

Two questions are important here: Is the content of police culture universal—that is, does police work produce similar attitudes among its practitioners regardless of the environmental context? And, second, what other explanations for police culture, besides the nature of the work or the importation of prior experiences and attitudes, can and should one look for?

The Concept of a Police Culture

The content of police culture has been described from four perspectives although some disagreement exists concerning the details of each description. The four are as follows: 1) Police are thought to exhibit specific personality patterns, namely authoritarianism, cynicism, conventionality and forcefulness (Butler and Cochrane, 1977; Fleming, 1979; Hanewicz, 1978; Lefkowitz, 1975; Munro, 1976; Regoli, 1976; Rafky, 1975; Sheppard, et al. 1975; Tifft, 1974, 1975; Wilt and Bannon, 1976). 2) Police have a common set of role definitions of how best to perform their job, specifically that they are profes-

* Opinions and interpretations in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect positions of the Department of State.
sionals, good at what they do, and able to determine and deal with danger and crime effectively (Arcuri, 1976; Bennett, 1976; Cain, 1973; McCabe and Sutcliffe, 1978; Reiner, 1978; Rozelle and Baxter, 1975; Skolnick, 1966).

3) Police perceive their relations with the community as uncooperative, a confrontation with a hostile, and non-supportive public which rejects their work as it demands their services, thus leading to the closure of the organization against outside interference (Box and Russell, 1975; Denyer, Callender and Thompson, 1975; Dynes, Quantarelli and Ross, 1974; Lefkowitz, 1975; Robinson, 1978; Wright, 1976). And 4) Police see society as deteriorating, with moral standards and respect for authority eroding rapidly (Lefkowitz, 1975; Reiner, 1978).

The grounds for these beliefs is found either in the work experience itself or in prior socialization and educational experiences imported to the job. Some researchers conclude that the work experience model is correct (Bennett and Greenstein, 1975; Genz and Lester, 1976; Manning, 1974; Radzinowicz and King, 1977; Skolnick, 1966; Weiner, 1974); others support the importation model (Cross, 1977; Culbertson, 1975; Rokeach, Miller and Snyder, 1971); while others find more validity in a model combining these various factors (Dalley, 1975; Finckenauer, 1975; Hopper, 1977; Reiner, 1978). Yet the basic question, namely, is the content of police culture, derived mainly from studies done in Western societies, that is within a context of formally democratic politics, individualistic cultures and competitive economics, generalizable to other societies?—still needs more research before the secondary questions of source and development can be answered.

The evidence so far is inconclusive. Bailey's study of India describes a police culture generally similar to that found in an orthodox view (1969; also Rao, Reddy and Subrahmanyan in Reddy and Seshadri, 1972), yet his analysis of the police force in Japan fundamentally disagrees with descriptions of police community relations found for the U.S.A. or England (1976).

The data which follow describe and analyze the content and development of some aspects of police culture—perceptions of the police role, the state of police—community relations, ideological leanings, and notions of the symbolic assailant—in Nigeria, in an effort to bring another point of view to the debate.

Police in Nigeria

The police in Nigeria, like most police forces in Third World countries, is a creation of colonial rule and began its history and functions in the interests of British domination. The Nigeria Police Force emerged in 1930 through the merger of three essentially para-military groups—the Hausa Constabulary in Lagos, established in 1861, the Royal Niger Constabulary (initially a private security force of the Royal Niger Company) and the Oil Rivers Protectorate Force, the last two established in the late 19th century. Alongside the centrally controlled Police Force there grew up a system of locally controlled and organized police forces, built on existing policing traditions (e.g. palace guards