

# Currents and Perspectives in Sociology



*edited by*

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## Chapter Eighteen

# The prison as a social system

– R.A. Okunola, A.A. Aderinto & A.A. Atere

There is nothing cheering about prison life. The buildings are dull; the cells are semi-dark and the vast majority of inmates are rough in mind and body. They constitute a kind of state with state functionaries within prisons (Awolowo, O; 1985).

### Introduction

Imprisonment as a form of punishment for offenders was not new to many societies in pre-colonial Nigeria. For example the traditional legal system in the North established the Gidan Yari (which is often behind the palace of the Emir); the Yorubas had the Ogboni room and the Edos had the Ewedo house. In fact, Fredric Lugard gave a description of Kano City's Gidan Yari in 1903 as follows:

The interior is divided into departments, each 17ft and the walls were pierced with holes at base through which legs of those sentenced to death thrust up to their thigh, and they were left to be trodden till they die. It is unventilated except for one hole on the wall through which they creep in. The total space is 2618 cubic feet and at the time Kano was taken over, there were 135 inmates. *As quoted in Meek (1969: 277)*

However, modern prison system started in Nigeria in 1872 when the first prison was established at Broad Street, Lagos. Nigeria today has some 132 'modern' prisons spread across the 36 states and the Federal capital territory of Abuja.

The society confines offenders in the prison for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons that bother on punishment are also contained in this volume (see Obioha, E.). Perhaps it is important to note here that one of the justifications for imprisonment rests on its legal uses - custody, coercion and punishment (see Morgan, 1997). Our concern here is to examine the prison community as a functional social unit; that is prison as a social system. In doing this, we shall identify the social actors, patterns of social intercourse and the consequences of the emerging networks

especially on the inmates. We shall also attempt to focus on an ever-recurring concern surrounding the prison as a re-socialization institution in society.

The rest of our discussion will be divided into two. First, we shall present a brief discussion on what can be termed "The Sociology of the Prison". Our second concern will rest on the contradictions that exist between the reasoning, which leads sentencers to send offenders to prison and the objectives pursued by those who manage the prisons.

### **The prison: a sociological sketch**

Sociologically, the prison is a place of confinement. It is a place where offenders are kept. According to McCorkle and Korn (1970:409),

A prison is a physical structure in a geographical location where a number of people, living under highly specialized conditions, utilise the resources and adjust to the alternatives presented to them by a unique kind of social environment. (See also Rottman & Kimberly 1975)

It is a castle-like structure isolated from the community and is expected to protect the law-abiding from the 'undesirables'. Thus the prison is organised to protect the larger community against what are thought to be intentional dangers to it. From this root the welfare of the persons thus sequestered is not the immediate issue (Goffman 1961).

An isolated community - often with high walls, locked orders and barbed wire - it is expected to return its 'clients', who were once the undesirables of society, back as 'fits' into the mainstream macro-society (Odekunle, 1974). Adelola (1994:125) commenting on sociology of the prison opined that the physical appearance of the prison, of tall walls, supplanted with barbed wires, an iron-gate antiquated buildings separate their prison from its larger community. These isolated structures are meant to accomplish the confinement aspect, while confinement itself is supposed to detach the prisoner from his previous infectious group. This 'new world', it is expected, will provide the inmate with particular opportunities of rethinking, stocktaking and register of his ways. It is this reformatory function of the prison that has been called to question given what would appear to be the punitive ideology of the prison system.

The prison as a community has some features, which centre on the breakdown of barriers ordinarily separating three major spheres of life that are often taken for granted. These are in the areas of sleep, play and work. According to Goffman (1961); McCorkle and Korn (1970); Morgan (1997) these features include:

- all aspects of inmates' life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority;
- members' daily activity is carried out in the immediate company of a large batch of others;

- phases of day's activities are highly scheduled and imposed from above through a system of explicit formal rulings and body of officials;
- the contents of the various enforced activities form part of a single overall rational plan designed to fulfil the official aims of the institutions.

Furthermore, in the prison community there is a split. The first group comprises of a large class of individuals who live in and who have restricted contact with the world outside the walls; this group constitutes the inmates (offenders). The second group, a small class, that supervises the inmates are called the staff and are socially integrated into the outside world. This split, together with the restricted social mobility, engenders narrow hostile stereotypes within the community. With this develops different social and cultural worlds that move along beside each other, with points of official contact but little mutual penetration. The world of work in the prison community presents a different scenario than that which obtains in the world outside. Here work is induced not by reward, but by threat of dire punishment, thus leading to demoralization on the part of the inmates. This is because in the prison the direct relationship between work done and material value received, as well as individual productivity and personal status have broken down.

Within the context highlighted above, inmates come into the prison system with full-fledge, already acquired way of life including the concept of the 'self', which has been described as 'presenting culture' (Goffman, 1961). However the prison as a correctional institution is not interested in this old habits and ways. The prison system creates and sustains a particular kind of tension between the home world and itself using this as a strategic leverage in the management of inmates.

At the point of entrance the offender is immediately stripped of his old supports: a fact symbolically demonstrated often by the removal of all personal effects brought from the outside world. (See section 43 of Standard Minimum Rules for the treatment of Prisoners). The self of the recruit is systematically modified. This marks the beginning of a radical shift in the moral career of the prisoner. It is a standardized process of defacement of the person. The family, occupational and educational career lines are severed by the act of confinement behind the wall and a stigmatised status of 'the rejected' is substituted. This has been called degradation ceremony (McCorkle & Korn, 1954).

As a resident within the prison, autonomous decisions are eliminated through the process of collective scheduling of daily activity. Channels of communication with the outside world and expressive signs of respect for the staff are coercively and continuously demanded. Any member of staff has certain rights to discipline any member of the inmate class. Authority of staff is directed to matters of dress, deportment, social intercourse, manners, and so on. Any misbehaviour in one sphere of life is held against the standing of the inmate in other spheres. In sum, the inmate is constantly enveloped in a tissue of constraints, which negates the basis for control that staff are expected to exert over interpersonal environment. This close enforcement of rules makes inmates to live in chronic anxiety about breaking the rules and chronic

wary about the consequences of breaking them. Thus the desires to 'stay out of trouble' is generally present amongst inmates and often lead them to avoid certain levels of sociability with fellows in order to avoid incidents that may occur in these circumstances.

As the modification progresses, inmates receive instruction (formal and informal) in what has been referred to as the privilege system of the prison (see section 7 of Standard Minimum rules). The instruction covers:

- House roles - prescriptions, proscriptions and regulations
- Rewards and privileges in exchange for obedience to staff in action and spirit
- Punishment designated as the consequence of breaking rules.

The overall consequence of the privilege system is that co-operation is obtained from persons who often have cause to be uncooperative. Thus each group has a clear awareness of the phenomenon of 'messing-up' - a process of engaging in forbidden activity. The privilege system also fosters a fraternization process amongst the inmates. Within the context of the tissue of constraints and the need to 'stay out of trouble', inmates are known to develop a system of secondary adjustment which does not directly challenge Staff management but which allows inmates to obtain disallowed satisfactions or allowed ones by disallowed means.

In the course of adapting, inmates develop some kind of code amongst their close associates. Such adaptations according to Golfman (1961) are:

*Situational Withdrawal*: a situation of curtailment of involvement in interaction. This often manifests itself in the form of prison psychosis, which is often irreversible.

*Rebellious line*: a situation in which inmates challenge the institution by flagrantly refusing to co-operate with staff in almost anyway. This is often temporary and often seen as an initial phase reaction which can later lead to withdrawal or other line of adaptation

*Colonization*: Here inmates sample some values of the outside world that are provided in the prison system. Around this sample, inmates build a relatively contented existence within the prison system.

*Conversion*: the inmate takes over completely the official view of himself and try to act out the role of the perfect inmate. He/she "toes" a more disciplined, moralistic and monochromatic line.

While the above are the likely adaptations, inmates are not likely to be pigeonholed into any. Most inmates are known to want to 'play it cool', which is a somewhat opportunistic disposition. The objective of 'playing it cool' is to have a maximum chance of eventually getting out physically and psychically undamaged from the various constraints in the prison. Adaptation, in sum, represents a way of managing the tension between the home world and the deprivations and pains of the prison world.

The consequence of adaptive mechanisms in the words of McCorkle and Kom (1970) is such that:



The adaptive inmate destroys a major therapeutic objective of the prison experience, namely, that of learning compliance to duly constituted authority. By learning that we can successfully deceive, connive, and evade, the inmate is re-encouraged in the hope that, by using the social skills perfected in prison, we may avoid the unfortunate 'errors' that first trapped him and sent him there.

Furthermore, the secondary adjustment leads to a form of Kitchen Strata. The Kitchen Strata according to Goffman (1961) is:

a kind of rudimentary, largely informal, stratification of inmates on the basis of each one's differential access to disposable illicit commodities; so also we find social typing to designate the powerful persons in the informal markets system.

In other words, inmates create roles, statuses and ranks to mimic the world of the oppressor and to make 'life meaningful' amongst them. Making life meaningful includes strata creation and a whole network of social mobility and conflict resolution mechanisms amongst the inmates. The official administrators often rely on this unofficial administration (Adelola 1991:1-2).

### **Assessment of the prison system**

We begin this section by asking: To what extent does the prison community provide opportunities for altering the group memberships and reversing the socialisation process which contributed to the criminal behaviour of those incarcerated in it? We shall answer this question within the limits provided by some available information on Nigerian prison system. Our argument here is that situational arrangement does not lend to the conventional goal of the prison given the social distance it creates between the inmates and the correctional officers - the staff. Our argument will proceed at three levels, which centre around the hostility of the prison community from the point of view of the inmates:

- correctional principle in use in the prison community
- social organisation among Prisoners
- the overall atmosphere of the prison community and its various deprivations

#### ***Correctional principle***

The conventional principle in use in the prison is largely a function of where the administration emphasis is laid between custody and welfare. A discussion of custody as an ideal presupposes emphasis on discipline. Discipline itself is according to Brankan and Kutesh (1949:383), group order. This 'group order' can be achieved through various techniques (Teeters; 1952: 5 - 8 and 29). Punishment is one technique and it has a constructive function in prison discipline although it must be

applied in a carefully diagnostic and well-chosen manner or it can cause more damage than it ameliorates (Knight; 1974: 667 - 627). The most desirable motivation for group order lies in good morale, good food, a challenging and interesting programme and excellent spontaneous communication and relations between all individuals and sub-groups of which the total group is comprised.

Adelola (1991:6) opines that there is an element of authority built into prison administration. For him, authority refers to who tells whom what to do. The nature of authority of the superior prison official over the other ranks is rational and authoritative while his authority over the prisoners is both authoritarian and persuasive.

Rod Morgan (1997: 1139 - 1140) contends that though these matters of prison discipline are difficult to assess, it seems certain that prisons have become less orderly and safe. He reported that by the 1970s, it had become evident that both hard and soft drugs were freely available in many prisons, with all the violent and intimidating consequences. This is a clear evidence of prison disciplinary problems (Livingstone and Owen; 1995: 179 - 207). Many custodial departments in prisons are faced with the problem of what level of custodial control can be established. Institutions with almost a one-to-one relationship between officers and inmates can achieve a high level of custodial control. Where the reverse is the case, the officers have to "get along" with the inmates; many officers also develop covert blindness unless the behaviour of an inmate so flagrantly violates the rules that the presence of other inmates forces the officer to act. As a result of over crowding, many prisons operate with the assistance of inmates and at a low level of custodial control, which complicates the role of the custodial officer.

Adelola (1991:3) submits that in the management of a typical Nigerian prison and in an attempt to achieve the primary goal of the organisation - reformation - the tasks of the administration are divided into units such as welfare, health, education, works and maintenance. These efforts are directed at preventing escape and checking external influence. Consequently, most of the strategies are geared towards custody. According to him, 102 out of 109 staffs of Ado Ekiti prison for instance are of custodial calibre. This goes to show the importance of control and surveillance as the primary objectives of the prison system. However, Adelola (1991:4) again identified welfare as an essential part of prison life. He observed that a welfare unit in the prison is concerned with the reformatory aspects, which include education, recreation, contact with relations, after care arrangement and even prisoners' earning scheme.

Furthermore, facilities to accomplish the objectives of re-thinking, stock taking and re-adjustment are provided for by the welfare section, which assumes, on admission, the role of parents, attending to prisoners. Personal needs include establishing links with the outside world, orchestrating moral and religious instructions and counselling prisoners by providing the necessary succour for adjustment to prison life. For the training in anticipation of re-absorption at post-release, or post-prison training in crafts such as tailoring, masonry, carpentry, basket-

weaving, cane work, painting, knitting, sewing (for female) etc. are to be provided. In reality, however, such facilities are never really provided in Nigerian prisons.

Guards, the institutional programme and the inmates themselves motivate custodial control. The guards are generally interested in the enforcement of prison regulations that are designed to foster discipline. The programme including athletic events, psychological services, food, religion, school, industry, farms, radio and television, library, recreation and other facilities, are all designed to achieve total group order.

### **Social organization**

The social organisation among prisoners has been found to fill the gap created by the deprivation arising from custodial control. This social organisation is predicated upon a strikingly persuasive value system which is in the form of an explicit code, in which brief normative imperatives are held forth as guides for the behaviour of the inmate in his relations with fellow prisoners and custodians (Sykes and Messinger, 1960: 5). The maxims are usually asserted with great vehemence by the inmate population and violation calls for a diversity of sanctions ranging from ostracism to physical violence.

It has been variously reported that the prisoners cherish independence and that they achieve this by ensuring orderliness in their "territories" i.e. cells. This apparatus of social control inside the prison are so effective that no prisoner dares defy its authorities. Their commitment to the enforcement of prisoners "codes" is so high that all prisoners are collectively involved in enforcement in addition to the designated officials. A provost with a retinue of officials variously named Advisers, DPO, manages each cell just as in the manner of law enforcement paraphernalia outside the prison walls.

Nevertheless, although this 'administration' has no *locus standi* in the prison system, it acquires some recognition to the extent that it acts as the link between inmates and the staff. Indeed, its officials have been found to be on the fringes such that at one time, they act as "officials" even to other inmates and at another, as spokesmen for the inmates. Furthermore, the officials accord this 'administration' some recognition because its activities and objectives help to ensure that prison objectives are met. The prisoners' codes have three objectives, namely security, hygiene and orderliness. These objectives easily synchronise with prisons objectives as they help to ensure that its ideals are realised. Even where the officials are not inclined to relate to this 'administration', its virility and dynamism of necessity help to coerce the authority into submission, failing which prison riots and jailbreaks may result. The existence of the prisoners' government thus negates the notion that informal systems may work against established order depending on the circumstances of time system. In this case, rather than work against, it compliments, instead of rivalry, it is tolerance and instead of antagonism it is co-operation.

### ***The prison community, and its deprivations***

The standard of living of prisoners is another critical issue for discussion. Often it is constructed in terms of so many calories per day, so many hours of recreation, so many cubic yards of space per individual and so on. A standard of living can be hopelessly inadequate from the individual's view point because it bores him to death or fails to provide those subtle symbolic overtures which we invest in the world of possessions, and this is the core of the prisoner's problem in the area of goods and services.

The health conditions of inmates can be a function of the prison population. In the first place, evidence abounds that the Nigerian prisons hold population twice their capacity (CLO,; 1995: 3). Practically every prison in Nigeria is a slum where men (and women too) literally live on top of each other. Available statistics indicate that the Nigerian prisons have an over-crowding rate of between 10% and 58%. Adelola (1994: 127) while agreeing that over-crowding is endemic in Nigerian prisons pointed out that the problem is compounded by the "awaiting trial persons" who are invariably left in the circumstances of complete idleness. According to him, the awaiting trial persons are frequently and indefinitely held for periods far exceeding the period of imprisonment were they convicted of the offences for which they are being held without an option of fine. This overcrowding has severe implications on the health of the inmates. Adelola (1994: 123) found that in prisons most treatment were limited to administration of drugs such as panadol, and there are occasions when prisoners have had to procure the drugs through outside sources like spending from their earning scheme or asking relations to provide the money for such procurement.

The Civil Liberties Organisation (1995: 37) also indicated that the facilities for personal hygiene are in as terrible a state as those of environmental hygiene. There is hardly a male prisoner who has his bath once in two days. There is no prison in the country which satisfies the standards set in Section 3 of the Prison Regulation, nor is there any prisoner in respect of whom they are met. The reason for this failure ranged from spasmodic or inadequate water supply through non-availability or gross inadequacy of soap to outright refusal by responsible prison officials to avail prisoners of these necessary facilities.

Health is not only related to physiological forces but also to a variety of factors such as available medical technology, the socio-economic variables, use and non-use of available facilities, nutritional conditions and psychological factors (Adelola, 1994). Apart from examining the health facilities in the prison yard, cognisance is also taken of the socio-economic background of the inmates. Education, occupation, income and gender are regarded as important in illness, especially in the presence of catalysts like the socio-economic well being of inmates before incarceration. All these factors may determine the kind of care and privileges enjoyed by the individual prisoners. These factors are critical to the understanding of the incidence of illness and treatment in the prison system (Adelola, 1994: 12a). As a result, whether or not there is a good health policy with the offending gadgets of clinics, medical personnel

and drug, access to their use may be hindered or disturbed by socio-economic circumstances of the individual.

Most prisoners, particularly awaiting trial persons, look emaciated, skeletal with bones almost visible from the skin, curved back and often 'decorated' (adorned with rashes all over the body). When opened out for fresh air, they look like ghosts who have been bathed in ashes, scratching heads and dreadful to look at (Adelola, 1994: 133). As for the female inmates, they are not given soap, contrary to the provision in the standing orders (CLO, 1995: 41). The women often times, have to buy their own soap. As family and friends have abandoned many of them, they usually could not afford to do this from their own funds. Worse still, they are not issued sanitary towels. As for ailment, Adelola (1994) discovered that they reported mostly abdominal pains, skin diseases, fever and cough.

With the explosion in the prison population, feeding the prisoners adequately has become an impossible task for the prison authorities (CLO: 1995:80). Adelola (1994:136) also reported that the menu in prison is pre-dominantly carbohydrate blend with some protein contents. Inmates normally eat meat or fish once a day but often this is limited to 3 days in a week. The menu chart, which is largely dominated by starch, *eba*, rice, pap and bread, cannot by any standard be regarded as balanced diet. The food given to the average prisoner is qualitatively inadequate for an average human being and, at best could only be described as starvation diet, because the budgetary allocation of ₦10 per day for the feeding of prisoners is inadequate (CLO, 1995: 92). Sharp practices of food contractors have also been reported (Ajomo and Okagbue 1991). The quantity and quality of food available is rendered even more inadequate by the warders who generously help themselves to prisoners' food supplies (CLO, 1995:94).

The worst thing about the congestion in our prisons is the effect it has on sleeping arrangement. The Civil Liberties Organisation (1995: 32) reported that as a result prisoners sleep in batches. In most prisons there are three to five batches. When it is time to sleep, every other batch makes space for the first batch. They stand at one end of the cell, or sit. Some sleep while standing, but do not lie down. Only the first batch lies down. After four hours, they get up, and the next batch lies down to sleep, until the shift is completed.

For Adelola (1994) fumigation of the cells is a luxury. While convicts sleep on beds without mattresses; the 'awaiting trials' only rest on old blankets on the bare floor where the congestion allows stretching of the body, otherwise he sleeps by leaning against the wall which further smears the latter. Most characteristic operational situation of the awaiting trial in sitting at "Post" i.e. resting the back against the wall with legs akimbo while arms rest on the knees thereby making dozing a substitute for sleep as there is space famine.

It is obvious that there can be no talk of suitable bedding where there are neither beds nor mattresses. All prisons in Nigeria supplement their absent or inadequate stock of beds with mats (CLO, 1995: 28). At most prisons, however, the prisoners have to provide mats for themselves. Abandoned by family and friends and with no

access to money, most prisoners find themselves unable to afford even mats, and are compelled to sleep either on the bare floor or cardboard sheets. Given the generally inadequate size of cell windows in Nigeria prisons, most of them do not meet required standards (CLO, 1995: 45). The cells are usually dim in the day and most inmates, even if they have the chance and inclination, could not read for any considerable duration without damage to their eyes. At nights, many cells are dark because the prison authorities, especially in the small, rural prisons, do not provide electric lights. Indeed many prisons have no electricity supply and have to depend on candles and lamps.

McCorkle and Korn (1954: 88-89) believe that the isolation of the prisoners from the free community means that he has been rejected by society. His rejection is underscored in some prisons by his shaven head. The prisoner is confronted daily with the fact that he has been striped of his membership in society at large and now stands condemned as an outcast, an outlaw, a deviant so dangerous that he must be kept behind closely guarded walls and watched both day and night. He has lost the privilege of being trusted and his every act is viewed with suspicion by the guards, the surrogates of the conforming social order. Constantly aware of societal disapproval, his picture of himself, challenged by frequent reminders of his moral unworthiness, the inmate must find some way to ward off these attacks and their interjection.

The Civil Liberties Organisation (1995: 47) reported, for instance, that it appears that not more than 10% of the inmates of any prison in Nigeria are affixed adequately in clean and strong clothes. Close to 80% are either always half-naked or clothed in worn and torn clothes. The remaining approximately 10% are naked but for the blankets they wrap round themselves. While they are generally better clad than their male counterparts, female prisoners also have to make their own dresses at their own expenses. No less important, perhaps, is the ego threat that is created by the derivation of heterosexual relationships. In the tense atmosphere of the prisons, with its provisions and constant references to the problems of sexual frustration, even those inmates who do not engage in overt homosexuality suffer acute attacks of anxiety about their own masculinity. These anxieties may arise from a prisoner's unconscious fear of latent homosexual tendencies in himself, which might be activated by his prolonged heterosexual deprivation; or at a more conscious level he may feel himself as a man in the full sense only in a world that also contain women. In either case the inmate is confronted with the fact that the celibacy imposed on him by society means more than simple physiological frustration, an essential component of his self-conception, his status as male, is called to question.

Bethlehem (1943: 417 - 452) further posits that rejected, impoverished and figuratively castrated, the prisoner must face still further indignity in the extensive social control exercised by the custodians. The many details of the inmate's life, ranging from the hours of sleeping to the routine of work and the job itself, are subject to a vast number of regulations made by prison officials. The inmate is stripped of his autonomy; hence, to other pains of imprisonment we must add the pressure to define himself as weak, helpless and dependent. Individuals under guards

are exposed to the bitter ego threat of losing their identification with the normal adult role.

Sykes (1956) identifies the remaining feature of the inmate's social environment as the presence of other imprisoned criminals. Murderers, rapists, thieves, confidence men and sexual deviants are the inmate's constant companions and this enforced intimacy may prove to be disquieting even to the hardened recidivist. As an inmate has said:

The worst thing about prison is that you have to live with other prisoners crowded into a small area with men who have long records of physical assaults, thievery and so on (and who may be expected to continue in the path of deviant social behaviour in the future (Sykes, 1956:109).

The Nigerian experience is not different from Sykes' explanation above. Jimoh's account drives home the point (see Atere, 2000)

The situation here is not even close enough to the luxury of my one room apartment. There are instances when you are forced to give up your bed space to some 'powerful' prisoners. On some occasions your inability to get to your bed early enough translates into you becoming a 'landlord (sleep on the floor) for the night for sometimes beyond the night. Bedding is simply short supply because of the congestion in the prison.

The inmate is deprived of the sense of security that we more or less take for granted in the free community. Although the anxieties created by such a situation do not necessarily involve an attack on the individual's sense of personal worth. The problems of self-protection in a society composed exclusively of criminals constitute one of the rigours of confinement.

Loss of identity is equally discernible in the Nigerian prisons system. Adelola (1991:4) observed that inmates of Nigerian Prisons suffer personal "defacement" because clothing, combs, shaving sticks, etc. may be denied them. The actual position is that the prisoner is allocated new outfits commensurate with his new "status" which include allocation to cells, acquisition of beds and bedding which are already infested with pests. On top of it all, the prisoner is allocated a number, which is inscribed on his uniform together with the "earliest date of discharge." All these confirmed him as a sub-human being and also complete the "successful degradation ceremonies" which began at the point of his arrest.

In short, imprisonment "punishes" the offender in a variety of ways extending far beyond the simple fact of incarceration. However, necessary as such punishments may be, their importance for our present analysis lies in the fact that they form a set of harsh social conditions to which the population of prisoners must respond or adapt itself. The inmate feels that the deprivation and frustration of prison life, with their implications for the destruction of his self-esteem, somehow must be alleviated. It is, we suggest, as an answer to this need that the functional significance of the inmate code or system of values exhibited so frequently by men in prison can overcome the

deprivation of prison living. Evidence also shows that individual expectations of possible legitimate rehabilitation affect the solidarity of that prison's social organisation. In addition, the lack of clear association between one element of deprivation and subscription to the prison code suggests that for some, adherence to the prison code is merely a device for survival and has little effect on participation in the rehabilitation programme.

In another research endeavour, Edwards (1970:213) examined American sociological literature on prison and prisoners and concluded that it (literature) produces a general picture of some sort of society evolving among inmates either as a collective reaction against their shared "deprivations" of liberty, security, autonomy, heterosexual relations and goods/services, or as a consequence of their common social characteristic and criminals in the outside world. This society operates on at least two inter-related levels, psychologically and socially.

Again, the physical environmental conditions such as filthy cells, infested by bed-bugs, lice, cockroaches, together with poor water supply, overcrowding and substandard clothing added to poor nutrition may jeopardise the health state of an individual psychologically, the individual perceives the situation unbearable. Thus, the incidence of sickness, use or non-use of drugs or other medical facilities may affect the health state of the individual.

In terms of age, some prison yard and structures are outdated, depicting the awkwardness, the physical deterioration of dilapidation, infection-prone and unsafe for human habitation. In spite of the whitish colour of the high walls, the outward appearance is that the ordinary human being without the compellation of the law would dread ordinary glimpse (Adelola, 1994; CLO., 1995).

In all, the problems identified thus far lend credence to the inability of the Nigerian prisons to provide adequate rehabilitation of prisoners. The Civil Liberties Organisation (1995:3) contends that the breakdown of prison facilities may have forced the prison authorities to abandon all pretence of prison reformation and rehabilitation. Prison workshops across the country are idle and silent, except at such prisons as those in the Kirikiri complex and Ikoyi prison both in Lagos.

### *Recidivism in Nigerian prisons*

In addition to problems facing the Nigerian prison and its prisoners (as discussed above), the rate of return of ex-convicts to prison (recidivism) presents an uncomfortable figure. Recidivism is defined as the act of persistently going back to a life of crime. Thus, a recidivist is that person who is prone to crime commission, and is consistently imprisoned. Usually, such a lifestyle begins with an initial trial and conviction, integration into a prison sub-culture, release, rejection by the larger society, support by other ex-convicts, involvement in some other criminal activities, another trial and conviction. The cycle goes on and on like that and the recidivist can hardly stay away from prison life. The rate of recidivism in Nigeria has been attributed to the attitude of members of the public to the ex-convict. For example,



although the rate of recidivism discovered in Atere (2000) study was low (6.5% and 4.2% at Agodi and Ilesha prison respectively), respondents adduced society's hostile attitude as responsible for their return to the prison. The society makes it difficult for them (ex-convicts) to engage in gainful employment, simply on account of their prison records. This draws them back to criminality. Adelola and Adebayo's 1991 study had earlier established this also.

The 1995 edition of the Federal Office of Statistics *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, however, shows more than 50% rate of recidivism among prisoners convicted between 1986 and 1990 (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Recidivism in Nigerian Prisons (1986-1990)**

	RECIDIVISM				
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
<b>First offender</b>					
Male	14,545	10,713	17,262	10,227	6,164
Female	373	297	380	190	119
<b>Convicted once</b>					
Male	8,969	4,216	7,797	5,600	2,572
Female	201	84	85	96	26
<b>Convicted twice</b>					
Male	3,043	2,640	3,300	2,562	1,237
Female	49	49	25	39	15
<b>Convicted thrice</b>					
Male	1,736	1,496	1,525	1,360	641
Female	13	26	6	7	5
<b>Convicted four times</b>					
Male	1,176	888	1,145	973	1,017
Female	12	4	-	4	-
<b>Convicted five times</b>					
Male	880	397	529	549	758
Female	7	4	-	1	-
<b>Convicted six or more times</b>					
Male	1,027	620	463	783	482
Female	19	1	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>					
Male	31,376	20,970	32,103	22,114	12,871
Female	674	465	496	337	165

Source: Nigerian Prisons Service adapted from the *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1995 Edition of the Federal Office of Statistics, Lagos, Nigeria.*

## Conclusion

The discussion above gives a grim picture of the Nigerian Prison System. All the problems mentioned above – congestion, inadequate and poor facilities, recidivism etc. and there attendant consequences have made the prison function of reformation

and rehabilitation difficult to achieve. On the other hand also, the attitude of members of the public to the released prisoner and the widespread poverty that characterises the Nigerian society have also made the rate of return of ex-convicts to prison to be very high, thus making even more unrealisable the ideals of reformation and rehabilitation of the Nigerian Prison.

In either of the cases above, the social structure is seen as playing an important role. Durkheim in 1952 had showed how suicide, considered as the most individualistic of all actions, can occur as a result of the level of integration in the society. Merton (1968) building on Durkheim's ideas also explained the role of the social structure in crime causation. In his theory of anomie, Merton attempted to demonstrate how the socio-cultural structure of the society applies pressures on people to commit crimes. Reports from various studies have consistently brought out poverty and economic deprivation as constituting a cause to crimes. Odekunle (1986) in his studies of prisoners at Abeokuta, Agodi and Kirikiri prisons also shows that the typical criminal is unskilled and unemployed. In his book Dambazau (1994) reported a condemned armed robber interviewed in 1987 citing lack of education, unemployment and the unnecessary arrogant display of wealth by the rich as responsible for people's involvement in crime.

The implication of all these is that many people continue to engage in crime, get arrested and eventually convicted. This consequently means an increase in prison population and an over stretch of prison facilities. These prisoners, even when released, return to prison because the conditions that led to their first conviction are still present in the society.

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