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Police-citizen interactions in Nigeria: the 'ordinary' aspects

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Police-citizen interactions in Nigeria: the 'ordinary' aspects

Certain types of police actions are beginning to represent 'the ordinary' – many of which seem to be simply too commonplace to capture the attention of researchers. Based on an ethnographic experiment conducted over the course of 10 months in Nigeria, this article contributes to existing literature by redirecting attention to what is termed here as 'the ordinary' aspects of law enforcement. These ordinaries include verbal exchanges, the use of police slang and typification, and how police officers develop shorthand characterisations when they encounter the 'bastards' and the 'witches'. Further included are other micro-elements such as spitting patterns and mockeries, which seem to be central to the negative interactions and confrontations that dominate everyday policing in Nigeria, and the role played by boredom, humour, and humiliation. Previous studies have rarely examined these aspects and perceive them as insignificant. However, this article demonstrates the significance of these critical ordinaries and elucidates how they damage the legitimacy of the police organisation in Nigeria. As a contribution, this article argues that without sufficient attention to 'the ordinary' aspects of law enforcement, the crises of police brutality and negative interactions may not be amended.

Keywords: Police, Nigeria, Ordinary, Interactions, Ethnography

Introduction

The word 'ordinary' is an important term in this study, not just because it is indicative of the routine or day-to-day actions of the police, but also because of how ordinary actions in everyday interactions between the police and citizens seem to be highly significant. Previous studies on the interactions between the police and citizens in Nigeria generally focused on the traditional challenges facing the organisation in terms of their militaristic nature, deviance from the rule of law, police brutality, and everyday exploitation of the Nigerian public (Hill 2012; Igwe 2014; Ikuteyijo & Rotimi 2014; Arisukwu & Okunola 2013; Okesola & Mudaire 2013).

However, these studies failed to capture and analyse the full significance of what occurs when the police and citizens interact. Simply put, no study in Nigeria has directly analysed how the questions of negative interactions and those generated by ordinary interactional logics play out in everyday street engagements. However, it is important to recognise that these areas have recently begun to receive considerable attention, particularly in Europe, where studies argue that in order to comprehensively understand the factors fuelling negative interactions between the police and citizens, direct focus is required on the small troubles, the often fleeting moments of upset, the routine disruptions that arise during street engagements, and how they lead to extraordinary results and changes in life circumstances (Fassin 2013; Ilan 2016). Similar ideas are also incorporated in Blumer's (1969) notion of 'symbolic interactionism', which explains the mechanism of role-taking, explains how meanings are formed through the process of interactions, and clarifies how, in turn, interaction shapes human experiences.

Based on an ethnographic study of a wider Ph.D. research project conducted over the course of ten months in the pseudonymised town of Kuto in the south-western region of Nigeria in 2015-2016, this paper steers away from stereotypes that have dominated previous scholarship in Nigeria. It refrains from focusing on the organisational challenges undermining police-citizen interactions, and instead scrutinises the ordinary actions that occur when the police and citizens interact, namely, the role of humour, humiliation, boredom, etc. in the practice of law enforcement. This study was submitted for ethical approval at a London university and then approved for commencement. Access was granted for this study based on previous research conducted in the police organisation by the author, where contacts had been established with some police chiefs. During the fieldwork, ethnographic observations were conducted with a patrol team. This enabled the author to observe police patrol day time activities. The analysis in this paper focuses mostly on this patrol team and their engagements

with the public. Restrictions imposed by the university prevented the author from participating in night patrols.

It is important to note that due to the ethnographic nature of the study, aspects of this work will be deploying the first person singular 'I' to narrate the findings, as the author's inclusion contributes to the findings. This strategy has been used almost exclusively by ethnographers (see Faull 2017; Goffman 2014; Fassin 2013; Hulst 2013; McDonald 1999) in their research studies. An iterative-inductive and deductive approach was adopted to analyse the data. This approach is consistent with Creswell's (2012) description of the grounded theory method, i.e. a process that aims to explain themes within a theoretical framework by ensuring the themes are effectively linked to the data.

In order to protect the identity of the participants, names and locations have been pseudonymised in this study. I observed situations en-route and conducted interviews with patrol officers whilst on the road. Additionally, I observed police engagements with the public during stop-and-search patrols, dispute settling and everyday policing. The crew consists of an inspector, two sergeants and one corporal. While on the road, notes of conversation and observations with staff were recorded in a notebook and using a mobile phone notes function. It has been observed in other studies that writing or videotaping in a research process when people are talking sometimes makes people defensive, or even causes them to shut down completely (Fassin 2013). Therefore, in order to avoid being obtrusive, I chose not to conduct any type of formal interview with the officers, and instead engaged them in informal conversations during the long hours spent patrolling the streets while engaging with the members of the public.

Divided into four inter-linked sections, the first section of this article explores relevant literature in an attempt to identify the gap in the debate. The second section introduces the concept of 'the ordinary' and the significance of the ordinary in the everyday encounters of the

police and citizens. In the third section, attention is drawn to the typologies and implications of those ordinaries, and in the final section, this article combines the arguments into a conclusion by highlighting the implication of the ordinaries in contemporary police studies and practices. It indicates the areas requiring change and provides guidelines for police practitioners, noting that without adequate attention to ‘the ordinary’ aspects of law enforcement, the crises of police brutality and negative interactions may not be resolved.

Understanding police-citizen interactions

Any attempt to understand the state of affairs of policing anywhere must commence with an assessment of the kind of interaction that exists between the police and citizens. Analysing these interactions helps provide meaningful insights into not only the processes and operations of community policing, but also the nexus between two opposing classed cultures (Ilan 2016). Notably, a large body of research has consistently demonstrated various factors shaping police-citizen interactions. For instance, some studies claim that certain types of police cultures undermine police-citizen interactions (Skolnick 1966; Bordua & Reiss 1966). These studies described police culture using terms such as sceptical, cynical, dictatorial, macho, monolithic, suspicious, and highly resistant to change. Previous studies have also drawn attention to the culture of police moralism in terms of their perspective of a particular mission (Herbert 1996; Skolnick 1966). Additionally, they draw attention to how the police use acute moral characterisation to justify their actions (Manning 1978) and how cynicism and solidarity are believed to reinforce the ‘we versus them’ mentality as well as an attitude of suspiciousness towards members of the public (Manning 1978; Reiner 2010). From these findings, Reiner (2010) concluded that this mentality is believed to be instigated by the idea that society is comprised of people who are opposed to their values as well as individuals who conspire against them and disrespect their occupation. In the Nigerian context, police culture has been

linked to similar ideologies in the West, many of which reinforce experiences of police brutality, violence, arbitrary killings, affronts, confrontations, and everyday conflict (Alemika & Chukwuma 2000; Ikuteyijo & Rotimi 2014). Other studies link these experiences of negative interactions to other factors such as the post-military junta mentality of the police institution, the centralised nature of the police force, weak oversight structures, and the politicised nature of the police institution (Ikuteyijo & Rotimi 2014; Johnson 2013; Arisukwu & Okunola 2013; Okesola & Mudaire 2013). Over the years, a large body of research conducted mostly in developed western societies has demonstrated the role of effective procedural justice in police-citizen interactions, arguing that there is a strong relationship between procedural justice and police legitimacy, and that negative police interactions such as rude and impolite behaviour may reduce public confidence in the police (Akinlabi 2017; Tyler & Wakslak 2004; Bottoms & Tankebe 2012). Within the Nigerian context, Akinlabi's (2017) important research on the effect of procedural justice on young people in Nigeria found that procedural fairness is important in sustaining effective policing and that while procedural fairness cannot be over-emphasised, it may be beneficial in remedying the broken relationship between the police and citizens (Akinlabi 2017: 433).

In particular, a stream of research has demonstrated that corruption undermines police legitimacy and, in turn, police-citizen interaction (Goldstein 1975; Punch 2009; Newburn 1999). Economic constraints, the subculture, and socialisation are highlighted as critical factors in negative interactions in Punch's (2009) analysis of police corruption. Similarly, many other scholars (Reiss, 1971; Roebuck & Barker, 1974) contended that corruption persists within all police departments and is capable of fuelling negative interactions with the public. Additionally, it has been argued in the Nigerian context that the institutionalised culture of corruption, the routine extortion of motorists, and other forms of bribery and corruption in police stations are critical issues fuelling disconnections that lead to confrontation and violence

on a daily basis (Akinlabi 2017; Agbiboa 2015; Ikuteyijo & Rotimi 2014; Johnson 2013; Arisukwu & Okunola 2013). In his ethnographic study of corrupt policing and related abuses in Nigeria, Agbiboa (2015) elucidates the crises of police abuse by noting that such crises can be traced back to socio-historical conditions rather than managerial problems. Agbiboa (2015) places these conditions squarely within the crises of colonialism and the history of military regime, all of which have negatively affected the perception of the police.

Other studies claim that these experiences of corruption in Nigeria cannot be explained in isolation from the various situations of under-funding and deplorable infrastructures – where temptations to engage in corruption are sometimes justified by police officers and where poverty is particularly acute (Umar & Bappi 2014; Obaro 2014).

Some studies also claim that both the traditional policing styles (many of which were negatively affected by histories of colonial social control) as well as the experiences of protracted military dictatorship in the country have damaged police-citizen interactions in Nigeria (Obaro 2014; Rotimi & Ikuteyijo 2012). This aspect is quite central to Hills' (2008) study where she argues that the militaristic model has grossly altered police operations to where police training now mirrors the military style, where police personnel are forced to undertake military operations, and where the police are struggling to change 'a force' into 'a service'. This argument is in line with Okesola and Mudaire's (2013) views that militaristic orientations are still extremely visible in the attributes of police officers in current times, particularly since the wanton killing of innocent Nigerians has been on the rise since 2018 (Ogbette et al. 2018). They add that the police organisation is at a stage where their brutal nature continues to repel people. Other studies claim that negative interactions can be linked to factors such as inadequate training in terms of educating officers about their actions (Karimu 2015), the centralised nature of the police force (Agwanwo 2014), and the politicised nature of the police institution (Ikuteyijo & Rotimi 2014). In Western policing studies, there is a long tradition of

racial profiling research on the significant influence of race and pre-conceived notions when the police interact with citizens (Rawls 2000; Barlow & Barlow 2000). For example, in America, these studies found that ethnic minorities are more likely to be arrested and mistreated by police than their white counterparts. In the Nigerian context, scholars claim that class and gender dynamics play a critical role in the outcome of negative interactions between the police and citizens (Johnson 2013; Igwe 2014).

While the various studies mentioned above have undoubtedly contributed to the issues undermining police-citizen interaction, they have consistently failed to capture and analyse the full significance of what occurs when the police and citizens interact. Crucially, these studies have been unable to analyse sufficiently the interactional dynamics between the police and citizens and they do not elucidate how the complexities of the ordinary play out in everyday street engagements. In their recent study, Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) also highlighted this point and suggested that such research be conducted. Therefore, as a contribution to the existing scholarship, this article introduces what is considered here as ‘the ordinary’ aspects of law enforcement. The central argument is that for a deeper understanding of the factors fuelling negative interactions between the police and citizens, direct focus is needed on the ‘ordinary’ acts of the police during encounters (e.g. name calling, gesticulation, spitting patterns, the role of boredom, humiliation, etc.). Focus is also required on how ordinary routine confrontations lead to extra-ordinary results and changes in life circumstances.

Understanding ‘the ordinary’ in police-citizen interactions

The nature of interactions between the police and citizens can transition from civil to volatile. They can frequently devolve from professional interactions to verbal confrontations. These instances are primarily influenced by the ordinary actions shaping those interactions, not just

the comments and demeanour of the other. The concept of ‘the ordinary’ in this article can be traced back to the earliest works of Wittgenstein’s philosophical investigation of language, where he considered the ordinary to be the context in which words have deeper meaning – not just the idea conveyed by the context, but its essence. This idea became central to many works on the 21st century philosophy of language – particularly in Rosen’s (2002) analysis of ‘the elusiveness of the ordinary’, which proposes that ‘the programme of philosophy is to go beyond ordinary language, to show how the ordinary develops into the extraordinary, not how the extraordinary collapses into the ordinary’ (Rosen 2002: 203). In both contexts, the concept of the ordinary seems to be rooted in the fact that interactions require repeated attention to the most ordinary objects and events to scrutinise their essence and reality. By using this approach, this paper conceptualises the ordinary aspects of law enforcement as actions that are frequent, common, and sometimes hidden within the culture of the police, yet significant in the everyday interactional dynamics between the police and the public. It is important to recognise at this point that the early research works of Van-Mannem (1988) and Reiss (1971) in America opened the pathway for recognising the role of ordinary actions and experiences in interactions between the police and citizens. However, recent studies such as those by Fassin (2013) and Ilan (2016) have extended this scope by providing new and important findings regarding the implication of the ordinary in police–citizen interactions, which I shall now explore.

A new stream of research, particularly in Europe, argues that for a deeper understanding of the issues fuelling negative interactions between the police and citizens, we need to explore beyond the broad organisational challenges undermining police-citizen interactions, scrutinise the actions of the police, and account for each of them in their full complexity (Ilan 2016; Fassin 2013). For instance, the ground-breaking work of French anthropologist Dider Fassin (2013), an ethnographic study of urban policing in France, provides new and improved understanding of how we perceive the interactional dynamics between the police and citizens

through an ethnographic exploration of the French police. While focusing on the ‘minor’ actions and interplay, Fassin effectively triggers new thinking by deconstructing the role of anger and affect and emotions. Fassin (2013) further explores how humiliation and laughter appear to be central to the hatred and disdain that exist between the police and the public, and how name-calling and ordinary slang appear to function as a barometer through which social groups are classed – in effect reducing public confidence. Fassin proposes that although the moment of interaction between the police and citizens is often linked to a range of deeper factors, a comprehensive and careful examination of those factors is required, with attention paid to ‘the ordinary’ interplays as well as the simultaneous occurrences when the parties come into contact. This aspect was also a critical point of attention in Ilan’s (2016) study of the Irish police in what he termed ‘the specificities’ of police-citizen interactions. In the study, Ilan determined how ‘power and inequality’ become entangled with the process of meaning-making, including the frustration and disdain that come to shape the negative interactions between young disadvantaged urban men and police officers in the Irish system. Through rigorous analysis, Ilan (2016) maintains that it is important to reflect on and rethink how we understand modern police operations – particularly by paying attention to the occurrences in the inner world of the police, their interactional dynamics with the public, and how police culture modifies itself – given its potential to make or mar operational results. In the Nigerian context, although Agbibo’s (2015) ethnographic study provided details of everyday police-citizen engagements, it did not comprehensively analyse the ordinary interactions that ensue when the police and citizens come into contact, and most importantly, the role of those ordinaries. Agbibo’s study concentrates largely on the various forms of corruption and abusive policing in everyday Nigeria, and links these crises to certain socio-historical conditions of colonialism and experiences of past military rule in Nigeria. However, as a contribution, the current study will attempt to analyse further the moments of interactions between the police

and citizens in Nigeria. It does this by providing a comprehensive analysis of the deeper meaning of actions during interactions, the essence of those actions, and their implications for the practice of law enforcement. While these studies have been conducted in the Irish and French systems, the present study will attempt to provide the Nigerian narrative in an attempt to provide further insight into the broader implication of negative policing practices in Nigeria. It is important to recognise that while these ordinary aspects seem to be simply too commonplace to capture the attention of researchers, they provide access to the police officers' candid perception of their clients (citizens), they explain how police officers experience their own work, and they explain how police officers respond to reform programs. In addition, the types of findings from this study are far richer in ethnographic terms than interviews conducted in police stations or offices because it is the insignificant that has the greatest significance when ordinary experiences transcend into extra-ordinary actions. The findings of this study are provided below as anecdotes or brief accounts of situations.

Police slang and typification

The problems to be considered here are some of the circumstances under which police officers evaluate citizens, the terminologies used within their inner circle to distinguish the different personalities and behaviours of citizens, and the consequences of using such terminologies. These terminologies are conceptualised here as police slang. Here, we come to understand how police slangs and labels seem to fuel the frustration and disdain as well as the negative interactions between the police and citizens in Nigeria. Generally, scholars working on police culture draw attention to various adaptations and typifications in police culture. For instance, observations of the police in 'Union City' provided Van-Maanen (1978) insight into the ubiquitous usage of the term 'asshole' – a category police reserved for any who refused to accede to officer prescriptions. In France, Fassin (2013) highlighted the use of the term

‘Gippoes’ – a type of racist slang used by the police to refer to immigrants. In Ireland, Ilan (2016) highlighted the use of the term ‘Scumbags’, a categorisation that explains the derogatory perception the police have of citizens. This category includes ‘punk, idiot, knucklehead, or terrorists’ terms found in Herbert’s (1996) study of the ‘bad guys’. Likewise, in Nigeria, this study found that police officers tend to place anyone they encounter into three categories: the bastards, the big fish, and the pigs and witches. This labelling process not only functions as a technique used to categorise people into those who deserve to be respected and those who are worthless in society, but also reveals how police officers view their own worth and how they define their task and role. More importantly, they provide insight into how police officers continuously seek respect and demonstrate superiority on the street, particularly when patrol officers come to believe that their occupation is not respected by the public. In this situation, the slightest attempt to speak in even ordinary English is considered an attempt to challenge their intelligence, which often leads to confrontation and violence. A detailed analysis of ‘the bastards’ and ‘the big fish’ is presented below – drawing attention to the case of a morally inclined pastor and the case of a wealthy university student.

The bastards

The term ‘bastard’ in the practice of law enforcement refers not just to a person born of parents who are not married to each other, but also elites who challenge the authority of the police during stop-and-search patrols and constantly intimidate them with their use of ‘big vocabulary’. In Nigeria, patrols are usually undertaken by patrol officers who are allocated to different beats to enable them to be familiarised with citizens and engage with them. Due to this arrangement, the most common type of interaction occurs during stop-and-search routines. This was the most common means employed by police officers to initiate contact with the public, regardless of whether a crime was committed. However, in some cases, the motive of

such routine checks as evidenced in some studies is largely (a) to enable other transactions with motorists in order to extort money (b) to find new ways of reinstating authority (c) an attempt to kill boredom, (See also; Agbibo 2015). Similar to police officers worldwide, police officers in Nigeria also stop cars based on certain aspects such as the appearance and composure of the driver and their response when they are stopped (rude drivers always get in trouble with the police). When checks were carried out on the streets, young people, mostly from working-class backgrounds, always kept a low profile in order not to be labelled a ‘yahoo boy’ (fraudster). They only spoke when asked a question and did not react to the abusive comments and aggressive or humiliating treatments they were sometimes subjected to by the police. Instead, they presented their papers and submitted to every command. Accustomed to these repeated abuses and knowing quite well what would happen if they protested, they appeared silent and expressionless – often waiting for the unpleasant moment to pass, for the only way to avoid losing face in these confrontations was to avoid entering into any transaction with the police. Therefore, they did not risk ‘getting smart’ with the officers who sometimes wanted nothing but a bribe. Of course, some citizens questioned the officers, asking why they should pay a bribe for a crime that had not been committed. However, challenging the police is like challenging the ‘gods’; anyone who dared to challenge the police directly or indirectly, either by refusing to pay a bribe at checkpoints or by threatening to take their case up to a higher authority would be immediately subjected to various punishments. Such punishments include, motorists being ordered to frog-jump if they are unable to pay bribes, being beaten, name callings, and public shaming.

In a scenario that I encountered a few months into my fieldwork, a roadblock had been erected by officers for a stop-and-search routine. A man in his late 50s had been stopped and the officers used the usual warm greeting, ‘Hello, anything for the boys?’ The man harshly replied, ‘I have nothing for you’. With such a hostile tone of voice, the man was immediately

perceived as being aggressive and rude, even though the police officers were initially friendly. He was immediately asked to park properly and get his vehicle's documents ready for inspection. The man challenged the officers by asking why he should obey since he had done nothing wrong. He engaged with them not in the local dialect, but using grammatical terminologies that would confuse the officer, which further angered them. Having delayed him for about 15 minutes, one of the officers approached the man saying, 'Provide all the necessary documents relating to this vehicle and identify yourself at once'. It was at this point that the man understood that the reason for their hostility was his manner of 'using big grammars'. Realising that any further attempt to speak in an 'inappropriate' way would lead to a dire situation, he presented all his documents and further angered the police officers by saying, 'I am an ordained pastor, and by my profession, we are not allowed by the Bible to give bribes'. Although the police officers had not formerly asked for any bribe, the pastor had assumed that he had been stopped only because they wanted a bribe. The officer smiled sarcastically and replied, 'Did any of us ask you for a bribe? Answer me; who asked you for a bribe? Fucking bastard!' Looking angry, the man quietly replied, 'I am not a bastard', as he entered his car and sat there, waiting for his verdict. Reporting the case to the inspector, the officer said, 'Boss, that man in that car is a very rude bastard; did you hear how he was speaking English? His vehicle particulars are valid and complete, but he must not go scot-free. What should we do?' 'Just delay him for 30 minutes and let him go away with his troubles', he replied as they both giggled. The inspector's judgment was very lenient that day, maybe because I was present.

The usage of such profanity helps to explain how ordinary language and the manner of speaking can damage relationships, public trust, and confidence in the police institution. Of course, this scenario did not involve any form of physical brutality. However, it involved a type of mental brutality designed to punish the man psychologically and diminish his elitist status using different profanities. Cain (1971) describes three main typologies of police responses

when their authority is questioned by a citizen. (1) A police officer may attack the individual physically, (2) he may decide to swallow his pride and overlook the situation, or (3) he may fabricate an excuse to arrest the individual. While none of these typologies can be disproved, they do not comprehensively capture the humiliating practices these police officers subject their clients to in Nigeria. A fourth typology can therefore be added to these typologies, namely, the mechanism through which humiliation was adopted as a tool to ‘teach a lesson’. Here, the police demonstrated their authority with varying degrees of verbal abuse and threats, while the pastor’s mode of communication, coupled with his attitude, continued to infuriate the police officers. While the pastor’s refusal to bribe the officers was considered an affront, the officers were more annoyed by how the pastor spoke to them using ‘big vocabularies’ – something they perceived as a deliberate attempt to demean their status and worth based on their low level of education. This finding corresponds with Agbiboa’s (2015: 114) recent analysis of corrupt policing and related abuses in everyday Nigeria, where he argues that ‘ordinary Nigerians driving or commuting on the country’s roadways, including those buying or selling at markets, are routinely subjected to police extortion and abuses’. Crucially, Ibrahim (2016) links these everyday abuses to the low educational standards of Nigerian police officers. In the study, Ibrahim maintains that ‘the low educational level of some recruits is baffling’, explaining that ‘it is difficult for a mere illiterate to perform duties that need concrete intelligence’. It will also be difficult for a ‘mere illiterate’ to grasp and analyse difficult situations (Ibrahim 2016: 37).

In this present study, the recurring complaints of the police about citizens were constructed based on the understanding that their occupation is not respected by the public and that their work is often referred to as the job of ‘mere thugs’, which is why citizens disrespect them. These experiences are shaped by relationships of competition where one party (the police) considers the other (the public) as ‘disrespectful and pompous’, while the public considers the police as bullies unworthy of their respect. I once overheard an officer saying to

his colleague that people did not respect them until they used force. He said, 'Unless you deal with them, these guys won't respect you'. In response, his colleague agreed by stating, 'You can't treat me like shit and expect me to be quiet; I'll deal with you seriously'. This statement highlights the power relation between the police and citizens, and is indicative of what appears to be the low self-esteem of policing actors, which causes them to become violent and punish anyone attempting to ridicule them or challenge their actions on the streets. As Van-Mannen (1978) concludes in his famous study of the 'Assholes', a psychiatrist diagnosing a patient is similar to the police observing the character and actions of a motorist on the street. In both situations, the person diagnosing patiently observes the actions, patterns of communication, and expressions of the clients in determining the required treatment. While the client of a psychiatrist could end up with some medical outcomes, the client of the police ends up being treated, as in this case, like a bastard. Hence, regardless of whether the brutality is conveyed using language or facial expressions adopted by the police to indicate disgust, the person will definitely 'get his justice'. This finding contradicts the system of procedural justice. As mentioned earlier, an important element of procedural justice is respectful treatment by the criminal justice system, which includes politeness and courteousness from police officers when they interact with the public (Akinlabi 2017; Tyler & Wakslak 2004; Bottoms & Tankebe 2012). While corresponding with other studies conducted in Nigeria and other police organisations (Akinlabi 2017; Fagan & Tyler 2005), this study argues that procedurally unfair treatments damage public perception of police legitimacy and largely undermine such legitimacy. However, evidence shows that when citizens are respectfully treated, positive interactions are highly likely. This leads me to the second category of slang and typifications.

The eja-nla (big fish)

Eja-nla (meaning the 'big fish'), contrastingly, is a more complimentary term ascribed to

wealthy citizens who easily bribe police officers at checkpoints without getting into arguments with them unnecessarily. The manner in which the police detect those in this category and subsequently treat them is strikingly different from how they treat 'bastards'. In this context, those who offered bribes without complaint were treated with respect and in a somewhat 'professional' manner.

I was particularly struck by an event I witnessed during my fieldwork with the patrol officers. On that afternoon, like in the pastor's case, a young boy in an exotic range rover jeep had been stopped for a stop-and-search routine. On sighting him, an officer sitting with me in the van cheerfully said in a low tone, 'Eja-nla' (signifying the capture of a big fish - a prey). He quickly grabbed his baton to assist his colleagues with controlling the traffic while the boy was asked to park to be searched. In a cheerful and friendly exchange of greetings, the officers started by complimenting his vehicle plate number, asking how much he paid for the customisation. 'You cannot be driving such a nice car and not expect to bless us in this hot sun', one of the officers said to the boy as they all burst into laughter. In this pleasant scenario, shaped by the police officers' admiration of him, the boy felt professionally treated and respected. He gave the officers some money as they all praised him, after which he drove away.

While these terms or names might seem ordinary, they provide an extraordinary guide of action for police officers based on the situation. In the case of the pastor, his mode of communication coupled with his attitude, which the police officers interpreted as disrespectful, was the only reason he was humiliated in that manner. However, in this boy's case, the police officers showed admiration and remained friendly and respectful throughout the interaction since the boy was also interacting in a friendly manner. While speaking politely is not enough to realise quality positive interactions, the way in which police officers communicate orders when they interact with the public makes a difference in how the police are evaluated. While both scenarios strongly correlate with Blumer's (1969) interactionist perspectives, they also

reveal how terms such as bastards, fools, pricks, etc. are used to categorise people into those who deserve to be respected and those who are worthless, for only 'bastards' have the courage to challenge the authority of the police, and as their title implies, are worthless according to the police. For this crew, it is believed that only those who demonstrate the attributes of a 'big-fish', the 'respectful givers', deserve procedural justice. As Akinlabi (2017: 433) concludes in his rigorous analysis of the relationship between procedural justice and police legitimacy in Nigeria, 'positive and affirming treatment by the police might positively influence future positive attitudes and behaviours directed towards police'.

While the use of these various labels can be viewed as serving an occupational purpose in police work, it is important to note that this labelling also serves moral purposes which assists them in distinguishing between what they perceive as 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable', 'good' and 'bad', 'clean' and 'unclean', 'holy' and 'evil'. This leads me to the next analysis, where encounters with the 'pigs' and the 'witches' emphasise the nature and implications of the new police task of enforcing moral order, rather than, as used to be the case, maintaining social order.

The pigs or witches; enforcing moral order

In some cases, in policing in Nigeria, the maintenance of social order has been replaced by the enforcement of moral order, in which police officers constantly attempt to 'cleanse' a world that is 'out of order' through shaming and brutality.

As it is today, police officers in Nigeria deliberately arrest and punish people for acts that are not crimes by law if they consider these acts morally wrong. Such punishments include being beaten, being arrested, and being detained for several hours before release. They go on a rampage, raiding and illegally arresting those perceived to have committed a type of moral infraction, even if it is not a criminal infraction. These are the 'pigs and witches'. For instance,

I was told numerous stories about police officers conducting mass raids and arresting people with visible tattoos on their body, and I regularly witnessed such instances. The officers considered tattoos a sign of 'dirt', implying that a person with tattoos must be bad. I once asked them why having a tattoo was perceived as bad. One of the officers replied, 'No child born of a good home draws a tattoo on his body.... If you have a tattoo, it shows you're not well trained, you're dirty, and there is a high probability that you will be bad'. Similarly, when a female wears revealing clothes, such as mini-skirts, the individual is immediately considered a 'prostitute', even when they are not.

In Nigeria, police officers form suspicion through an instant assessment of the appearance of individuals. To put this idea into perspective, a popular male cross-dresser known as the 'Nigerian Barbie doll', believed to be transgender, was often referred to as an 'Aje' (meaning 'witch') by the police each time they came across his 'female-like' pictures on their social media feeds. One afternoon, during a conversation in the canteen, the inspector vowed to flog him mercilessly if he ever came across him in real life. He stated, 'If I ever come across this aje (witch), I'll tie him down and make him smell his anus'. In fact, people with dreadlocks were referred to as the 'dirty rasta', implying badness or criminality, and those involved in same-sex relationships were considered as 'no-goods' who negatively affected society. This attempt to maintain moral order rather than social order enjoys some institutional backing, i.e. the teachings of the training school. I was told of a guest instructor in the training academy who once said, '...when you all eventually arrive in the outside world, you are to sanitise society and try to bring everything back to normal, and you have to be very careful doing this...'. This statement is suggestive of the police officer's perception of his social role, the idea of sanitising the abnormal, which implies a structure of awareness and the task they must accomplish in cleansing a society that is 'out of place'. These aspects are similar and quite central to Mary Douglas's (1966) analysis of Purity and Danger, where things or persons

labelled 'polluted' deserve to be disinfected and where contamination is an effect of contact with abnormal elements. Therefore, for the trainees, the outside world is full of adversaries; it is 'abnormal' and 'unclean'. It is full of danger, criminals, and rogues. It is full of impurities and disrespectful citizens, which is why their role is to restore sanity to the state and restore it to a state of normalcy. It is important to make some clarifications here. The conditions for categorising individuals as 'pigs' or 'witches' arise from certain conditions which are unconnected to the official mandate of the Nigerian police. Rather, these conditions are considered a response to their own personal or moral concerns. Therefore, this implies that although some of the advice they receive during training is not the official training, these officers tend to follow the informal advice given to them about how they should behave with the public.

Clearly, the adaptation of 'pigs' and 'witch' in the practice of law enforcement not only presumes the moral disposition of the other, it also describes the social distance that must be established with individuals in this category. As mentioned, previous research on the police has drawn attention to the extent of police moralism, particularly the extent to which it contributes to the development of an 'us versus them' mentality (Skolnick 1966; Manning 1971). This present study extends these arguments, arguing that the process through which police officers in Nigeria distinguish the 'out-groups' (the pigs and witches) who threaten the moral security of the state is indicative of the nature and implications of the new police task of enforcing moral order. Part of the police's mission is to respond to their own personal or moral concerns, whereby they condemn and punish actions that may not be a crime by law but they consider morally wrong. Therefore, what we invariably find is a situation whereby police officers condemn and punish actions that are not a crime by law, using various techniques of neutralisation to justify their acts. While the police's response to that which is considered unclean or dirty may be justified through the activation of moral suffering, such actions have

profound consequences for the quality of the lives of victims and the viability of the community as a whole.

Boredom, humour, and humiliation

Apart from the fact that police practices are embedded in the operation of moral order, boredom, humour, and humiliation are inherently central to the analysis of 'the ordinary'. It is important to recognise the link between these actions and the role they play in the practice of law enforcement. Even though boredom, humour, and humiliation are sometimes considered too ordinary or insignificant in research works, they have social consequences.

Contrary to media reports and action movies that often portray police work as mostly filled with action and exciting moments, I came to realise that police officers are mostly bored, since they often complained that 'this police job is really boring'. As it is today, routine police work revolves around oppressive engagement with the public rather than maintaining order. This is also largely caused by the boredom of police work. The boredom of police work often instigates them to create actions for themselves when there was really nothing to do. Such actions were sometimes accomplished through stop and search or raiding (a type of comical justice). This argument has been consistently supported by scholars in other countries (Riener 2010; Bouza 1990), who insist that police work involves a large amount of 'down time', which can in turn cause occupational stress and turnover. The patrol officers that I observed spent much of their time observing the neighbourhood, and anytime there seemed to be no further activities for the day, boredom set in. In order to stave off boredom, they created action for themselves either by listening to music or simply taking a short nap in their vehicle. In most cases, they were eager to engage in conversations with citizens, who were sometimes disinterested in interacting with them. Hence, anyone who was rude or considered to be of questionable character was used to kill time.

I was particularly struck by an event I witnessed where the patrol officers humiliated a boy they perceived as homosexual. Since that particular day was not busy, the officers had decided to return to the police station until their shift ended. As the day drew to an end, the officers noticed 'a lady' surrounded by a group of boys who were harassing her and causing chaos. On arriving at the scene, we realised that the girl in question was in fact a boy in his early twenties dressed as a girl. The mob noted that he often disguised himself as a young girl and begged for money at different locations, assuming that people would pity her because of her looks. Convinced by their story, the officers immediately ordered the boy to enter the van without questioning. In Nigeria, a vast majority of citizens perceive cross-dressers as homosexuals, and homosexual acts are considered abhorrent, forbidden, and against many traditions and cultures across the country. Although cross-dressing is not a crime by Nigerian law, homosexuality is. Section 5 (1) of the 'same-sex prohibition act' (2014) imposes 14 years' imprisonment on anyone caught practicing homosexuality and life imprisonment for some other homosexual acts. This was obviously a good catch to kill time. Upon arriving at the station, the police officers started interrogating the boy while making homophobic remarks. 'Are you a boy or a girl?' The boy replied 'I'm a boy'. 'Do you have a penis or not?' 'Yes, I do', the boy replied, as all the officers burst into laughter. As one of the officers began to record the moments, the other officers continued to push further by further humiliating him. When one of the officers ordered the boy to strip naked, as they wanted to confirm he was a boy, everyone burst into laughter again. Mortified, the boy stripped slowly as everyone watched. One of the officers then turned to the boy's mother, who had been contacted to come and bail her son out, and said, 'Can you see your son, madam? This is shameful', as he spat in disgust. The act of spitting was frequently demonstrated by police officers. It represents their disgust towards an action perceived as 'filthy' or 'dirty' during interaction with citizens. These expressions are similar aspects central to Marzillier and Graham's (2010) famous emotional

profiling of ‘disgust and stimuli’, in which ‘disgust’ is considered as that which is capable of causing a negative effect. In this sense, spitting is one of the ordinaries mentioned in this paper, and these ordinaries must not be taken for granted in the world of the police, for they are implicative of what police officers perceive as ‘dirty and immoral’.

Scholars researching the topics of humour and humiliation, mockery and laughter, and embarrassment and jokes have identified the significance of humiliation and embarrassment in social life (Lumsden & Black 2018; Goffman 1967; Billig 2001). For instance, Goffman (1967), in his study of ‘embarrassment and social order’, highlights the role of embarrassment in social life. He argues that embarrassment is an important part of human life because its absence in our everyday lives results in social codes losing their force, and for many of us, the compelling drive to avoid embarrassment pervades our daily lives. This implies that embarrassment is an important component in maintaining social order and that the dread of humiliation can function as a strong deterrent against crime. Drawing from Goffman’s argument, we can argue that humiliation was used by these police officers in the above illustration not only to provoke moral suffering, but also as a weapon to correct moral infractions and enforce a type of moral correctness. In other words, these ordinary acts of humiliation and embarrassment are deployed in police practice as a strong deterrent which attempts to ensure obedience to the routine demands of social life.

In another event, I witnessed a situation where police officers teased a woman who had come to report an attempted rape incident at the police station. On that particular day, the police station had been mostly quiet because of a power outage. The stifling heat had forced everyone to their usual spot under a tree outside the police station. This spot was used regularly to ‘chill’ and ‘get some fresh air’, especially during power outages. Some of them were loitering around and some were singing acapella to liven the mood of the station. This was when the woman walked in. She was crying profusely, and when she narrated the incident, the police officers

took her statement while commenting sarcastically. ‘Tell us what happened from the beginning; did they touch your breasts?’ The girl replied, ‘Yes, they did’. Acting shocked, but simultaneously smiling, the two corporals continued to press on with other sarcastic remarks. These incidents highlight how police officers derive pleasure in carrying out a type of ‘comical justice’ when there is nothing to do. Sociologists and psychologists have attributed a number of benefits to humour, such as its ability to relieve pain, reinforce social cohesion, and display creativity (Lumsden & Black 2018; Kuipers 2009). In this study, humour explains why Nigerian police officers often attempt to trigger laughter amongst themselves, particularly when they are bored. This is a type of social practice that sociologists (Lumsden & Black 2018) and interactionists (Fassin 2013) have identified as a bonding mechanism or a type of socialisation activity that enables them to withstand the difficulties of their job. Similar to Lumsden and Black’s (2018) analysis of ‘emotional labour’ in their study of the ‘police force control room’, this study explains that call-handlers in the police control room engage in emotional labour – often in the form of laughter and humorous conversations – in order to reduce the tension and pressure of their work. Several other scholars (Billig 2001; Lockyer & Pickering 2008; Gundelach 2000) have also identified the role of ‘joke-making’ and the pattern of ridiculing within social groups. They describe joke-making as a kind of ‘safety valve’ that staves off boredom, also functioning as a bonding mechanism that help groups endure social difficulties. In the Nigerian context, the boredom of police work often instigates them to create actions for themselves, and sometimes, it is considered a game. I once overheard the police officers joke about how they carry out mass raids on prostitutes on the streets when they are less busy at night. Instead of taking them to the police station, they drive them far from where they were arrested and leave them to find their way back home. The aim is to punish (humiliate) them by leaving them stranded because they consider it immoral to be a prostitute. ‘... sometimes it’s just interesting to fuck with these prostitutes and their emotions’, one officers once said. This

is a clear demonstration of precisely how ordinary boredom and humiliation can damage relationships, public trust, and confidence in institutions.

Humour was also used creatively at different times during patrols as a form of a collective coping strategy, and this was often in the form of joke-telling, friendly mockery, and verbal banter. For instance, a patrol officer who was heavysset was always mocked in a friendly manner by the rest of the team. While bantering, one of the other patrol officers questioned his potency in jest, claiming that ‘fat people don’t last long in bed’. In response, the heavysset officer dared him to bring his wife to him to confirm that he could last for twenty-five minutes in bed. Although this was clearly intended as an ordinary joke, it shows the ordinary coping skills of these officers and illustrates how they socialise and interact with one another. I was also the butt of jokes when I started my study. One of the officers teased me by asking me to repeat a particular statement in reverse, which drew laughter because it resulted in it becoming a foul statement. The examples stated were ordinary socialisation processes used to relieve the boredom of the shift. However, they are critical aspects that explain how the crisis of negative interactions plays out in Nigeria.

In short, while militaristic orientations (Okesola & Mudair 2013), institutional constraints (Onyeozili 2005), the centralised nature of the police force (Johnson 2013), inadequate training (Arisukwu & Okunola 2013), widespread experiences of police brutality, and arbitrary killings (Alemika & Chukwuma 2000; Ogbette et al. 2018), as well as the culture of bribery and other forms of corruption in police stations (Okesola & Mudair 2013) have been identified as critical issues undermining police-citizen interaction in Nigeria, this paper contributes to existing literature and offers fresh insight, particularly in the context of ‘the ordinary’.

Conclusion

To summarise, this paper argued that the biggest issue fuelling negative interactions between the police and the public in Nigeria has to do with the problem of the ‘ordinary’ acts that police use in everyday encounters. This paper contributes to existing literature on police-citizen interactions by highlighting the types of police actions that are beginning to represent ‘the ordinary’ – which seem to be too commonplace to capture the attention of researchers. It has also demonstrated how the questions of negative interactions and those generated by ordinary interactional logics play out in everyday street engagements. It is important to recognise that a critical analysis of these ordinaries has provided an improved understanding of the experiences of policing actors as well as the broader implications of police culture. Although rarely examined, these ordinaries, which are composed of the micro-elements in the moments of encounter, are critical factors fuelling the disconnection that generates hostile reactions – in effect reducing public confidence in the Nigerian police. These ordinaries also comprise various communication processes, which are critical aspects that must not be disregarded in any partnership program, no matter how ordinary or irrelevant they sometime seem, because they are indicative of how the ordinary transforms into the extraordinary during the process of interaction. Unlike previous research on this issue, this paper extends the debate by not just focusing on the instantaneous ways in which street encounters are managed, but by analysing how language and actions damage relationships, public trust, and confidence in institutions. Through the detailed analysis of witnessed events, this paper maintains that without adequate attention to the ordinary actions of patrol officers and the context of their communication, the crisis of negative interactions may not be resolved.

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