

## Checkmating the Trends of Insecurity on the Nigeria Roads in the Light of Islām

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### Abstract

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Over the course of time, the Nigerian roads are faced with myriads of intricacies that encumber her state of security and impede the safety of lives and properties. This paper entitled “checkmating the trends of insecurity on the Nigeria roads in the light of Islam” looks into a number of issues responsible for the set back. Consequently, it expounds that the threats posed by the Nigerian Police to security of the roads, the increasing rate of the roads accident and the activities of armed robbers all combined to play a detrimental effects on the safety of lives and properties on the roads. However, the irresponsible attitude of the drivers, bad governance, bad parental upbringing, the poverty ridden nature of the nation, aftermath effects of political thuggery, corruption, and the like are factors expediting the prevalence of insecurity on the motorways. The paper provides a number of solutions to the aforementioned glitches in the light of Islam. It therefore recommends that the government should fine-tune measures to curb corruption in the nation. When done, it would ensure judicious utilisation of the nation’s wealth for poverty alleviation, guarantee good road network and wipe out bad eggs from the civil service in particular and the society at large. In addition, parents should rise up to their responsibility over their children so as to ensure procreation of responsible and accountable road users and citizenry.

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**Keywords:** Roads, Insecurity, Nigeria, Islāmīc Perspective

### Introduction

Prior to the introduction of motor vehicles in Nigeria in the first quarter of the 19th century, the usual day to day movement of people as well as goods and services were basically on foot and complemented by animals (beast of burden).

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These include horses, camels, and donkeys, particularly in the savannah and desert regions, while boats were used in the riverine areas of the country.<sup>i</sup> Although people travelled under difficult conditions for days before arriving at their destination, the routes were safe and secured.

The influx of the colonial enterprising in the country brought about the introduction of bicycles, motorcycles and later cars, lorries, and trailers.<sup>ii</sup> With passage of time, railways and aeroplane came into use. With these developments, a tremendous improvement in movement of human beings, goods and services was recorded. But they also have detrimental effects, for some of these means of transportation pose great threat to pedestrians and other road users. Coupled with the above, some atrocious acts are carried out on the roads by notorious men thereby complicating the security threats to lives and properties as elucidated below.

### **A Flash on Some Major Threats to Road Security in Nigeria**

The Nigeria Police: In the year 2007, a joint research carried out by the World Bank and Transparency International identified the Nigeria Police as the most corrupt organization in the country. They are followed by the Power Holding Company Limited (PHCL). Investigation further affirmed that the Nigeria Police have scaled up roadside bribery from N20 to N50. That is to say, whenever any driver was asked to pull over at a checkpoint for any reason whatsoever, he or she is expected to dish out N50.00 as bribe. This amount is paid as bribes to the "Nigerian department of police roadblock" which exist at every ten or twenty miles.<sup>iii</sup>

The notoriety of the police road block is never news but rather an open secret. If the whole saga ends there, it would have been a better evil. Unfortunately, this scenario has transcends and trickles down to a situation where an organisation that is meant to protect the lives and properties of citizens becomes vicious and barbarous against them.

On many occasions, men and officers of the Nigeria Police Force were severely blamed for extra-judicial killings and shooting of motor drivers who refused to give them bribe. A commentator in one of the Nigerian Dailies described the travail pass through by commercial drivers as he says:

Accidental discharge! Whenever one approaches the checkpoint one becomes very apprehensive. The reason is, it seems the security forces want an accident to happen. Their guns are pointed straight towards oncoming traffic instead of making the muzzle face away. Even an insect bite can cause the now common Accidental Discharge. Those in charge must restrain their operatives. Even prisoners deserve protection.<sup>iv</sup>

Evidences abound of cases where men of the Nigeria Police have accidentally killed innocent citizens thereby leaving the bereaved family to wallow in overwhelming fear and sorrow. For example, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 2012, the fragile peace in the commercial heart city of Onitsha was disrupted as residents took to the streets in protest of the killing of a bus driver, by policemen in one of the illegal checkpoints. The driver Mr. Edwin was reported to have insisted on paying N20 as against N50 requested by the Police men. As he drove away from the checkpoint, one of the policemen followed him on a motorbike and eventually shot him on the neck killing him instantly.<sup>v</sup>

Similarly, on 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2012, a bus driver, Kazeem was allegedly shot dead about 3.15pm by a trigger-happy policeman over N50. This incident happened at the Vulcanizer Bus stop at Egbeda, Akonwonjo Area of Lagos State. An eye witness, Toyin, narrated the event as he says:

I was standing at the Vulcaniser bus stop to board a bus to my house when I heard a gunshot. The bullet hit a commercial bus driver who was conveying some passengers, and the driver lost control of his vehicle and the vehicle hit the bus in front of him. The policeman who shot him was demanding for N50 tip, but the driver said he had paid N50 before. He was driving off when the police shot him.<sup>vi</sup>

A similar incident occurred at Ishashi Area of the State, barely two weeks earlier before the latter. It was reported that a policeman was alleged to have shot dead a commercial motorcycle rider who refused to offer him a bribe of N20.<sup>vii</sup>

In September 2012, a driver of Mazda bus marked KKSF 432 XZ by name Friday Sunday was gunned down by a police corporal identified as Samson Yusuf for refusal to give a bribe of N20. The incident took place along Lagos Ibadan expressway.<sup>viii</sup>

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2013, similar offence was said to have been committed by a police Corporal Emmanuel Agbe against one taxi driver, Chukwuma Harris at the Murtala Mohammed International Airport. The refusal of the victim to give out N300 as bribe out of the N500 tip he collected from passenger resulted into this awful and indeed horrible incident.<sup>ix</sup>

Another dimension through which the Nigerian police is constituting threat to the roads is their involvement in arm robbery on the roads. A notable personality and the pioneer Chairman of former Guardian Express Bank Plc., Ambassador Ihonde acknowledges this act of the police as he says:

Today with the discovery of real and authentic policemen parking their official patrol vehicle in a nearby bush path to rob road travellers on our interstate routes, the verdict is different. We are not now referring to improvised road blocks for toll collection that all road travellers are used to; no. We are talking about policemen identified in their official uniform, and on official duty, stopping passenger buses and other vehicles on our interstate expressways, and robbing the passengers' one after the other and dispossessing them of their cell phones.<sup>x</sup>

With this exhaustive though alarming submission, it is glaring that, the Nigerian Police are indeed a great threat to the security of lives of people on the roads especially the highway roads.

Road Accident:- As people move from one place to another in a bid to secure a means of sustenance or achieve one goal or the other, they are trapped down on the road by death. This sordid incidence shatter their hope and brings to an end their wishes and aspirations in life. Road accidents have claimed lives of not only the drivers and commuters but also of some pedestrians who never dreamed of meeting their death on the road.

In the first half of the year 2011, the Federal Road Safety Corps corroborated the result of the research carried out by World Health Organisation (WHO) which shows that out of 192 countries ranked, Nigeria came 191 in number of deaths due to road accidents.

By implication, Nigeria is the 2nd worst country in the world regarding road accident. It further acknowledged that from every 100, 000 Nigerian, 162 people die from road accidents.<sup>xi</sup>

According to a reliable statistic released by the Corps Marshal of the Federal Road Safety Commission, FRSC, Osita Chidoka, 3000 people were said to have died in road accidents between January and December, 2011. The source further affirms that the casualties were recorded in 2,235 separate cases.<sup>xii</sup> It is pertinent to note that these are only cases reported to the appropriate authorities.

In the second week of June 2012, the Corps Marshal of the Federal Road Safety Commission, (FRSC), Osita Chidoka lamented that Nigeria ranked second to Eritrea in road accident rate. Eritrea the report avowed, top the list of the sub-Sahara Africa countries whose roads were most unsafe.<sup>xiii</sup> Similarly, a reliable report released by the Federal Road Safety Commission, avows that from January-September 2012, 317 people died in 763 crashes while 1298 men, 658 women and 35 children sustained injuries.<sup>xiv</sup> All these records further validates the assertion that road accident poses great challenge to security of lives in Nigeria.

Armed Robbery:- The rate of armed robbery in Nigeria is not only alarming but indeed worrisome. On daily basis the crime of armed robbery is committed in one corner of the nation or the other. The following are few illustrations. In 2008, the National Bureau of Statistic asserts the prevalence of cases of armed robbery in different part of the country. Lagos Oyo, Imo, Cross River, Ogun, Kano State and FCT Abuja recorded highest rate of armed robbery among the states.<sup>xv</sup>

In late 2009, a disquieting headline appeared on Sunday Tribune reads "Robbers kill 20 on Sagamu/Benin Road-Trailer crushes 16 to death in Lagos" The above information was reproduced online by Masterweb News Desk under the title "Robbers kill 20 on Sagamu/Benin Road". The story went that the robbers blocked the highway with big wood and instructed the passengers to disembark from the bus and lie down on the highway. While they were in this state, a trailer said to be on high speed ran over them, killing all of them. The Sector Commander, Federal Road Safety Commission, (FRSC), Ogun State, Mr Olu- Mike Olagunju, also acknowledged this and confirmed the death of 13 men and 7 women while 2 men were said to be seriously injured.<sup>xvi</sup>

In January 2012, some suspected armed robbers were said to have killed 15 Zamfara traders. Similarly, on the eleventh of June 2012, a group of 80 men carrying AK-47rifles raided Dan-Gulbi, Sabuwar Kasuwa, Biya and Gum villages of Dansadau in Maru Local Government of Zamfara State. During the attack, 23 people were killed while several people sustained injury. It was reliably gathered that the incursion was a retaliatory attack by the bandits who were dislodged from their 3 hideout earlier by a combined force of Police and Vigilantes.<sup>xvii</sup> On the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, 2012, some suspected bandits killed 19 people in Dansadau Emirate in Maru, local government of Zamfara state.<sup>xviii</sup> All these revelations are quite disquieting and therefore call for serious attention through unraveling the factors expediting their prevalence and checkmating them in the light of Islam.

### **Factors Expediting the Prevalence of the Aforementioned Threats**

Irresponsible attitude: To be responsible, one has to be answerable and accountable to somebody for an action. In that case, one receives the blame for failure and commendation for success. Lack of responsible drivers, policemen and citizens have resulted into the insecurity on Nigeria roads. It is a clear act of irresponsibility for a driver to start his vehicle without necessarily observing its condition. Indiscriminate parking, over speeding, wrong overtaking, disregard to rules and regulation of the road and lack of concentration while driving are all evidences of being an irresponsible road user in Nigeria. Consequently these factors play negative role on the security of Nigeria roads.

Quite a number of road accidents on roads are due to the influence of drug and alcohol on drivers. Road accident has claimed an inestimable numbers of lives and maimed incalculable number of people.<sup>xix</sup> The consequences of the insecurity of lives and properties of Nigerians on Nigeria roads can never be overemphasised.

The task of maintaining peaceful coexistence among people and ensuring compliance with law and order is in Nigeria vested on irresponsible policemen a factor which stimulates wasting of lives of innocent citizens at different road blocks by this law enforcement agency. It is reliably ascertained that no one would partake in the job of highway robbery except an irresponsible and indeed an imprudent person. In April 2005, two irresponsible police officers in charge of police armoury were paraded at Zone 4 police Headquarters for their involvement in the sales of police guns to armed robbers.<sup>xx</sup>

Recently, some robbers caught in Abuja willingly confessed that their arms and ammunition were purchased from some custom officials. Whosoever was responsible for this has no doubt proved to be irresponsible.<sup>xxi</sup>

Although it is the responsibility of the government to provide motorable roads for the citizens and equally ensure its maintenance but the question remains, to which extent is the government carrying out these responsibilities? Below is a report by The Managing Director of FERMA, Mr Gabriel Amuchi on bad maintenance culture of the roads. In his statement he says:

At inception (of FERMA) in 2004, the agency inherited Federal roads that were constructed as far back as at in the 70's after the civil war and during the oil boom era. Although the roads had the life span of about 20 to 25 years the poor maintenance culture of Nigeria coupled with the various forms of abuses in the use of the roads has led to the collapse of these roads.<sup>xxii</sup>

In 2011, a petrifying statistics was released by the National Co-ordinator of the Rural Access and Mobility Project (RAMP), Ubandoma Ularamu. In his words,

Out of over 160,000 kilometres of secondary and tertiary roads in Nigeria, with an average registered network of 4,000 kilometres per state, only about 10 – 15 per cent is paved. While a large proportion of this network remains in poor or very poor condition with only 15 per cent of federal roads in good condition. It is sad to note that rural roads which are statutorily referred to as local government roads which constitute about 132,000 kilometers (67.7 per cent) of the entire road networks in Nigeria is the worst hit by this state of disrepair.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The above submission strongly upholds that over the course of time, Nigerian government had failed in her responsibility of provision of more motorable roads and maintenance of the available ones. As a result of these, the rate of accident continues to increase with corresponding death rate.

**Bad Parental Training:-** A psychologist Mr. Benjamin Ajayi, argues that psychologists and criminologists for years, conducted various researches on why people commit various crimes, especially armed robbery.

Eventually it was realised that there is a connection between underlying criminal behaviours and people who display early anti-social behaviours.<sup>xxiv</sup> Few among the anti social behaviour include drug abuse, alcoholism, cultism, stealing, and pugnacious behaviour.

Non challant attitude of parents to these deviant practices of children at the early stage of their life often translate into bigger crime such as highway robbery. Similarly, when such a child is recruited into the police force, he sees human soul as a mere chattel which could be terminated for a penny without any course for regret. The negative effect of alcohol and drugs on a driver is obvious and noticeable in their carelessness. The various forms of crime promoting programmes and films which parents allow their children to watch at home also play great negative role on their psyche as it consequently graduate them into mindless sets of human beings.

Poverty ridden: Some people have become armed robbers simply because of the economic milieu which the country is passing through. Unfortunately, in an attempt to maintain their family socially and economically, they are desperately pushed to embark on armed robbery as they could not get a veritable job to do. In one of his article, Kwowusi substantiates on this as he says "There are many Nigerians who have become armed robbers simply because they cannot eke out a simple living for themselves..."<sup>xxv</sup>

Thousands of university graduates roam about the street without any job to sustain their living. In a bid to keep body and soul together, they result into highway robbery. The deteriorating economy of the nation also prevents vehicle owners from putting their cars into good condition. As a result of this, pertinent problems which need to be given utmost consideration are given less attention or totally ignored thereby leading to fatal accidents.

Laziness: - There are people who are too lazy to work and they don't want to spare time to learn an honest trade. Instead of working, they would rather pick up arms and rob people of their belongings. This quest to become rich over night is a tradition common among the youths.

High rate Of cupidity and flamboyancy:- Addiction to a fake type of lifestyles often prompt some people into robbery.



The society is such a greedy one which fashions a flamboyant lifestyle and people struggle to get money at all cost in order to support this lifestyle.

Aftermath effects of political thuggery:-Unfortunately, the politicians use the youths to achieve their selfish political goals and at the end of the day, dumb them after having achieved their aim. These thugs who are usually addicted to drug become stranded and see no other alternative than to pick up arms against people on the streets and highways. Few among them atimes are lucky to be recruited into the police force through the influence of the politicians or by virtue of their luck. The greedy and cruel natures which are part and parcel of them often prompt them to extort money from drivers to the extent of shooting when their demand is turned down.

Corruption: Many of the traffic officers are corrupt and as such give room for violators of rules and regulations to escape punishment. Instead of ensuring that driver abide by all the rules and regulation guiding driving, traffic officers rather extort money from drivers to allow them flaw these laws. One of the consequences is road accidents where lives and properties are lost. Corruption is also responsible for the bad state of our roads. Many atimes money or funds budgeted for constructions of roads are diverted into private pocket leading to poor shady work.<sup>xxvi</sup>

### **Checkmating the Trends of Insecurity on the Nigeria roads in the Light of Islām**

It is firmly established in the Glorious Qur'an that man himself and all his possession belongs to no one except Allāh. In view of the above, man is given guidelines on how to utilise them as he shall definitely account for them on the Day of Resurrection. It is enough for a reasonable police officer for example, to realise that he has been given the golden opportunity (job) which others are desperately searching for. Besides the apprehension which befalls him if he misuses this opportunity by shooting innocent drivers, the greatest trepidation awaits him on the day of accountability. On that day, man's actions shall either be for him or against him Qur'an (41:46), Qur'an (45:15). The small and the large sins committed by man are clearly written for presentation before him on the day of reckoning Qur'an (99:7-8).

Highway robbers also have a leaf to borrow from the above lessons. The strength granted to man is a scarce resource from Allāh which is highly needed by many who are lying on sick beds. Therefore this strength must be utilised in commendable acts. Furthermore, extortion of money from drivers and armed robbery are acts of oppression. In one of his traditions, Prophet (S.A.W.) seriously cautions man against the acts of oppression as its consequences on the day of accountability is severe.<sup>xxvii</sup> Man is therefore expected to be responsible by seeking for means of sustenance from the lawful sources as against dependence on the hard labour of other people whose earnings and life savings are extorted by force.

Drivers are equally expected to reflect on the fact that, the moment one sits behind the steering trying to start the car, he has assumed a position of trust and accepted a crucial responsibility. This responsibility is vested on him by Allāh who has given man the wisdom to construct and control such a magnitude of mechanical engine called vehicle for the satisfaction of his daily needs. The state of the vehicle must therefore be examined before proceeding and in the course of utilising it, man is expected to be responsible so as to ensure safety of lives and properties otherwise he shall be held responsible on the day of accountability.

A child not well trained is easily susceptible to bad behaviour or misled by the miscreants as naturally children are readily given to bad thoughts and devilish inspirations. When a child grows up into different deviant practices, such as cultism, alcoholism, drug addiction, nasty attitude and bad influence of peer group, he poses a great threat to security of lives and properties in the society. To prevent this and ensure the procreation of refined children, Islām summons parents with the duty of ensuring the inculcation of the right culture in their children Q: (66:6). Training of children requires concerted efforts of all the society and as such each and every person is expected to be up and doing as each is regarded as a shepherd and shall give an account of his or her stewardship on the Last day.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The institution of *Zakāt*<sup>xxix</sup> Q: (51:19), Q: (9:60) and *Sadqah*<sup>xxx</sup> when properly administered, would promote poverty eradication from the society. Acculturation of the following teachings of the prophet would also help in ameliorating poverty ridden which has eaten deep in the society. For example, the Prophet (S.A.W.) says: *Whosoever dispels a person from distress Allāh will dispel him from his distress here in the world and in the hereafter.*<sup>xxxi</sup> *Whosoever wants to be under the shade of Allāh, (on the Day of Resurrection) let him take care of a distressed person or let him come to his aid.*<sup>xxxii</sup>

Refusal to give out *Zakat* according to the Prophet (S.A.W.) attracts severe punishment on the person on the Day of Judgment.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Greediness is an evil which when man fails to checkmate, would result to an awful and regrettable act. Moreover life no doubt is temporal as Allāh (S.W.T.) says:

Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children-like the example of a rain whose {resulting} plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes {scattered} debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment and forgiveness from Allāh and approval. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion. Qur'an (57:20)

Alcoholism and drug abuse are seriously condemned in Islām Qur'an (5:93-94), Qur'an (4:29) and Qur'an (2:195) as they both lead to destruction of the human health and demoralisation of the noble status of man. A drunkard or a person under the influence of drug easily loses his sense of reasoning and as such miscalculate when he drives. Such a person would equally consider extermination of a soul as nothing when he holds gun or needs money desperately to satisfy his selfishness. To ensure abstinence from alcoholism, 80 lashes of strokes is stipulated by Islam to be given to a Muslim who drinks.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The sanctity of the human soul is given utmost consideration in Islam as killing of a soul is regarded as exterminating the entire human race in the sight of Allāh Qur'an (5:32). To curb the menace of robbery thereby ensuring security of roads, the Qur'an instructs that an armed robber be punished by either execution, crucifixion, amputation of hand and foot on the opposite direction and exile Qur'an (5:33). It is in view of the above that scholars suggested that crucifixion should be applied where murder is committed and property robbed. A robbery case where murder is committed but no property is robbed attracts death sentence while that which is devoid of murder but involves robbery of property attracts cutting of a hand and a foot. In a situation where murder is not committed and property is not robbed but the road is made unsecured, the punishment is exile or imprisonment.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Furthermore, political thuggery and giving room for corrupt practices to thrive are all signs of bad governance which Islam, strictly reprimands as the Prophet says:

A ruler who having obtained control over this affair of the Muslims does not strive for their betterment and does not serve them generally shall not enter paradise with them.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Whoso from you is appointed by us to a position of authority and he conceals from us a needle or something smaller than that, it would be considered as misappropriation {of public funds} and will {have to} produce it on the Day of Judgment.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

If leaders leave up to their task by standing firm against all forms of corruption and ensuring judicious utilisation of the enormous resources of the nation, it would pave way for construction of standard motorways and proper maintenance of the available ones. In addition, it would promote poverty alleviation and by implication foster security of lives and property on the Nigerian roads. The above prophetic traditions are enough for a wise man to reflect upon and make a change of mind before it is too late.

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is crystal clear that the Nigerian roads are faced with myriads of problems which make it insecure for people to travel. The threat to security posed by the Nigeria roads emanate from the activities of some ferocious policemen and armed robbers coupled with the escalating rate of accidents on the roads. As a result of the irresponsible attitude of people, bad parental training, poverty ridden, laziness, high rate of cupidity, aftermath effects of political thuggery and corruption, the menace of insecurity of roads in Nigeria continue to worsen.

## **Recommendation**

Government should fine-tune strict measures to curb corruption in the nation so as to guarantee good road network and wipe out the bad heads from the civil service in particular and the society at large.

The legislative and judiciary arms of the government should discharge their duties effectively and efficiently so as to ensure good governance.

In the course of training of policemen, facilitators or instructors should lay emphasis on moral values so as to have disciplined officers as security men and not jeopardisers.

Erring police officers caught should be seriously dealt with so as to serve as lesson for others.

Parents should rise up to their responsibility over their children so as to ensure the proliferation of responsible and accountable road users and citizens.

Federal government should give room for application of *Shariah* laws on Muslims as such would give room for security of lives and properties and as well leads to the realisation of its reformative role on man's life.

Addressing this problem requires a concerted effort where parents are expected to contribute their quota by modeling their children for better tomorrow.

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- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Ibn al-Hajjaj op.cit, Vol.3. p1020.No. 4514.