

# Lost in translation: why Nigeria's police don't implement democratic reforms

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The transfer of western norms and practices to police forces in West Africa is a substantial part of a billion-dollar business. Out of the US\$452 million the Obama administration requested for law enforcement and narcotics control in Africa during the financial year 2010, US\$8 million was allocated to United States officials and contractors for police training, infrastructure and equipment in Liberia alone,<sup>1</sup> while between 2002 and 2009 the United Kingdom channelled some £37 million to reforming or improving the security and justice sector of Nigeria, a key anchor state for UK policies in sub-Saharan Africa (hereafter Africa).

Such programmes are predicated on the belief that culturally based values and practices can be transmitted between societies. Yet the ways in which Africa's police respond to theories and practices imported from western societies have yet to be assessed critically. Further, despite decades of international support for police reform and re-education, there is little evidence to support the assumption that the skills, technologies and procedures associated with western policing can act as an effective channel for the transmission of democratic values.

One reason for exploring these issues in the context of policing is that there is an established literature on the occupational commonalities and culture shared by police around the world, which provides a base for assessing the transmission of culturally based norms, values and procedures, and which narrows down otherwise overly broad ideas of cultural beliefs and practices. Even so, most of this literature is either rooted in, or influenced by, Anglo-American experience,<sup>2</sup> and as such has failed explicitly and systematically to assess the ways in which western norms and practices travel outside the societies in which they were originally developed. The difficulties of transferring such norms and practices are particularly evident in West Africa, where democratic notions of accountability clash with personalized patronage networks and local material interests. And nowhere is it more obvious than in Nigeria, the regional hegemon to which the UK has provided police assis-

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<sup>1</sup> Africa Security Research Project, 'Obama administration budget request for AFRICOM operations and for security assistance programs in Africa in FY 2010' (2009), <http://concernedafricascholars.org/african-security-research-project/?p=18>, accessed 17 May 2012.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview, see Megan O'Neill, Monique Marks and Anne-Marie Singh, eds, *Police occupational culture: new debates and directions* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2007), pp. 3–7.

tance and support over five decades. Despite being one of Nigeria's major creditors, and despite the significant sums of Nigerian money held in London's banks, the UK seems to have limited leverage to change Nigeria's corrupt and repressive policing standards and practices.

This situation prompts the questions at the heart of this article: what explains the response of a police service in Anglophone Africa to externally funded reform ventures, and how does the police response relate to internally generated initiatives? It also prompts a question with implications for policy transfer more generally: what explains the uneven transmission of politically sensitive forms of knowledge?

We can throw light on these questions by considering the Nigerian police's response to community policing projects supported by the UK,<sup>3</sup> and to the internally driven reform initiatives developed since 1999, when the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo marked the end of 15 years of military rule. Community policing is significant in this context because it is a major western export to Africa, and it incorporates values and techniques that must be transmitted and embedded if democratic-style policing is to be developed, even as its ambiguous nature means that it is open to manipulation by those responsible for implementing it. This is not to say that community policing (or, indeed, police reform—the two are not synonymous) is a key issue in Nigerian or African politics: it is not. Rather, it is to suggest that Nigeria's experience offers analytical precision while allowing a degree of generalization that has implications for a broader understanding of transmission as it concerns both the police sector and UK policies.

Admittedly, concentrating on recipient response (and individual and elitist response at that), rather than the content of the message or the bureaucratic logic and organizational culture of the police institution, runs the risk of producing a descriptive account that leaves transmission, transmitters and knowledge undertheorized, and the operationalization of terms such as transmission ambiguous. Similarly, focusing on a specialized form of occupational knowledge and technical expertise neglects the ways in which Nigerian culture is influenced by the Christian, Muslim and traditional beliefs and practices of its 155 million people. Even so, Nigeria's experience has both specific and general relevance to the debate regarding cultural transfer in the police sector, and practice can illuminate this undertheorized area.

What follows is organized around an interest-based account. Although hard data are difficult to obtain, evidence can be found in alternative and/or informal sources. Consequently, what follows is both the product of research and a commentary on events described in private conversations by senior and middle-ranking officers and officials. It draws on a series of semi-structured interviews and informal discussions with Nigerian officers and British and American advisers and officials during annual visits to Abuja, Kano and Lagos from 2006 to 2011, and

<sup>3</sup> The UK's contribution is well documented and long running, but community policing was also supported by the US and Israel. For example, USAID maintained a project in the northern town of Kaduna from 2004 to 2009. On community policing, see Mike Brogden and Preeti Nijhar, *Community policing: national and international models and approaches* (Cullompton: Willan, 2005).

on personal observations in three police stations in Abuja and Kano. Additional insight into the realities of policing in Nigeria—and into public perceptions of policing—is provided by reports in newspapers such as Abuja’s *Daily Trust* and *Leadership*, and the Lagos-based *Next*, *Punch* and *Vanguard*.

The discussion develops in three sections. The first introduces transmission as a tool for understanding the impact of western-funded reform projects before focusing on the contextual factors affecting it in states such as Nigeria. The heart of the article lies in the second section. Based on interviews with Nigerian officers and British police advisers, this part of the article provides empirical evidence on attempts to introduce community policing into Nigeria over the past ten years. It explains the different perspectives of Nigerian officers and UK advisers before comparing the reception of community policing with that of internally driven reform initiatives. The third section discusses the implications of Nigeria’s experience for current understanding.

## Transmission

The transfer of policing policies between liberal democracies such as the United States and United Kingdom, and between the US and its regional neighbours, receives attention, as do international police cooperation and transnational police craft;<sup>4</sup> but the affinities and procedures on which such developments depend are assumed to be universal, whereas they may not be. Fundamental aspects of the core transmission process remain unaddressed. Commentators address the desirability or the details of the policies to be transmitted, but pay little attention to the response of the police concerned, or the nature of the security culture to be reformed, while police advisers analyse developments in terms of western policing but ignore the ties, transactions and elements of power that indigenous officers and elites take for granted.

The social science assessments of cultural transmission underpinning western understanding draw on anthropology, biology, politics, psychology and sociology.<sup>5</sup> The consensus arising from all such studies is that culture—which is widely understood to mean ‘the transmission of knowledge, values, and other factors that influence behaviour from one generation to the next’<sup>6</sup>—is transferable, is learned through experience and participation, and comprises a set of rules or guidelines

<sup>4</sup> See Trevor Jones and Tim Newburn, *Policy transfer and criminal justice: exploring US influence over British crime control* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2007); Mark Ungar, *Policing democracy: overcoming obstacles to citizen security in Latin America* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2009); Peter Andreas and Ethan Nadelmann, *Policing the globe: criminalization and crime control in international relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Frédéric Lemieux, ed., *International police cooperation: emerging issues, theory and practice* (Cullompton: Willan, 2010); Andrew Goldsmith and James Sheptycki, *Crafting transnational policing: state-building and police reform across borders* (Oxford: Hart, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> For example, Marshall Sahlins, *How ‘natives’ think: about Captain Cook, for example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Mark Feldman, *Cultural transmission and evolution: a quantitative approach* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Martha Finnemore, ‘Norms, culture and world politics: insights from sociology’s institutionalism’, *International Organization* 50: 2, 1996, pp. 325–47.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson, quoted in Ute Schönplflug, ed., *Cultural transmission: psychological, development, social, and methodological aspects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 3.

that generate specific forms of conduct. Ironically, these insights have yet to be applied systematically to security sector reform projects: the debate on transmission in the police sector remains uneven and partial in both senses of the word. Intergenerational transmission between African craftsmen receives attention, as does the clash of norms at the international level,<sup>7</sup> but little is known about the ways in which African police construct, exercise and validate knowledge in respect of ‘international’ policing standards. In fact, knowledge of African police culture(s) and its/their assessment of western policing fashions is minimal: we do not know ‘how “natives think”’.<sup>8</sup>

Traditional explanations of security-related transmission emphasize procedural or mechanistic issues such as training and equipment, while donors such as the UK Department for International Development (DFID) pursue a normative agenda that speaks of moral conviction. Both assume that transmission is a realistic policy objective, and that it can be assessed using qualitative or quantitative management tools. In practice, skills transfer is a relatively straightforward process, and recipients always find offers of technical assistance and equipment more attractive than projects promoting values. Nigeria’s police may have accepted British support for projects promoting the notion of service, but it is probable that North Korea’s offer in 2009 of training in unarmed combat, and the provision by the French national police of a training course on cyber-crime in the same year were more welcome. Whatever the case, decades of international support to African police suggest that effective transmission depends on a shared technical vocabulary, and on accommodation and networking between the officers concerned, rather than on norms and values. Further, and contrary to contemporary arguments favouring norm diffusion across societies,<sup>9</sup> African experience suggests that the utilitarian forms of knowledge underpinning police practice transfer better than the disembodied and codified normative forms of knowledge associated with international policing standards and human rights legislation.<sup>10</sup> In other words, while knowledge is a key issue affecting the transfer and internalization of western norms, processes and practices, it is necessary to distinguish the utilitarian forms of knowledge (knowledge *in practice*) favoured by practitioners from the more theoretical forms of knowledge (knowledge *as practice*) promoted by donors and western advisers.

Also, Africa’s experience suggests that transfers that persist over time depend on the existence of what can be called a knowledge-trading zone. That is, successful transfer requires the development of a hybrid form of understanding that accommodates aspects of both donor and local understanding. While donors adopt an ethical universalism, and indigenous knowledge is pragmatic (so, say, Africans know how something operates, rather than that it exists), African officers look for compromises that enable them to accommodate or manipulate aspects of both.

<sup>7</sup> Roy Dille, ‘Specialist knowledge practices of craftsmen and clerics in Senegal’, *Africa* 79: 1, 2009, pp. 53–70; Andrew Cortell and James Davies, ‘Understanding the domestic impact of international norms: a research agenda’, *International Studies Review* 2: 1, 2000, pp. 65–87.

<sup>8</sup> Sahlins, *How ‘natives’ think*.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Ian Loader and Neil Walker, *Civilizing security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> See OECD Development Assistance Committee, *OECD DAC Handbook on security sector reform (SSR): supporting security and justice* (Paris: OECD, 2007).

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This suggests that, while governments and institutions often seek to enhance their legitimacy by adopting the discourse of reform, the acceptability, transfer and persistence of outside norms and procedures depend on political contingencies, functional requirements, peer pressure and social realities, rather than on international norms or moral conviction.

### *Significant influences*

Given that North–South transmission is undertheorized, and African police culture is benignly neglected, discussion is best conducted via an empirically based account identifying the contextual variables influencing a specific instance of police-related transmission: in this case, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). The NPF is, of course, unique, yet it is also a typical recipient of western reform projects in that its approximately 325,000 underfunded and often parasitical officers are both feared and ineffective. Its functions are typical, too, dominated by order maintenance, regime representation and regulatory activities. Consequently, its experience offers opportunities to test donor orthodoxy (for example, the assertion that embedding change takes at least ten years), and to assess whether time-specific or skills-based transfers are more effective than diffuse or normative forms of transmission. At the same time it enables the issue of ‘quality fade’ to be incorporated into understandings of transmission.<sup>11</sup>

Three significant factors affecting police-related transfers are identifiable in Nigeria, as they are in most African states (the main contours of policing are relatively consistent across Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone Africa). First, the critical actor is the president, who authorizes or tolerates externally supported transfer projects which are then implemented by the inspector general of police (IG). The IG is the second critical influence on policing—and IGs are conservative figures operating in support of the status quo. In the Nigerian case, conservatism is reinforced by the fact that the seven IGs appointed since 1999 had been career officers. President Obasanjo’s first IG in 1999, Musliu Smith, had served for 27 years, and his second, Tafa Balogun, had been in the police since 1973, while Ogbonnaya Onovo, Goodluck Jonathan’s first IG (and Umaru Yar’Adua’s before him), was an officer of 32 years’ standing, nine of them at police headquarters. The current (acting) IG, Mohammed Abubakar, joined the police in 1979. Admittedly, all Nigerian IGs since 1999 have introduced reform plans incorporating external support and liberal terminology. But their responses are better described as acknowledgement, exploitation or manipulation than the facilitation or implementation of democratic-style policing. Balogun, for example, introduced an eight-point agenda that included the development of a ‘people’s police’. Indeed, his strategy, which placed great emphasis on the role of vigilantes, corporate organizations and traditional rulers in supporting the police, and on better welfare and conditions of service as a means to improve police morale, included

<sup>11</sup> ‘Quality fade’ refers to the subtle but progressive ways in which the quality of products and standards is deliberately lowered once a contract is secured in certain manufacturing cultures.

community policing. For by then Obasanjo had invited the British Council and DFID to incorporate a community policing initiative in the security component of a UK Security, Justice and Growth (SJG) Programme designed specifically for Nigeria. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that Balogun supported community policing in order to gain access to UK resources. Whether or not this was the case, he was dismissed in 2005 on the grounds that he had stolen or laundered US\$98 million.

Third, Nigeria's experience emphasizes the politicized and personalized context in which imported ideas and practices must operate. Take the case of Balogun's successor, Sunday Ehindero, a legally trained career policeman. He introduced a ten-point reform plan incorporating donor vocabulary. But this was only to be expected. Not only was the NPF under pressure from Obasanjo in the aftermath of the Balogun scandal, but by then every IG invariably began his period of office with a reform plan. In fact, Ehindero's version of reform manipulated western ideals even as it acknowledged them. In 2007, for example, he announced that more than 10,000 corrupt officers would be dismissed, but the sackings were token. Damningly, Ehindero was implicated in the violence that attended the presidential elections of April 2007. According to multiple reports in the Nigerian media, he was reportedly caught leaving office with the 200 million naira he had received as payment for election rigging.

The election of a new president and the concomitant appointment of a new IG rarely change these basic patterns, as Yar'Adua's appointment of Mike Okiro in 2007 shows. Okiro began his appointment as acting IG with the publication of an eight-point reform plan that was consistent with Yar'Adua's reformist statements, and throughout his period of office he promoted liberal paradigms and practices. Unlike Ehindero, he was accessible to the British Council officials implementing DFID's project, and ensured that community policing received resources; a popular deputy IG (DIG) was placed in charge of the division responsible for it, and was supported by middle-ranking graduate officers. However, Okiro's last months in office (he retired in July 2009) were blighted by his association with the collapse of the Lead Merchant Bank, to which his wife's company owed 166 million naira, with all that this implies for his internalization of liberal values.

Overall, the NPF's record since 1999 suggests that, like many African forces, it is not committed to liberal knowledge and practice *per se*, but (and this is key) it is politically and pragmatically committed to accommodating many aspects of that culture, and the resources associated with it. Hence Balogun and Obasanjo used the international language associated with anti-corruption campaigns even as they failed to put it into practice. Balogun's anti-corruption crusade of 2002 was informed by Obasanjo's stated policy of due process, transparency and accountability in public affairs, and Obasanjo had worked for Transparency International for several years between his first and second terms as president; but neither challenged the corruption that has been Nigeria's primary symbolic failure since the 1960s.

Based on Nigerian experience, it appears that while the mechanisms of transmission are relatively straightforward, its effectiveness is influenced primarily by

political calculations and social realities. Moreover, the record of men such as Ehindero and Okiro suggests that transmission involves the development of a hybrid understanding capable of integrating aspects of donor understanding and indigenous realities.

### **Community policing as a test case**

The values and practices donors wish to promote via democratic-style policing are intended to produce a set of normative rules guiding conduct; so one way to consider transmission is to ask what affects Nigerian reactions to projects such as community policing, which encapsulate liberal values such as service and partnership. The NPF's response to the British Council's promotion of community policing between 2002 and 2009 provides a case in which to explore such questions, though the documentation associated with it addresses donor goals rather than recipient responses. Ironically, British Council surveys conducted in 2006 assessed public perceptions of community policing projects while failing to evaluate the responses of the officers involved.

Community policing is both internationally recognized and historically alien in its goals and techniques. Many Nigerian officers see it as an import, but one capable of improving police–community relations. This matters because it is increasingly acknowledged by officers of all ranks that relations between the police and society must be improved, and the British Council's project offered a timely and politically acceptable way to do this; the project sought to transmit a set of rules capable of generating specific forms of conduct in an environment in which the need for change was recognized. Many of the NPF officers involved appeared to be content to take their lead from their advisers (that, after all, was why the advisers were there). British advisers always claimed that community policing was a universally applicable philosophy of policing, rather than a specific technique, so there was room for manoeuvre, too. Even so, the vision of community policing promoted by British advisers was ambitious and sometimes unrealistic. Thus British policy documents not only stated that a 'culture of excellence in service provision' was to be introduced, and that individuals were to be held accountable for their performance, but also that 'ethical policing' was to be placed 'at the core of all personal and organizational development programmes' and that 'social problems' were to be jointly identified, prioritized and resolved.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the potential for change was always limited by vested interests and social realities, as is evident from the record of pilot projects introduced across Nigeria in the mid-2000s. The projects are of value here because they offer insight into the nuances of transmission, and an opportunity to assess recipient response as an explanatory factor for the uneven record of reform.

<sup>12</sup> British Council and Department for International Development, *Security, Justice and Growth: Nigeria* (London: DFID, 2005); personal communication, British Council, Abuja, 2007.

### *Pilot projects*

Most Nigerian regimes, military and civil, have stated that the NPF must be reformed. But this was always understood in terms of more officers, training and money, and it was not until around 2001 that community policing was chosen as a means to achieve a more acceptable form of policing. Significantly, transmission was by invitation: Obasanjo invited the British government to undertake to introduce community policing in Nigeria.

The notion of promoting better police–community relations had first been introduced in 1985 when President Babangida authorized police–community relationships, consultative committees and vigilante groups. But the prompt for western-style community policing appears to have been the publication in 2000 of a report by the Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN), an influential and well-connected Nigerian NGO that emphasized the need to address the adversarial nature of police–civilian relations.<sup>13</sup> This recommendation evidently resonated with Obasanjo, because in March 2002 the Minister of Police, with UK and US support, introduced a five-year development plan that included community policing as a way of improving police–public interaction and reducing crime.

The formal objective of community policing was—and is—to provide an environment in which ‘the police and law-abiding citizens can work together to prevent crime [and] to promote inter-agency problem solving, bringing offenders to justice and improving the overall quality of life’.<sup>14</sup> Few officers would have objected to this because it would have made their job less dangerous. Also, the manner of transmission was functional, business-oriented and interest-based; despite DFID’s overtly normative agenda, British and Nigerian advisers alike promoted community policing in terms of modern or international policing. In other words, understanding was built on a shared technical vocabulary, and on operational and management skills (such as patrolling and records management) that transmitted relatively easily. Significantly, according to accounts given to me by British advisers involved in the early phases of the SJG project, it also built on networking between the officers concerned, rather than on shared values.

The mechanisms or characteristics required to shift police culture were identified by both international and Nigerian advisers in terms of functional skills, but there was a marked difference between rhetoric and reality, and between outside assessments and local material interests. The result was, on the Nigerian side at least, that a hybrid form of understanding developed, which accommodated aspects of both donor and local understanding. For example, a pilot project introduced in Enugu State in April 2004 emphasized skills development, leadership training, intelligence-led policing and legislation reviews, rather than accountability or service.<sup>15</sup> However, it trained mainly junior officers, who were deployed to police

<sup>13</sup> Etannibi Alemika and Innocent Chuckwuma, *Police–community violence in Nigeria* (Lagos: CLEEN, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication, British Council, Abuja, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Austen Iwar, ‘The impact of community policing on the performance of the Nigeria police in Uwani Police Station and Central Police Station of Enugu State’, MSc. diss., University of Leicester, 2008.



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stations rather than headquarters, thus implying that what was transmitted was of secondary importance.

In truth, Nigerian assessments of the project ran on a separate parallel track to the UK's understanding of community policing as a series of integrated interventions designed to change norms, orientation and behaviour, as well as processes. Thus British Council officials implementing the project on behalf of DFID referred to the 'paradigm shift' required to reposition the NPF so that it would 'deliver a quality service and create a conducive environment for the practice of democratic policing principles';<sup>16</sup> they focused on improved 'service delivery', and stressed the need for police to develop appropriate skills, attitudes and behaviour (this concerned the 'core values' of respect and human rights, rather than effective policing). They also promoted community policing as pro-poor, which was understood not as rhetoric but as a non-negotiable criterion. In contrast, Ehindero's interpretation of a paradigm shift referred to his ambition to 'restore the glory' of the paramilitary Police Mobile Force (PMF).

### *Transmitters*

Transmission to recipients requires transmitters, and three sets are identifiable in Nigeria's policing projects. The first (and least influential) comprises international actors such as DFID, the British Council, and the retired or seconded senior British officers employed as advisers. Many advisers developed good working relations with Nigerian officers, but a lack of diplomatic or high-level political support exacerbated the problems DFID faced in transmitting its vision.

The second transmitter consists of the IG and the senior echelons of the NPF, whose support was necessary for implementation. Smith had no interest in community policing, while Balogun and Ehindero failed to support either the SJG's community policing component or the team charged with implementing it. Indeed, Balogun's reform plans coexisted with an overtly belligerent policing strategy. That the community policing project was managed by an assistant IG based in Lagos, rather than in the federal capital, Abuja, reinforced its secondary status. Transmission was obstructed by strained relations between both IGs and UK officials, and by confrontation and minimal cooperation between the various agencies in Nigeria's justice sector.

The third transmitter is Nigeria's political elite. It was a presidential commission on police reform that called for community policing to become the key delivery mechanism for policing, and it was the federal government's SERVICOM programme that required all government ministries and departments to focus on the service delivery underpinning community policing. This trend was reinforced by comparable moves from, for instance, the Presidential Commission on the Administration of Justice, which called for the development of a coherent approach to crime prevention. DFID reports may have provided the overarching context and direction for the review team's terms of reference, but implementation was led by

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication, British Council, Abuja, 2009.

government institutions even as it was subverted by the vested interests of their members.

### *Transmission*

At one level, the procedures used to facilitate the introduction of imported procedures and standards were straightforward. As is usual in such situations, Balogun, for instance, sent 72 officers to workshops in Nigeria on issues such as conflict management, leadership and 'visioning for productivity'; 16 received training in countries such as China, Egypt and Sweden; and training assistance was accepted from France, the US and the UK.<sup>17</sup> In 2003, seven officers were sent to study community policing in the UK, a strategic plan was developed, and officers were recruited to act as a project team and trainers. Fifty community policing developers (CPDs) were trained to change attitudes and behaviours in police stations and surrounding communities, and there were also community safety officers, human rights officers, vigilante support officers and divisional intelligence officers: all told, 150 officers of various ranks were trained by SJG and USAID/MacArthur. High-visibility policing was introduced by means of beat patrols and the posting of officers to geographical areas for which they had responsibility. Specific commanders were appointed, though it was not until Okiro became IG in 2007 that a dedicated DIG was located in force HQ in Abuja. Okiro's commitment was evident from his development of a core team of middle management officers (assistant commissioners and chief superintendents) to manage implementation in selected states. Lastly, community policing was included in Yar'Adua's seven-point agenda and Okiro's nine-point agenda,<sup>18</sup> which paved the way for community policing to be included in the 2008 budget.

At another level, transmission was opaque, with delivery and receipt affected by presidential calculations, the manoeuvrings of politicians, and obstruction by officers of all ranks, from DIGs to constables. Issues internal to DFID also affected the timing and mode of the department's approach. Thus in 2005 DFID redesigned and restaffed the project in response to a critical internal assessment. The revised project was aligned with the Nigerian government's National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and the equivalent strategies at the state level (SEEDS), and included a sharper focus on conflict prevention and the links between security and growth. But rather than focusing on the practical problems of maintaining enthusiasm for community policing, and the ways in which it could improve police–community relations, DFID conflated its functional and normative knowledge, expanding the project beyond the original four states while concentrating on the needs of 'poor people'.<sup>19</sup> DFID's Annual

<sup>17</sup> Solomon Arase and Iheanyi Iwuofor, eds, *Policing Nigeria in the 21st century* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2008), p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Mike Okiro, *The Nigeria police blueprint: under my administration* (Iskat Design, n.d.).

<sup>19</sup> DFID's stated aim was to 'tackle world poverty': DFID, 'Who we are and what we do', <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-DFID/Quick-guide-to-DFID/Who-we-are-and-what-we-do/>, accessed September 2011. It is now to lead 'Britain's fight against global poverty, delivering UK aid around the world', <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/What-we-do/>, accessed May 2012.

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Programme Review Report of 2006 argued that the SJG's security component should be reoriented to broaden its focus from police training to wider community and institutional development. The project's rationale was evidently questioned too, though an assessment commissioned by DFID from the New York-based Vera Institute of Justice is typical of the department's approach in that it judged the investment to have been realistic and appropriate on the basis that transmission had been successful: Nigeria, it said, showed what could be achieved in environments where violence is an everyday occurrence.<sup>20</sup> Judging from the series of reviews that took place between 2005 and 2008, DFID focused more on the perceived value of what was being transmitted than the way in which it was received.

### *Results matter*

Ultimately, reform-related transmission is judged in terms of its effectiveness in facilitating certain types of procedural and behavioural change, though the boundaries between the two may be ambiguous. For example, although the officers responsible for developing community policing employed donors' vocabulary of core values and sensitization workshops, they also promoted it as a means to develop intelligence-led policing capable of capitalizing on new technologies. More importantly, long-standing institutional and organizational problems quickly offset the appeal of change—and transmission and community policing are to some extent driven by the desire for change. Community policing may have been publicly supported by the President, the Minister of Police Affairs, the Police Council, the Police Service Commission, the House of Representatives and the Nigerian Bar Association, but their commitment was weak, as was police support. This was reflected in the slow production of policy documents and guidelines. DFID's police adviser may have obtained the agreement of the Minister of Police Affairs to create a legislative framework that would make community policing a statutory requirement, and a supplementary budget that would support the project team, but to date neither exists.

Effective transmission was, in Nigeria as elsewhere, undermined by donors' inaccurate assessment of the situation. DFID knew that Nigerian policing is highly centralized, but failed to appreciate the institutional and cultural limits on what could be transmitted. Divisional managers are given wide discretion to deal with the tactical and operational issues affecting their divisions, but there is a strong tradition of micromanaging in police stations, and managers do not seek input from either their subordinates or their local communities; they may be trained in democratic principles, management and leadership techniques, delegation, performance measurement, action planning, partnerships, community mobilization, problem-solving techniques and accountability, but much depends on individual motivation.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Stone, Joel Miller, Monica Thornton and Jennifer Trone, *Supporting security, justice and development: lessons for a new era* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2005).

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The practical limits to externally supported transmission projects were most visible at the street level, as were responses of the programme recipients, that is, the police officers themselves. The attitude and behaviour of officers in the localities in which pilot projects took place often changed, leading to a marked (albeit temporary) shift in public confidence in the police's ability to deal with crime; but corruption remains endemic, reflecting the limits on what can be achieved by external agents in the face of societal pressure.<sup>21</sup> This applies at every level, from IGs to the constables manning illegal roadblocks. In 2005, for example, the community policing team in Enugu State made a concerted effort to reduce incidents of police extorting 20 naira (about 8p) at road checkpoints, but these checkpoints remain in place in Enugu as in all other states, and are perhaps the most corrosive feature affecting police–public relations. DFID advisers may argue that countering corruption must become a key management performance indicator, and some CPDs may challenge such behaviour, but the under-resourcing, low pay and skimming that affect every level of the NPF ensure that little changes. Consequently, the transmission of democratic standards is at best partial and its results uneven. Nigerian-style community policing has evolved as a response to the perceived inadequacies of conventional policing, but the projects required to transmit the values and processes associated with community policing have been permitted by the authorities for a range of political reasons, and genuinely enthusiastic officers are few in number. Damningly, CLEEN concludes that senior officers tolerate, rather than own, the project because of the financial resources it provides.<sup>22</sup>

## *Accommodating change*

Focusing on the ways in which Nigerian police respond to imported ideas and practices offers a more nuanced picture of transmission than that given by policy-based analyses. Community policing may have been an item on Okiro's nine-point agenda, but it was at number eight, between human rights and interagency cooperation, neither of which has traction in Nigeria. Also, it does not impinge on most officers. On the other hand, it is difficult for officers or politicians to deny that the police's public image needs to change. This situation suggests answers to the related question of how politically sensitive police practices and protocols shift under the impact of unavoidable political pressure.

Assuming that the government concerned is subject to international pressure (as Obasanjo's was), Nigerian experience suggests that practices shift in the face of unavoidable pressure because they are unimportant, or because accommodation is necessary. In this case, Nigeria's government enhanced its legitimacy around the discourse of reform, but the situation is essentially that described by Chabal and

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Daniel Smith, *A culture of corruption: everyday deception and popular discontent in Nigeria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Innocent Chukwuma, 'Motions without movement': report of the Presidential Committees on Police Reforms in Nigeria (Abuja: CLEEN, 2008).

Daloz, who argue that elites appear to go along with international priorities while actually preserving their power and interests.<sup>23</sup>

The real reason why elites publicly welcome community policing is that it does not affect their lifestyle; politicians can afford to buy their own protection, and PMF men continue to carry their wives' shopping. Indeed, from an elite perspective, the transmission of the culture of origin is dysfunctional in the recipient country. The notion of a police being accountable for its actions to the public it serves (the definition of democratic policing provided by Bayley) is not in their interest.<sup>24</sup> Neither is the belief that policing is a means for justice, development and poverty alleviation.<sup>25</sup> How, then, has the governing elite accommodated the knowledge and practice advocated by donors? The answer is that they have done so smoothly because their perspective and agenda run parallel with those of donors, and because they have used retired senior officers with experience of working under military regimes to manage the process.

This is clear from the last twelve years, which have seen a ministerial committee and two presidential committees established to review the police and make recommendations for its reform (that is, to improve its image, rather than to make it democratically accountable). The first initiative saw a Five Year Development Plan drafted in 1999 by a ministerial committee established by the then Minister of Police Affairs, David Jemibewon, a retired general. The second occurred in 2006, when Obasanjo created an eleven-member presidential committee headed by a retired DIG, Alhaji Mohammad Danmadami, whose career reached back over Nigeria's military regimes. However, the Danmadami Committee's white paper was never implemented because Obasanjo's successor, Yar'Adua, inaugurated a second presidential committee on reform, headed by Alhaji Yesufu, a retired IG with many years' experience of working for military regimes. These developments suggest a nuanced answer to the questions posed here regarding the process and substance of reform.

Reform has, inevitably, been affected by political imperatives. The debate on process, for example, was shaped by concerns that submitting an accountable reform process to the political control of elected representatives would lead to reform being subject to the short-term decisions associated with electoral cycles. In fact, reform was always seen as a political issue, and the Danmadami Committee was generally regarded as a political response to a threat by junior officers to initiate a national strike in protest over delayed promotions and a grossly inadequate welfare scheme. Similarly, the Yesufu Committee was viewed as an attempt by Yar'Adua's administration to enhance its legitimacy following national and international condemnation of the police's role in the fraud associated with Yar'Adua's election. Unsurprisingly, the recommendations of the Danmadami Committee were ignored once Obasanjo retired, while the Yesufu Committee's report and

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa works: disorder as political instrument* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> David Bayley, *Democratizing the police abroad: what to do and how to do it* (Washington DC: US Department of Justice, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. DFID, *Fighting poverty to build a safer world—a strategy for security and development* (London: DFID, 2005); OECD DAC, *Handbook*, pp. 3, 13, 20.

white paper duplicated the earlier reports but failed to urge their implementation. Further, the contents of the reform reports were criticized for failing to address issues relating to the value system, ideology, philosophy, and organizational and legal deficiencies that account for police inefficiency. Even when fundamental recommendations were made, they were watered down in white papers, which maintain the status quo in such a manner as to ensure continued politicization.

In other words, the process of reform is accepted, but the political will required to ensure its effective implementation is absent. Hence the phenomenon of quality fade as reform processes are manipulated by representatives of the existing order in order to protect their interests and achieve predetermined political gains that are at odds with normative reform and efficiency. This trend of accommodation and manipulation is indicative of the resilience of utilitarian knowledge in the face of imported norm-based understandings, and of the trading zone that results. For politicians and officers (from IG to constable) evidently amalgamate the norms and practices associated with imported and indigenous moralities; they integrate those associated with modern states with those based in long-established patronage relationships. This suggests that while utilitarian forms of knowledge, skills and behaviour transfer relatively easily between individuals and groups, the influence exercised by normative reform on the behaviour and world-view of recipients is limited in extent and duration.

## **Common knowledge**

The discussion of Nigeria's experience offered here goes some way to addressing our partial understanding of African responses to western policing models and practices. It uses community policing to offer insight into the nature of transmission, the pace and extent of diffusion, and the types of knowledge that affect the outcome of transmission projects. The various practices clarify transmission in three key ways.

First, the response of Nigeria's police and political elite challenges the theory of knowledge and practice underpinning western policies, which assumes that the paradigms, norms and practices developed in liberal democracies can—and should—be transferred to Africa's police. Such an understanding reflects a context-specific type of knowledge and practice which is presented as universally applicable even though it reflects western policy requirements. Trends in scholarship and policy-making play a part, too, as the incorporation of police reform into the security-as-development discourse shows. This is not to suggest that Nigerians do not deserve a humane police service. Rather, it is to acknowledge the power of contextual realities, especially in societies where value is 'attached to the utility of violence in politics, with political and electoral success often indexed to the capacity to threaten or unleash violence'.<sup>26</sup> It is difficult to conceive of imported

<sup>26</sup> Jeremy Ginifer and Olawale Ismail, 'Armed violence and poverty in Nigeria: mini case study for the Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative' (Bradford: University of Bradford, 2005). Consequently, the police play a critical role in elections, as Obasanjo's manipulation of 2007's presidential poll shows.

liberal norms and practices that would be capable of fundamentally changing the knowledge this represents.

A further observation on norms deserves note. Given that the social values underpinning community policing are variable (as in northern Nigeria, where Islamic perspectives on community security and justice affect understanding), it may be that transmission sometimes depends on a moral response to a specific situation. This raises the as yet unanswered question of what norms ground the moral response, and what the limiting factors might be.

Second, Nigeria both confirms and rebuts the value of orthodox police studies in explaining transmission. Although assessments of the relationship between NPF officers and their international advisers remain anecdotal, it appears that Nigerian experience validates the consensus in police studies that officers share a 'set of assumptions, values, modes of thinking, and acting' that enables a degree of occupational understanding—and, potentially, functional and/or cultural transmission—despite attitudinal differences.<sup>27</sup> Notwithstanding disagreements about the acceptability of physical force and corruption, police around the world share a functional knowledge that consists of the socially transmitted attitudes and values that help them cope with their job; Muir's observation that policing commonly engenders cynicism, suspicion and uncertainty remains relevant,<sup>28</sup> and is suggestive of the limits to transmitting democratic-style policing. Accordingly, the idea of occupational commonalities offers a reference point, and a starting-point for generalization about transmission and community policing.

The literature focuses on the habits, values and styles of police in rich liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom and United States, even as it emphasizes occupational commonalities. Together with the broader field of police studies, such literature has developed a normative, ideological and technical agenda based on Anglo-American experience, which is assumed to apply to all police. The NPF's record suggests that it might not. Nigeria's experience also confirms that cultural transmission is selective. Even so, the idea that officers from very different societies share a distinctive outlook on the world and their job offers a context in which to explore not only transmission, but also the heterogeneous forms of knowledge that result when that culture operates in a different or alien environment. Occupational commonalities enable the Nigerian police institution and individual officers to understand many aspects of Anglo-American policing, even though they do not necessarily facilitate transmission. This leads to a third point: knowledge.

Nigerian experience confirms that the forms of knowledge (i.e. information) transmitted most successfully are the tacit, learned forms favoured by practitioners around the world, rather than the disembodied and codified normative forms of knowledge associated with international policing standards and human rights legislation. It suggests that effective transmission requires a zone in which different types of knowledge can be temporarily accommodated. Consequently, the ways

<sup>27</sup> Janet Chan, 'Police stress and occupational culture' in O'Neill et al., *Police occupational culture*, p. 148.

<sup>28</sup> William Muir, *Police: streetcorner politicians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

in which police learn are important—and typically they learn on the basis of personal experience, or from incidents occurring in their occupational environment, rather than on courses. This can include storytelling as well as imitative means. Indeed, Shearing and Ericson argue that culture is a figurative resource made available to officers through stories that provide a world-view, and a library of gambits and precedents;<sup>29</sup> stories offer analogous meanings that permit the transfer of knowledge from one situation to another. We do not know what Nigerian police stories comprise, and content may yet prove more significant than the manner of transmission, but stories probably offer greater scope for transmission than formal procedural rules which do not necessarily guide or dictate behaviour. Also, stories offer scope for incorporating the implicit subculture that influences behaviour. Nigeria's ubiquitous but under-researched roadblocks may offer a suitable case for investigation.

The ways in which western scholars and analysts learn, or fail to learn, are similarly significant. Specifically, most western scholars, policy-makers and activists promote an ethical universalism based on notional 'democratic' standards, or advocate the general transfer of procedural goals developed in, and for, specific cultural fields aligned with liberal democracies, but most collapse practical reason into theoretical reason. The result is, as Bourdieu noted, intellectual fallacy.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Bourdieu's conception of scholastic fallacies offers an elegant insight into the disconnection between liberal tendencies to universalism and the pragmatic approaches common in West Africa. The same is true of his observation that 'knowing how' is treated as if it were synonymous with 'knowing that' when the two are fundamentally different in content and intent.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusions

Rather than focusing on the uneven record of international efforts to transfer democratic-style policing to West Africa, this article addresses a neglected but critical aspect of the process: how imported ideas are received by police officers and political elites, and how they are transformed once filtered through local interests and dispositions.

It suggests that, contrary to donor orthodoxy, transmission, as it relates to police, is better analysed and promoted in terms of technical knowledge and material interests than norms, important aspects of which clash with local political interests and police culture (though norms and values may be embedded in technical skills). Further, the knowledge concerned is a utilitarian form of information (of knowledge *in practice*), rather than the normatively based theoretical forms of knowledge promoted by donors (knowledge *as practice*). This implies

<sup>29</sup> Clifford Shearing and Richard Ericson, 'Culture as figurative action', *British Journal of Sociology* 42: 4, 1991, p. 491.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian meditations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), p. 3. Chan has made Bourdieu's concept of habitus (referring to the principles people use to negotiate structures and practices in the social world) familiar in police studies. But Bourdieu's critique of scholastic reason is arguably more significant for the cultural transmission underpinning security sector reform.

<sup>31</sup> Bourdieu, *Pascalian meditations*, p. 31.



### *Lost in translation*

that successful transfer—a transfer capable of accommodating or embedding a specific type of knowledge—requires the development of a hybrid form of understanding whereby recipients construct, exercise and validate an adaptive form of knowledge (though whether knowledge shapes action, or vice versa, remains unclear).

Distinguishing knowledge as utility from knowledge as theory provides an analytical tool for understanding the hybrid nature of African knowledge and practice as it relates to reform initiatives in the police sector. The knowledge that the NPF and its political masters value is utilitarian in nature; it accommodates international imperatives, ethnic and religious divisions, and policing realities as they are today, rather than as they might be, and it is concerned with facts, techniques and experiences that can be used to achieve specific functional ends. In contrast, the arguments adopted by donors such as DFID are all too often based on knowledge as theory; they promote a globalizing culture on the premise that it expresses a normative truth. In essence, donors see knowledge (e.g. of ‘good’ policing) as a form of truth, whereas Nigerian officers understand knowledge as a means to achieve a specific result.

Analysis of the NPF’s adaptive response to imported paradigms and practices such as community policing suggests that the process of reform is accepted, but the political will required to ensure its effective implementation is absent. Quality fades as reform processes are manipulated by representatives of the existing order so as to protect their interests and achieve predetermined political or personal gains that are at odds with normative reform and efficiency. More generally, the NPF’s experience suggests that while cultural transmission is a universal process, it may be a one-way transfer of skills, behaviours and world-views that requires significant levels of accommodation on the part of the recipients. In other words, transmission is essentially a goal-mediated selective process, whereas culture is ultimately a perspective or assessment.