

MOB ACTION OR 'JUNGLE JUSTICE': A CONTEXTUAL SECURITY IMPERATIVE

ONONIWU OPARAH¹&CHARLES OKEKE OKOKO²

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,
EVANGEL UNIVERSITY,AKAEZE,

EBONYI STATE



noniwu.oparah@evangeluniversity.edu.ng¹&Charles.okeke.okoko@evangeluniversity.edu.ng²

Abstract

In situations of uncertainty, communities or their members and organizations are known to have devised means of protecting themselves against attacks, harm or from losses. Mob action or 'jungle justice' is made more imperative with the presence of non-people oriented army and police, bequeathed to African nations by colonialism. Although mob action has often been regarded as illegal, it has over the years served useful purposes in the social and political history of various communities. Mob actions are carried out without recourse to 'approved or constitutional security agencies', such as the army or police; and have occurred in response to the inactions of government, security agencies and the need for instant and fair justice. It has always been reactions to delays in the juridical system, corrupt and sharp practices; and perversion of justice.

Introduction

This type of paper, it must be stated from the outset, is non-specialist in the sense that it will not bother about legalities and illegalities. Inferences have been drawn from day-to-day happenstances in our polity. Perversions of justice and the ineptitude of the security agencies are common knowledge. The government at all levels of governance has not helped matters. More disheartening is that the poor, not just the masses, have been subjected to total disregard in the overall calculus of social relations. Efforts, when made, are geared towards the protection of the fewer-rich. Even the touted state police will still be for the protection of the rich at the state levels in further subjugation of political opponents and the masses. It is against this background that mob action or the so-called jungle justice is being posted as the best alternative to a failed security system. It could seem archaic, anarchic, illegal and illogical to advance mob action in a 21st century situation, suffice it to say that there is a need for an abruptly effective security system. It becomes necessary to define what is a mob action is. What comes to mind immediately the word 'mob' is mentioned, is a large and unruly crowd and are often regarded as irrational. A mob could be ordinary or organized people or groups who could be prompted to act in defense of their personal or group security, property, attack and losses. Often times, mob action could be against constituted authority. While mob action is generally construed as illegal, and could go out of hand, it is known to have yielded positive results, especially as it concerns the well-being of the masses who do not have access to justice. Because of the procedures in exercising mob action, often haphazardly implemented, it has become accepted as the oldest law practice from the inception of human societies. ¹

Defined in Encarta:

The law of the jungle...has been arranged for almost every kind of accident that may befall the jungle people, till now its code is as perfect as time and custom can make it – its applicability. ²

Furthermore, the jungle in our context would be a temporarily harsh environment, which is characterized by fierce competitiveness, or struggle for survival nexus the quality of justice pervading the social, economic and political spheres of human life. Thus, mob action could still be defined as doing something towards a goal to achieve fairness or reasonableness, and especially in the way people are treated or decisions are made. Concluding the definition of terms, mob action is thus an act by a group of persons, obviously outside the dictates or guidelines of the law, intended to achieve a purpose. It becomes applicable when people are no longer satisfied with the legally prescribed means of achieving fairness, especially by government. While it is difficult to draw a line, mob actions could be different from strike actions by organizations seeking redress from government, which actions are called out after series of deliberations have failed. But mob actions are often abrupt, although the remote causes would have been smoldering for a while. Generally speaking, mob actions are evidently chaotic, anarchic and rebellious.

Instances of Mob Actions

Before enumerating instances of mob actions, it will be pertinent to itemize what could be regarded as mob actions. It is a known fact that certain governments are more effective, more tyrannical, and more backward than others. Commentators have over the years tried to find out the reasons for these states of affairs. Some concluded that those who have provided effective governance have evolved appropriate political systems. There have been systems, such as democracy, theocracy, socialism and mobocracy,³ among others. Mobocracy is what this paper seeks to discuss. Still contending why some governments are more effective than others, it has been observed that some governments are not just more assertive than others, although it could be as a result of the resources at their disposal, but have created organs that operate outside “the national or state modus operandi” – outside the constitution and legality. Thus, the incessancy of invasions in spite of international conventions, extra-judicial killings in spite of touted principles of sanctity of human life, and arrests. The government of any state, must therefore, condone some degrees of illegality to be effective; and so must the people. This is a form of social contract since it is binding on government to protect its people and the people to also protect themselves from tyrannical tendencies. A catalogue of possible examples of mob actions are solidarity marches in support of an action that the people think would be beneficial; or even against the government or proponents of it. Marches, therefore, could be for or against an act of constituted authority or those who have taken it upon themselves to ride-rough-shod of the people or others. In failed security state, communities or groups are known to have evolved security systems that are homegrown and referred to as vigilantes. They are often traditionally accoutremented with charms for invincibility alongside modernly armed police/army officials. These traditionally ambiguous systems, such as the Bakassi Vigilante, are known to have inspired fear into criminals. They have become acceptable to the people because of the immediacy of the administration of justice; and are backed by oracular deities, which are media the people are used to. A similar Cross River import into the Cross River Igbo area is the “Akpam”, a spiritualist agency which remained effective for the period the proprietors, who were usually trained indigenes, had not learned to circumvent its taboos.⁴ Again, it is held in some quarters that the efficacy of the Akpam Deity, for instance, was so effective because the people accepted it. While the reason for this opinion has not been explicated, the efficiency of the deity in settling wrongs was applauded. In fact, its efficacy regarding accuracy was never in doubt. Yet, the Akpam was only efficient within an area where its installation, usually with bags of pepper and other ingredients non-initiates could not be privy. Whenever the Akpam spotted a criminal, it behaved on the

citizenry to enforce the demands made. But the most interesting thing about this mob-inflicted deity is its non-secrecy mode of revelations. It immediately alerted its priests who in turn notified the offender or perpetrator of crime.

Another trade-social control mechanism is the “IbuUro”. This was contrived in pre-colonial times to publicly expose criminals who were forced to dance round the village naked to derogatory songs delivered with musical accompaniments. If the offender ever repeated the crime, installmental excommunication was, and is still, applied. This included such measures as preventing the criminal from attending the same market as other members of the village or the fetching of water from the village streams. Total expulsion from the village were inflicted for repeated criminal activities. In recent times, people have resorted to legal proceedings, yet to no avail, since no law court can enforce anyone from buying or selling to such excommunicated persons.⁵

Some mob actions have assumed terrorist dimensions to adopt a lesser acrid labeling, some militancy. Communities, such as those in the Niger Delta of Southern Nigeria, have complained over the years of being shortchanged in the affairs of the Nigerian state, especially in the handling or sharing of the proceeds from the “oil” resource. This is in addition to the environmental degradation, which has affected its natural pre-occupations of farming, logging and fishing. They have since occasionally forced government into making concessions, by general consensus, to ameliorate their suffering and enhance their well-being. In worst-case scenarios, these agitations have resulted to outright sessions or terrorism by the aggrieved persons, groups or communities. Metahistorically, mob actions have been modernized. There have been applied legal approaches by communities through the issue of ultimatum, communiqués and the institutionalization of national conferences. Even when it is the government that convenes a national conference, it is usually at the insistence of the populace who want a fair deal in a federalist structure such as Nigeria. Thus, a national conference is a mob action of sorts. It is shunning of the crudities of the jungle but retains its vehemence of purpose. While itemizing events that could pass for mob action, it is difficult to draw a line between what is legal and illegal. Some illegal governments, for instance when they came to power through coups d'etat or rigged themselves into power, are known to enjoy the support of the citizenry. In another explanation, such governments have enough money with which they bought over the citizenry, who in this case constitute our mob. We are premised to insist that any acts that do not conform to the principles in the constitution are illegalities. Thus, those that carry them out constitute our mob. When a community, therefore, declares for another political party, where it hopes to obtain a fairer deal, it is a mob action.

As mentioned earlier, it is almost impossible to draw a line between strikes called out by organized labour and mob action. It must be pointed out that all along, attempts have been made to defrock the ugly garb of “mob action” and insist that the so-called mob action as indicative of chaos has had positive sides to it. It will again be restating the obvious if all acts that do not fall within the gambit of the law as mob actions; and the extent or degree of successes and damages, which are basically collateral, would imply the application of jungle justice. Regarding strike actions called out by labour, such as the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), which are intended to achieve a better deal nexus welfare, have often been successful because the labour leaders have always been able to communicate their grievances or goals to the masses.⁶ Since it is a potent means of achieving such ends, the masses, which obviously will be seen as working against government and for labour who are also fighting for the masses, are the mob. Throughout history, in both capitalist and socialist

communities, governments have been made to create better states of affairs through the arm-twisting of the mob. Thus, mob action. Cross carpeting of groups to other political parties, as mentioned before, is a form of mob action. This was illustrated in the 2011 general elections in Southeastern Nigeria, when the electorate decided to vote out IkediOhakim of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in preference to Rochas Okorochoa of the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). No matter the approach, it was indeed a mass movement, a mob action. It is imperative that when these actions are commenced with, the issue of legality or otherwise, is often neglected or not thought about. Even when mob action takes place under the label of demonstration, peaceful march or protest, it is worn a legal garb by asking out the law enforcement agents to chaperone such. Furthermore, governments have been known to instigate mob. Any unruliness orchestrated by two persons constitutes a mob action. Thus, when government instigates a larger number of members of the legislature to impeach a speaker or governor, a mob action would have taken place. Could this then be described as legal mob action? Legal or not, the end justifies the means. While corruption remained a non-issue in Yobe state, he became impeached when he was considered to have made anti-state statements regarding the Boko Haram being better armed than the Nigerian Army. Whichever way, the greater number of members of the Yobe State's House of Assembly did a mob action to satisfy either a bottled up desire or danced to the song of a master. In the religious sphere, when it is perceived that the avatar to which the supplications are directed is not promptly attending to payers, there have been thought out procedures to induce action. Religious bodies are known to have embarked on nationwide crusades, which are often initiated through fasting by participants. It is hoped that God would answer prayers after much mortification of the body and spirit. This call out to prayer is a mob action. It is not peculiar to Christians alone, but also to traditionalists and Muslims. Further instances of mob actions are exemplified by the activities of the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) and Ijaw National Congress (INC); the Pogrom of 1966 during which Easterners, especially the Igbo were murdered in great numbers; the religious riots in Northern Nigeria; the Boko Haram sect; and the "Return our girls campaigns" of abducted girls from Chibok in northeast Nigeria.⁷

It will be anachronistic attempting to isolate events that could be taken as constituting mob actions. This is because since the departure of the British and their concomitant legacy of disunity, all acts of governance and relationship have been group-based, ethnic-based and dichotomy-oriented. These in turn have elicited cutthroat competitions, which would have benefited Nigeria in a properly worked out mode of coexistence. It is still the contention here that attempts at delineating a coexistence formulae are ill-motivated in the sense that it is as a result of particular groups wanting fairer deals. Even when the British concocted nations out of the many ethnic nationalities of Africa, it hoped to reap maximum colonial dividends without much thought about what would happen to her colonial estates after departure.

Mob actions could be elicited by all correlates in human existence, such as in the social, economic and political spheres. As mentioned earlier, Nigeria, for instance, is a hastily federated nation, which the nationalists accepted as a necessary evil, so long as the British would leave. Nigeria has since been a country where pretence reigns supreme. There are so many pretences in contention here, such as pretence to unity, pretence to federalism and pretence to a Nigeria. The most worrisome pretence is the pretence to accountability. OgagaIfowodo, in response has called for an end to pretence and declare Nigeria a unitary state. In his words:

We must erase the words federal, federation and federalism out of the 1999 or any new constitution and joyfully declare Nigeria a unitary state.⁸

The above demand has, however, been made by Ifowodo because he still pretends that there will be a Nigeria: Downright patriotism. The state of the Nigerian nation is aptly captured in Wole Soyinka's "A Ance of the Forest". The luxuriant jungles planted by the British reverberated even during their tenure. There were so many dances in the forest, such as that of the Egba women when they rose in protest against the colonially imposed Alake; and the Aba (inclusive of all the women of the Old Bende, Aba, Owerri to as far as the Calabar provinces) Women's Riot of 1929 over a purported bid to impose taxation on women.⁹ It must be recalled that this paper only seeks to instance mob action as a basic alternative to ask for redress, curb government's insensitivity and ineptitude; and cause immediate responses to assuage the people's desires. Mob actions which have metamorphosed from jungle justice to other labels, such as peaceful marches, demonstrations, militancy, secessions, rebellions and terrorism, have come to stay so long as peoples of varied creed coexist on unequal terms in a particular niche. Thus, the Easterners queried their ill-treatment in a Nigeria nation; the Northerners reacted against the "Unification Decree 34" of Aguiyi Ironsi and the Igbo-tagged coup d'etat of Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu to unleash a pogrom which left so many Easterners dead;¹⁰ and the peoples of the Niger Delta regretted the state of their environment and the improper return on investment, tagged the "resource curse" and evolved a militancy, among others.¹¹ The litany could be long. These have been mob actions, some of which have become so organized that government has labeled them terrorist and militant groups.

Conclusion

From the definition of terms to itemizing what could be regarded as mob actions, this paper has inferred that mob actions, in spite of their colourations or labels, have come to stay. On the security front, shun of abuses by the political elite, mob actions should be imbued with more legality so that it would be resorted to more frequently to settle issues. In fact, politicians are known to 'cow down' on an entire community of peoples, who in turn have become docile by poverty. This is even made more urgent as a result of the selective policing by government. For instance, the World Economic Forum hosted by Nigeria, saw Abuja being adequately policed while bombs exploded in various parts of Nigeria.

Notes/References

1. "Jungle Justice", Encarta Dictionary, 2009.
2. Encarta Dictionary.
3. Encarta Dictionary.
4. The Abam of the Cross River Igbo imported the Akpam deity in the early 1980s to resolve cases and identify criminals and peoples of bad intent, which the Western legal system could not handle.
5. Charles Okoko, "The Abam and Her Aro Neighbours", B. A. Long Essay, Department of History, School of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt, June 1983.
6. Charles Okoko, "The Labour Movement in Nigeria", Ph. D seminar paper, Department of History and International Relations, Abia State University, Uturu, 2013.
7. E. N. Ota and Charles Okoko, "Nigeria's Security Challenges and the Imperatives of Collaborative Networking among Security Agencies" in Ojong Echum Tangban and Chukwuma C. Osakwe (eds.), *Perspectives in African Historical Studies, Essays in Honour of Professor Chinedu Nwafor Ubah*, 2014
8. Ogaga Ifowodo, "So Many Pretences", Vanguard, Wednesday, July 23, 2014, p. 19.
9. Chiedozi Atonwu, "The Old Bende Divisions" Department of History and International Relations, Abia State University, Uturu, Ph. D Thesis, 2014.
10. Federick Forsyth, Emeka, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1982.
11. Charles Okonji, "IYC tackles Confab delegates over resource control", Daily Newswatch, Wednesday, May 21, 2014, p. 18; and Fred Oghenesivbe, "Delta 2015: Need for equity, good conscience, democratic principles: Daily Newswatch, Wednesday May 21, 2014, p. 30.