

# African Traditional Method of Social Control Mechanism: A Sociological Review of Native Charms in Farm Security in Ayetoro Community, Ogun State, Nigeria

Adebisi A. Sunday, Babajide Adeokin

**Abstract**—The persistent rise in farm theft in rural region of Nigeria is attributed to the lack of adequate and effective policing in the regions; thus, this brought about the inevitable introduction of native charms on farmlands as a means of fortification of harvests against theft in Ayetoro community. The use of charm by farmers as security on farmlands is a traditional crime control mechanism that is largely based on unwritten laws which greatly influenced the lives of people, and their attitudes toward the society. This research presents a qualitative sociological study on how native charms are deployed by farmers for protection against theft. The study investigated the various types of charms that are employed as security measures among farmers in Ayetoro community and the rationale behind the use of these mechanisms as farm security. The study utilized qualitative method to gather data in the research process. Under the qualitative method, in-depth interview method was adopted to generate a robust and detailed data from the respondents. Also the data generated were analysed qualitatively using thematic content analysis and simple description which was preceded by transcription of data from the recorder. It was revealed that amidst numerous charms known, two major charms are used on farmlands as a measure of social control in Ayetoro community, Ogun state South West Nigeria. Furthermore, the result of this study showed that, the desire for safekeeping of harvest from pilferers and the heavy punishments dispense on offenders by native charms are the reasons why farmers deploy charms on their farms. In addition, findings revealed that the adoption of these charms for protection has improved yields among farmers in the community because the safety of harvest has been made possible by virtue of the presence of various charms in the farm lands. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that such measures should be recognized in mainstream social control mechanisms in the fight against crime in Nigeria and the rest of the world. Lastly, native charms could be installed in all social and cooperate organisation and position of authority to prevent theft of valuables and things hold with utmost importance.

**Keywords**—Farm theft, native charms, mechanism, Ayetoro, pilferer.

## I. INTRODUCTION

AGRICULTURAL activities such as crops and livestock production in Africa play a significant part in feeding both the rural and urban population, increase government revenue, act as source of employment and as well as provide the basis for exports [1]. In Nigeria, despite crude oil

constituting larger percentage of government revenue, agriculture contributes a total of 40% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs about 70% of the working population of Nigeria [2]. Furthermore, agriculture is the largest activity in rural areas in Nigeria where 50% of the population lives and actively engage in crop production and animal rearing [3]. Meanwhile, agriculture by its versatile nature has a multiplier effect capable of driving a nation's economy towards development [4]. The knowledge and the realization of this have propelled the Nigerian government in many ways to encourage its citizens to engage in agriculture as a way out of hunger and poverty through different agricultural policies and programs. However, the goal of making many Nigerians swim out of poverty and hunger has been marred by frequent pilfering of farm harvest (a predatory behaviour in which a person continues to steal from the farm or an act capable of causing serious loss to the farmers) [5]. Farm theft remains a major problem causing pain and loss to farmers in Nigeria. Reference [6], in Ijebu North local government, reported that farmers were well aware of the occurrence of farm theft on their farms, majority of them had fallen victims of criminal activities on their farms and had experienced great financial losses as a result of such activities. More so, there has been serious problem of protein malnourishment responsible for infant mortality and general weakness of the body in the country [7]. The reason for this poor protein intake is inadequate supply of animals. Reference [8] identifies one of the major sources of this problem as livestock theft, that is, illegal carting away and exploitation of a good number of animals from farmers. Reference [9] further maintained that theft of harvest (otherwise known as pilfering) is fast becoming a research problem and it accounts for as high as an average of 5% of the total cost to marketers and 4% total quantities handled. However, this reality (problem) makes farmers especially among the Yoruba people in Nigeria to embark on the use of charms (an old practice) to control criminal activities on their farms. More so, the Yoruba community, unlike every other healthy society has standards of conduct and sanctions for any violation or disobedience. This means that the desire for security of life and protection of farmland from theft, especially in the rural areas necessitate the development and the use of charms (also known as Juju in West Africa). The use of charms in itself for protection of farmland is a traditional crime control mechanism that is

Adebisi Sunday is with the University of Ibadan, Nigeria (e-mail: adebisi.sunday9@gmail.com).

largely based on unwritten laws which greatly influenced people's lives and attitudes towards the society [10].

Against this background, this study focused on investigating the types of farm security charms that exist among farmers and the rationale behind the use of charms as farm security by farmers. In addition, this study will showcase the existence of that part of traditional method of social control that is often been neglected and not significantly emphasized in criminology literature. The study was carried out in Ayetoro community, Ogun state, South-western Nigeria.

## II. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

There are several theories of criminology that emphasize the relevance of punishment in discouraging criminal act or deviant behavior but the one that is adopted in this article is the deterrence theory that was developed by Cesare Beccaria in 1764 and is deeply rooted in the principle of rationality [15]. The proponent of this theory maintained that, for there to be deterrence, punishment must be meted out and the only justification for the punishment of an offender is deterrence. In other words, for an offender to be discouraged from committing a crime punishment is inevitable. However, associated with this theory is specific deterrence and general deterrence.

Specific deterrence is designed—by the nature of the proscribed sanctions—to deter only the individual offender from committing that crime in the future. Proponent of specific deterrence also believes that punishing offenders severely will discourage them from engaging in similar act in the future. An adulterer, for example, would be deterred from committing adultery because of the unpleasant experience he or she suffered from being apprehended. Thus, enough pain should be applied to offset the amount of pleasure derived from committing adultery.

General deterrence is created to discourage crime in the entire populace. In other words, general deterrence is achieved when crime is prevented in the general public [15]. Therefore, making the punishment of an offender public, the individuals watching would be discouraged from committing the same act. Thus, when an offender suffers for committing crime in a farm where native charms has been placed, it serves as a warning signal to other potential offenders in the crowd (general population). For instance, a pastor was stuck at a shrine in Abeokuta (Ogun state, Nigeria) for trying to destroy it [16]; this serves as a complete warning signal to others who might want to engage in similar act. In other words general deterrence is like advertising a product to the general populace. Furthermore, central to this theory are three major components of deterrence; severity, certainty and celerity of punishment.

The pioneer of this theory believed that, the more severe a punishment is, the more a rational calculating human being will desist from criminal acts. The assumption here is that, punishment that is not severe enough will not deter criminals from committing crimes. Furthermore, certainty of punishment simply means making sure that punishment takes place whenever a criminal act is committed. Beccaria believes

that if individuals know that their acts will be punished, they will refrain from committing an offence in the future [15].

Lastly, punishment must be swift in order to deter crime. In other words, there must be celerity. It is assumed that the faster an offender is sanctioned for committing a crime, the higher the likelihood that such individual will see no gain in crime. Therefore, it is believed that, when there is severity, celerity and certainty of punishment, a logical person will weigh the cost and benefit before engaging in crime and will be deterred from violating the law if the cost outweigh the benefit [15]. Native charms, however, possess these three components of deterrence (severity, certainty, and celerity). The punishment suffered by an offender who has stolen from a farm protected by native charms is always severe; ranging from sickness, misfortunes and even death. A research carried out in south eastern Nigeria [10] maintained that, it is a constant traditional practice for people to use ashes from their kitchen to secure properties left on the roadside or displayed for sale by an absent seller. It was believed that stealing anything that had kitchen ash on it would render the thief to ashes as soon as the thief ate anything cooked in a kitchen in his/her home or elsewhere. That means the person would die suddenly and go back to ashes from which he was incarnated. Furthermore, punishment meted out on an offender by native charms is always swift, for example, stealing property under the protection of Ogun (god of iron) in south western Nigeria attracts instant accident and eventually death. Lastly, it does not matter how long it takes after an offence has been committed in a farm where charms have been placed, the punishment will surely come.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional research design because it was a one time study that focused on farmers with similar experience and who share the same cultural values, norms, symbols and tradition, ethnicity and socio-economic background. Vital information relevant to the study was elicited from the respondents through a well-structured in-depth interview and key informant interview guide. The purposively selected site is Ogun state in south-western Nigeria. There is a big pool of farmers in this location who are actively engaged in traditional method of farm protection against incessant theft of farm produce by criminals. Qualitative data were obtained from 15 in-depth interviews with farmers who are victims of farm theft.

## IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### *The Types of Farm Security Charms*

There are several types of native charms that are deployed as security on the farm among farmers in Ayetoro community and the cost of making most of these charms are less expensive compared to the cost of reporting and pursuing a case within the formal settings (police). To support this, one of the farmers, also an herbalist, that was interviewed maintained that:

There are several ways to protect a farm traditionally

and there are several charms to that effect but I will mention only the one I do for people. It is called **Mariwo**, a gift from Ogun (god of iron). It is cheap and easy to make, all I need to do to make this charm is to get a palm front and tie it at the center of my client's farm with some incantations. Whoever goes there to steal behind the owners back will die from accident within seven days unless such person confesses. This is why not all accidents one witness on the road are natural, some of them are caused by the wrath of Ogun (god of iron). This particular charm works very fast. If someone eventually steals from the farm where this charm is and such person confesses on time, sacrifices will be offered to appease Ogun for forgiveness but if not the person will be soaked and buried in blood.... (kii/farmer/herbalist/Ayetoro community/south-western Nigeria/September, 2017).

Another respondent that was interviewed to support this claim stated that:

I make use of a charm called Ale (Mark), when this charm which is made in a form of mark is placed on the farm, if a person take from my farm with a pure heart when hungry, the person will not be affected except if the person is stealing with the aim of selling such harvest for money. The unique thing about this particular charm is that, when someone steals from my farm, and that person escapes with the loot, when such criminal gets to a T-junction where the road is divided into three, such criminal will be trapped and will be confused on where to go until he/she is caught....(idi/farmer/September, 2107).

However, while there are remedies or antidotes to the consequences that will be suffered by offenders (criminals) who trespasses on a farm where local charms are deployed as security, for other charms there are no remedies for their consequences on their victims (the consequences of stealing from the farm where these charms are placed is death). The only remedy or antidote to the wrath of these charms is to stay off farms where they have been deployed as security. Lastly, from the findings of the study, it was discovered that, most of the charms applied on the farm as security have some form of forces and supernatural backing that makes this charm very potent in prosecuting crime traditionally.

#### *The Rationale behind the Use of Charms as Farm Security by Farmers*

Base on the response of participants it was revealed that, there are several reasons why farmers deploy charms as security on their farms. This is related to what [11] said, that people deploy several charms at farms and at homes to secure their lives and property against intrusion and he went further to mentioned some of this charms that are commonly used among the Yoruba people to achieve this purpose. Similarly the interview conducted revealed that, the need for protection is the major reason why farmers deploy native charms on their farms. Some of the farmers said that each event of theft on their farm always leave nothing for them to eat for the year. This could be one of the plausible reason why a lot of farmers

(over 50%) of the population that are actively engaged in agriculture in Nigeria are poor. This is related to the study carried out by [12] where it is maintained that the effects of farm theft on the victims involves two things; financial losses (95.83%) and emotional disturbances (36.11%). In a similar study carried out at Ijebu North, Ogun State, [6] observed that farmers were well aware of the occurrence of theft of produce on farms, majority of them had fallen victims to thieves several times and had suffered great financial losses. Farmers in Ayetoro community, therefore, maintained that the losses they suffer each year on their farm is one of the reasons why charms are used on the farm to protect the farm against thieves. This is further similar to the study carried out by [3] in Kogi state where it was revealed that farmers relied heavily on fence and charms to secure their farms from invading thieves, this also validate the research of [13] in Bini kingdom where it is maintained that Festival of Curses' was brought to the fore in combating crime in Edo state. Furthermore, charms are employed to protect young children and animals from diseases or the effect of the evil eye [14]. Thus, an old man with over 35 years of experience in farming, gave an account of his ordeal on the farm:

Native charms are basically used to protect farms; because, it is the right thing to do. Over the years, I have been battling with low yield on my farms as a result of criminals invading my farms, sometimes I even have to sleep in my farm just to ensure the security of my farms. But one day I just got tired of all the stress of having to secure my farms all by myself and besides the stealing won't stop, so I decided to go the traditional way to secure my farms by using charms .... (idi/male/farmer/September, 2017).

Another person opined that:

Native charms are very potent in combating and prosecuting crimes. Majorly traditional charms are buried or hanged on the farm to protect the farm from ravaging thieves. I am into cassava and banana planting and most of the time people come from within the community to cause me pains, most of the time I will work very hard and when it is time to harvest, I usually have nothing to show for it. I reported this to the community head severally with no positive result and being someone that is not educated, I don't know how to go and report my case to the police so I went back to that old tradition that has been long forgotten by me to protect my farms. I resorted to the use of a charm called Ado efori (headache causing charm), to protect my farms against evil people which doesn't cost me anything. Anytime I put this charm on my farm and somebody steals from that farm, such person will start having severe headache that his/her eyeballs will start popping out gradually unless the person confesses....(idi/male/farmer/September, 2017)

However, beyond this, the study further discovered other plausible reasons why farmers use charms on their farms and these include:

**Cultural value and tradition:** Research revealed that the practice of the use of charms is a religion or part of the belief

system of the people that must not stop. This is related to the words of Emile Durkheim, where he maintained that, religion is universal and a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things which include three major elements; belief, ritual, and experience which are also embedded in the use of charms [17]. Furthermore, it also validates the popular belief that 'belief in magic is almost universal throughout Black Africa, and so is fear of witchcraft'. The interview conducted revealed that, the use and application of local charms or traditional medicine for the protection of oneself and farmlands is a tradition and ritual that must not stop, it is an ancestral gift and a religion. A respondent maintained that:

Obviously, the practice of native charms is a religion pass down to us by our forefathers and not following these norms and principles laid down by them, to me is a deviant behavior and betrayal to the confidence and trust that our forefathers have in us. Before Africa was colonized as a continent by the white, our forefathers have been using traditional charms for protection and security so it must continue... (idi/farmer/Ayetoro community/September, 2017).

**Severity of punishment:** Offenders caught on farms through native charms usually suffer strict punishment. Farmers in Ayetoro community reported that harvest has been stable since they started deploying charms as security on their farm. These follow the assumption of Cesare Beccaria in his own version of deterrence theory where he maintained that, the higher the amount of punishment given to an offender for committing a crime the higher the level of deterrence both at the individual level and the general public [15]. The punishment meted out on an offender by native charms is always severe and based on the findings of this study, it ranges from severe headache, swollen body, bending (the offender will start folding up in no time), death of loved ones and death of the offender himself/herself. Furthermore, these punishments can come immediately or later but it does not matter how long it takes, the punishment will surely be meted out on the offender.

In the interview conducted, one respondent mentioned that:

The nature of punishment that an offender gets for stealing from a farm under the watch of local charms is the reason why farmers use it. The punishment is always severe, for some offenders, it is swollen body, for some it can be sickness, for some it can be death of their loved ones and even they themselves. For instance, there is a charm called Agbaku (death) whoever steals from the farm where this charm is placed will die. It's not negotiable, native charms are better felt than mere words of mouth. The consequences that comes with them, when taken for granted is always severe and painful ....(idi/farmer/September, 2017).

## V. SUMMARY

The crux of this paper is the identification of some of the native charms deployed to secure farm by farmers and the major reasons why charms are deployed as security on the farm.

## VI. CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study we can conclude that native charms are strong, insurmountable and better felt than words of mouth as mentioned by one of the respondent. Native charms have all the element of deterrence (celerity, severity and certainty) [15] which are instrumental in discouraging people from engaging in acts that are injurious to other people and the society at large. Thus, when an individual (criminal) is being punished or suffer the consequences of encroaching on a land or farm that is secured by native charms, it serves as a warning to other potential offender within the crowd that might want to engage in similar act and as a result both specific and general deterrence is achieved. Therefore, it is recommended that, beyond the protection of farmlands, native charms should be deployed in the protection of properties and other valuables, both in households and institutions.

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