

**COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA:  
PATTERNS AND SIGNIFICANCE**

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**Introduction**

Since the early 1950's various forms of collective violence have proliferated in Nigeria. By collective violence is meant riotous conflicts which engender deaths, injury and destruction of property. In recent times there have been some years when waves of such cataclysms have followed one another successively. Given the popular expression of surprise, anger and righteous indignation whenever a new eruption occurs, it can be inferred that most Nigerians do not realise that the society they live in is essentially prone to such carnage. The country's perennial domestic disorder is not due to some destructive instinct inherent in the people's psyche. Rather, it stems from a complex, cleavage ridden socio-political system which our received categories of scholarly analysis have tended to conceal.

Extant studies of conflict in Nigeria broadly divide into two. On the one hand are the studies informed by the pluralist perspective (Melson and Wolpe, 1971; Dudley, 1982; Post and Vickers, 1973) which emphasise inter-ethnic socio-cultural differences as the causes of collective violence. On the other side are studies by scholars using the Marxist paradigm. They argue that the main conflicts of our time are between socio-economically differentiated classes (Nnoli, 1978; Usman 1982; Williams, 1980; Diamond, 1983; Madunagu 1982). Both types of studies focus, preponderantly, on violent encounters between large social aggregates like ethnic and class formations. These, however, do not exhaust the various types of collective violence within the society. Violent conflicts frequently occur among other cleavages such as those deriving from communal and religious affinities. Generally, these other types have tended, inadvertently or otherwise, to be overlooked in these analyses.

The subject of this paper is to analyse the basis and various forms of collective violence in Nigeria since the early fifties. The nature of the cleavages in the society will be examined in the next section, followed by analysis of some important incidences of collective violence. In the concluding section, the basic linkage among these seemingly disparate upsurges will be proffered.

**Cleavages in Nigeria**

Nigeria's population divides into a multiplicity of

interlocking cleavages. These cleavages are based on ethnic, communal, class, religious and regional commonalities.

The contemporary salience of conflict among these cleavages is tied up with socio-political changes which have accompanied the emergence of the Nigerian state as the locus of economic and political power (Nnoli; 1978). In broad outline, I will describe the various social cleavages and how they are inter-connected. We begin with ethnic groups, by which we refer to a very large human collectivity whose members share a more or less distinct culture and language which is used to 'sustain and enhance identity and to establish social networks and communicative patterns that are important for the group's optimisation of its socio-economic position in society'. (Patterson, 1975: 306).

The exact number of ethnic groups in Nigeria is unknown. Estimates range between 250 and 400. With the increasing penetration of the state into more areas of the society, new ethnic formations are either being created or discovered. Some "new" formations have emerged through the fission of groups that were formerly regarded as genealogically and culturally related. Some others have just been discovered as exemplified by the Koma people of Gongola state who were discovered in 1985 (African Concord, March 12, 1985). Each of these groups occupies a definite geographical area, and they vary considerably in terms of demographic size. According to the last census figures, for example, the Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo have approximately fourteen, thirteen and eight million population respectively, while Urhobo, Nupe and Edo have less than a million each (Awolowo 1966: 100). All of these groups are further characterised by internal fragmentation into sub-ethnic and communal units. The Yoruba, for instance, is an agglomeration of sub-ethnic formations like Ekiti, Ijebu, Oyo, Ijesa, Ikale, Akoko, Ondo and so on. These again subdivide into small, spatially discrete and dialectally differentiated communities (Mabogunje 1986; Dudley 1982: 36).

Partly reinforcing and partly transcending these ethnic and communal cleavages is religion (Onaiyekan 1985: 360-362). There are many religious sects in Nigeria, ranging from traditional worshippers to minor groups like Bahai and Mashad House. However Islam and Christianity predominate in terms of followership and socio-political significance. Islam was introduced to the Northern part of Nigeria about the 9th century. Its spread was given impetus by the Fulani jihad early in the 19th century, and it is today the hegemonic religion among the Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Kanuri and a few other ethnic groups in the north. Christianity came with colonialism. The early converts were logically the southern, coastal ethnic groups and their neighbours. Hence the Ijaws, Urhobos, Ibo, Ibibio, Efik are predominantly Christians. Among other groups like the Yoruba,

and Edo of the south Western area, and Tiv, Igala, Idoma of the middle belt, both Christianity and Islam have strong followership. In short each of these religions reinforces the relative homogeneity of some ethnic groups and creates Christian and Moslem cleavages within others. Even then, both religions have not completely obliterated traditional religions. In fact the latter are being reinvigorated as part of the cultural revival which has been going on in the country, particularly in higher institutions (Onaiyekan 1983).

Differential patterns of socio-economic development along ethno-regional lines have, largely, had similar impact on these cleavages like religion. The contemporary differences in the level of socio-economic development of the various ethno-regional groups have their roots in the developmental and political programmes of the country's colonial overlords. As Ake (1976: 5-6) has noted,

Colonialism left a legacy of imbalances - one ethnic group was the best educated and/or had the highest per capita income, and one part of the country had the most social amenities. These disparities deepened the antipathies between communities, and areas by fostering attitudes of superiority and inferiority. Even if colonial policy had been more favourable to balanced development it would still have caused antagonisms as the administrative units and political constituencies coincided with ethnic boundaries.

At the time Nigeria attained independence in 1960, the country was divided into three big regions, Northern, Western and Eastern. The two south-Eastern and Western - regions had the Ibo and Yoruba as the politically and economically dominant ethnic groups respectively, while the Hausa/Fulani was dominant in the North. The southern part, particularly the Yoruba area is generally regarded as more developed than the other parts (Anusionwo 1980: Diejomaoh, 1981; and Morrison 1981). The socio-economic development of this area was given a head start by the early acquisition of western education, skills and techniques of social organisation by the people (Oyovbaire, 1985). This initial headstart has engendered multiplier effects in the development of these areas. It was these groups that provided bureaucrats, early commercial intermediaries and industrial personnel. Other factors such as: the nearness of the south to the sea and consequent establishment of ports, the location of the federal capital, Lagos, in the southwest area; abundant availability of revenue earning agricultural resources like cocoa, palm-oil, rubber and mineral resources like coal, petroleum and so on, have combined with availability of manpower and markets to facilitate greater development. The result is the persistence of ethnoregional socio-economic differences, with the Yoruba of the southwest and Ibo of the east being regarded

as dominating other groups.

The other related consequence of the differential socio-economic development of the various ethnic and communal groups derives from the three regional governments. Each regional government was the main engine of development in its area of jurisdiction, and the main employer of labour. Realising its relative disadvantage, the Northern regional government initiated a policy of catching up with the other regions. Given the convergence of ethnic and regional boundaries, it devised the policy of restricting employment opportunities in the region to northern ethnics. As articulated by the then Premier of the region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the general policy of the government was to:

Northernise the Northern Region Public Service as soon as possible to ensure for Northerners a reasonable proportion of posts in the public services; to secure for Northerners a reasonable proportion of all posts in all statutory corporations; to increase the number of Northerners in commercial, industrial, banking and trading concerns in the region. (Ankpe 1987).

The Eastern and Western regions soon followed suit. The upshot of this was the mutual insulation of the educated and otherwise mobile elements of the various ethno-regional groups in the country.

Even though these regions have been abrogated and replaced with a twenty-one state administrative structure, the tripartite system remains real in the consciousness of most Nigerians. This is because the economic structures on which the regions were founded are still largely intact and have continued to influence contemporary thinking and events. Witness, for example, the establishment by the states created out of the former Western and Northern Regions of Odua Group and Northern Nigeria Development Corporation, respectively, as the holding companies of the industries and economic assets of the former regions. In relation to cleavage formation, the most important consequence of this policy has been the regionalisation of the socio-economic stratification process. The variation in the level of ethno-regional development has meant differential degree of stratification, and the regionalisation of economic and employment opportunities has tended to confine the process of class formation within each ethno-regional group. In other words there is no linkage among elements or individuals who, by their means and station in life, should normally belong to the same class. This is the point Madunagu (*The Guardian*, June 4th, 1987, p.11) recently noted when he wrote that 'the divisions within the Nigerian ruling class are as deep as ever'. This observation is no more than an admission of the non-existence of national classes whose membership cuts across all other

cleavages in Nigeria today.

Our analysis so far has been concerned with the nature and basis of social cleavages in Nigeria today. As Young (1982: 73) has pointed out, these cleavages were created by the intersection of socio-economic classes by units of social affinity based on commonalities of language, ethnicity, religion and region. Individuals tend to hold class, ethnic, communal, religious, economic and other sectional identities simultaneously. Hence, neither simple economic nor cultural determinism separately, solely and permanently accounts for political attitudes and nature of political conflict as Marxist and pluralist analysts, respectively, would make us believe. All these identities are inter-twined and reciprocally influence one another. But that does not imply that each cannot be activated independently or in combination with other factors depending on the situational exigency. In conflict situations, for example, religion can be activated for the purposes of promoting the political hegemony of an ethnic group.

In short, those who view collective conflicts as either ethnic or class fail to take into cognizance the various lines of division along which disagreements can occur. Moreover, ethnic and class membership is not a question of either/or, such that commitment to one precludes the consideration of the other as a determinant of attitude and behaviour. The crux of this argument is that the situational exigency in any society determines the lines along which conflicts occur. Thus collective violence can occur along several lines of social cleavage. In the following section an analysis and classification of collective violence will be done with a view to explaining the nature of the cleavages and issues involved in each case. In the concluding section the relationship among the different types of collective violence will be explained.

### **Varieties of Collective Violence**

On the twenty-seventh independence anniversary of Nigeria, the country's leading newspaper, *The Guardian* (1st October, 1987: 16), commented on the country's turbulent political life and noted that:

Before and since we won independence, Nigeria has remained a hopelessly divided country with centrifugal forces rooted in seemingly irreconcilable ethnic, religious and social differences. The political formations that saw us into independence were rooted in diverse aspirations, diverse hopes and diverse interests.

The resultant tangle of endeavours by the various cleavages whose interests and aspirations cross each other in various directions has meant that every group is in the way of the other; and each stands in covert or overt struggle with every

other group. These have led to many violent incidents at both local and national levels. Some of the notable cataclysms have occurred in areas often regarded as old ethno-political trouble spots. These include the south-western areas, (Dudley, 1970) the Benue/Plateau area of Nigeria's middle belt, (Anifowose, 1982) and the Kano-Zaria axis of the far north.

Since the early fifties, each of these areas has witnessed at least three waves of collective violence. The Kano riots of 1953 were the first. In that year, the Yoruba-dominated Action Group, which was one of the three dominant parties in the House of Representatives, moved a motion calling for the independence of Nigeria in 1956. The Ibo-dominated National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) sympathised with this motion, while the Hausa/Fulani-led Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) was against it. With the active support of the colonial authorities, parliamentary procedure was manipulated in favour of the NPC to kill the motion. Dissatisfied with the position of NPC leaders and the outcome of the debate, the Action Group sent a delegation to the North to explain to the people and get them to prevail on their leaders. On getting to Kano the delegation was met by an irate mob which had obviously been mobilised by northern political leaders who were displeased with the treatment meted out to them by southerners in Lagos. As Sir Ahmadu Bello, the leader of the party, explained to northerners, members of his party - the NPC were harassed and molested by a band of hooligans, who were organised by unscrupulous politicians to abuse anyone seen to be wearing Northern dress who appeared to be a member of the House of Representatives' (Amune 1986: 6). The mobilised crowd went on a rampage against southerners and their property. When peace was finally restored 36 people had been killed and property worth several thousands of naira destroyed (Sklar 1963: 131). The Ibos who constituted a greater number of southern ethnics and whose pervasive socio-economic presence in the city could have been an added source of northerners' disaffection, suffered the greatest casualty. But the riot was politically motivated despite the seeming ethnic nature of confrontation. Even though Ibos suffered more, other southern ethnics were not spared. And it is noteworthy that the Hausa/Fulani were divided into NPC supporters who attacked, and supporters of the NEPU who defended the southerners. The southerners were attacked not because of their ethnic identities but because of their presumed political identification with the southern based Action Group and NCNC. The fit between the boundaries of ethnic, party and regional cleavages greatly facilitated the upsurge (Sklar 1963: 131).

These same factors again converged about a decade later in the mayhem which followed the 1966 coup d'etat. This time, however, the scope and intensity of violence was greater, the target and

objective more defined. Between May and October three waves of violent riots followed one another successively. In May and October the riots were carried out by northern civilians against Ibos, while that of July resulted from the attack of soldiers of northern origin against Ibo civilians and military officers. The July event is classified as a military riot because of the general, indiscriminate and extreme violence soldiers visited against civilians in a non-war situation.

The ostensible causes of these riots centred on the January coup d'etat and certain events associated with it which the dominant Hausa-Fulani ruling class in the North interpreted as portending danger. Given the larger population, land area and hegemonic Islamic influence which characterised the north, the dominant class there assured of their political control of not only the north but the whole country. This was due to the constitutional arrangement which allocated more than half of the seats in the central legislature to the north. The January coup d'etat was seen as an attempt by the predominantly Ibo officers, who led it, to snatch power and foist Ibo rule over the whole country. The pattern of killing and some policies enunciated by the successor military regime of General Ironsi tended to lend credence to this fear. Apart from one Ibo military officer, who was allegedly killed by mistake, all the other casualties were either Hausa-Fulani political or military leaders and Yoruba politicians or officers presumed to be sympathetic to the north (Dudley 1973: 105; First 1970:22). In addition to this were a series of policy initiatives which a lot of people in the north and south-western areas felt were intended to consolidate Ibo political dominance in the country (Dudley 1973). These include the promotion of some military officers of Ibo origin, dismissal of some Air Force Cadets of Northern origin, promulgation of the regional and federal civil services and the unification decree which changed the constitutional status of the country from Federal to a unitary state.

Even if these policies would have been accepted by the generality of the people, the incautious haste with which they were made, coupled with the pre-existing resentment of Ibo economic dominance in the North alarmed the northerners. The result was the first wave of riots in May. It was spearheaded by students of Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. From Zaria the riots spread to other northern towns. Thousands of Ibos were killed and their property destroyed. As First (1970: 311) argues, the basic motive of northerners was to retaliate against their humiliation and the death of their leaders and thereafter secede. On this, she argued, all northerners irrespective of ethnic religious and political differences, were agreed:

The cry of the killings was 'Araba' (Let us part). Northern secession was the watchword... The May killings showed that

the old order in the North was ready to fight back. And by then it was also clear that the Ironsi regime had thrown together in the North forces previously incompatible, even hostile, to another. Northerners, whether NPC or NEPU, Hausa/Fulani ruling class or Middle-Belt, closed ranks...

The July and September-October upsurges were informed by the same motivations, and participation was on the basis of the north against the Ibos. The only difference was that they were more organised, and the July anti-Ibo violence was more widespread, covering the whole northern and western areas.

Apart from hurtling the country towards the civil war, one of the consequences of these waves of riots was the healing of the wounds of another type of ethno-political confrontation which raged in the north between 1960 and 1965. This was the series of riots in the Tiv area against what the people perceived as the economic exploitation, excessive coercion, victimisation and denial of fundamental human rights by the Hausa-Fulani-dominated Northern region government and their local Native Authority quislings (Anifowose 1982: 110-163). Several other factors reinforced the ethno-cultural cleavage between the dominant Hausa-Fulani and Tivs. The latter were predominantly Christians, relatively more educated than most other ethnic groups in the north, and supported the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) then agitating for the creation of a new region out of the lower north.

The sporadic riots occurred in two waves between 1960 and 1965 all over Tivland. The intensity of violence and extensive disruption of social life which followed the riots compelled the deployment of men of the Nigerian Army to restore order (*Sunday Times* 19 July, 1964) when detachments of the Nigerian Police and its para-military mobile wing could not cope. Yet the riots did not subside, and the government was forced to set up a commission of inquiry into the grievances of the people. The report of the commission confirmed the allegations of oppression, victimisation, and discrimination against the Tivs by the Hausa-Fulani-dominated regional government. The report was not officially released due to its scathing criticism of the government.

The Yoruba of south western Nigeria are regarded by some scholars as the most prone to collective violence. Beer (1976: 160), for example, has observed that a 'periodic resort to violence is a relatively long standing feature of Western Nigerian political life'. In recent times there have been many occurrences of collective violence in this area which Dudley (1970) once described as the cockpit of Nigerian politics. In this paper three of such incidents will be used to illustrate the various types of collective violence in the area. Two, the post election riots of 1965 and 1983, will be analysed in this



section while the Agbekoya riots of 1968 will be used to illustrate class oriented forms of collective violence in the appropriate section later. All outbreaks of collective violence in this area share certain commonalities which tend to imbue turmoil among the Yoruba with a certain uniqueness. These features include: the tendency for collective violence to be intra-ethnic specific, that is, for violence to be precipitated by Yoruba elements and directed against fellow ethnics; the tendency for participation to be pervasive; and the tendency for these socio-political explosions to be periodic, sporadic and local in scope. Lastly, the most extensive outbreaks have tended to occur in times of intense political activity, such as during elections.

In 1965 and 1983, the Yoruba speaking area was engulfed in extensive political violence. The circumstances and origins of these incidents were similar in some respects and differed in others. In 1965, for example, nearly all the Yoruba speaking people were grouped together under the administration of Western Nigeria. By 1983 this region had been divided into Ondo, Oyo, Ogun and a substantial part of Lagos state as separate politico-administrative units. However, as in 1965 when the Action Group (AG) was the ruling party in Western Nigeria, the Unity Party of Nigeria which was the off-shoot of the AG, was the ruling party in all the four Yoruba dominated states in 1983. The riots which occurred during the two periods had their origin in intra-leadership conflict within the ruling parties which led to the split of these parties and re-alignment of their members. The Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) which broke away from the Action Group in 1962 formed an alliance with the Hausa/Fulani dominated Northern People's Congress (NPC) while the members of the UPN who decamped in 1983 joined the National Party of Nigeria which was the off-shoot of the NPC.

There are other similarities in the background to these convulsions. Following the split of the AG in the sixties, the party was edged out of power and replaced by the NNDP as the ruling party in Western Nigeria, through judicial jobbery (Awolowo 1986). In 1983 the former UPN party men who decamped and contested on the platform of the NPN were, similarly, declared winners in elections generally regarded as the most rigged ever.

Before commenting on the violent response of the people to these outcomes, it is pertinent to point that even though all elections in the area - local, regional and federal - were generally contentious and acrimonious, only the regional or state elections resulted in extensive mayhem and carnage. It is also worth noting in 1983, extensive violence broke out in Ondo and Oyo States, where NPN gubernatorial candidates were declared winners and not in Ogun and Lagos states where UPN candidates

won. It is very obvious that ethno-political considerations have been the most important factor promoting violence in the area. Each eruption has always centred on the question of political leadership and control of Yoruba dominated states. On the 1965 riots, for example, a traditional ruler was quoted as saying that at least nine out of every ten Yoruba supported what was happening, i.e. the violence, because every Yoruba regarded it as Operation Salvation. And in 1983 *The Sunday Sketch* (15 April 1983) reported chief Awolowo as saying the Yoruba would never be slaves or play second fiddle to any other group in Nigeria.

Given the level, scope and targets of violence it would appear that the majority of Yoruba shared these sentiments. Participation in these riots was widespread, cutting across economic, communal and religious cleavages. In terms of scope these circumstances occurred in all the sixteen divisions of the Western Region in 1965 and all part of Ondo and Oyo states in 1983. It was however, less pervasive in Lagos and Ogun States where the UPN won. There are no accurate records of the number of people killed and amount of property destroyed. While the official estimate of recorded deaths in 1965 is 150, the unofficial estimate is as high as 2,000 deaths. More destruction of property took place during the 1983 riots. However, at least about one hundred people were estimated to have lost their lives in Ondo State alone (*The Guardian* 8 September 1983). Large-scale arson and looting occurred during both riots. The targets of attack were mostly NNDP and NPN stalwarts in 1965 and 1983 respectively. However, electoral officers, AG and UPN supporters were also attacked in retaliatory attacks by policemen and party thugs.

Another form of perennial collective violence in Nigeria is communal violence. Communities in Nigeria's rural areas are still very primary and traditional in the sense that they tend to be spatially discrete, and relatively, socio-culturally distinct. Membership in them is determined by birth, and intra community relations tend to be characterised by intense attachment and identification. About 80% of Nigeria's population live in around 95,000 rural communities. Even though the socio-cultural differences among these communities create conditions conducive to inter-communal violence, the main causes are often economic and political. This type of collective violence is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. In recent times, however, there has been a marked increase not only in its frequency but, particularly in the degree of violence and devastation attending it (*Newswatch* 21 September, 1987). Examples of recent upsurges will be cited from different parts of the country in order to reflect the diversity of circumstances, causes and partisans of communal collective violence.

The clash between Emede and Egbide (The Guardian 2nd July 1986) communities in Bendel State epitomises the changing nature of inter-communal violence in Nigeria. The two communities, separated by two kilometres, have been in a state of hostility for a long time over the ownership and the right to use of a farmland and a fishing lake lying between them. Even though this disagreement had been on for many years, it did not escalate into overt conflict until word got round that the government wanted to acquire the land for purposes of industrial development. Since then the relations between the two communities became characterised by intermittent skirmishes. It eventually exploded into unprecedented inter-communal violence between May 16 and 19, 1986. During the four days of violence and destruction, sophisticated military hardware like rockets, rocket launchers, machine guns and so on were reportedly used (The Guardian 3 July 1986: 7; 6 June 1986: 19). The resultant carnage in both communities, which are genealogically related, is unprecedented in the area.

A similar cataclysm occurred between Unubi and Umuze-Uga communities in Anambra state. The history of conflict between the two communities dates back to early this century. Attempts to resolve the conflict have been undertaken at various levels of government, including the Supreme Court. Yet peace has not been achieved. In the last upsurge of violence members of the Umuze-Uga community attacked Unubi people, killed and maimed many people, destroyed their homes, farms, and drove them into exile. As the Guardian (28 May 1986: 7) reported:

Today Unubi lies in ruins. And for about five kilometres stretch are remnants of a once thriving community: destroyed houses, burnt farmlands and ravaged avalanche of yam barns. Charred household items litter the whole place...while the land is desolate and festering, its owners continue in agony as refugees.

As in the Emede-Igbide case, the cause of the conflict centred on claim and counter-claim of ownership of land.

A more devastating communal riot than these two, which threatened to plunge the whole country into chaos, occurred in Kafanchan, Kaduna state. The conflagration in Kafanchan is unique in the sense that it clearly exemplifies how different, overlapping identities can simultaneously come into play during riots. The population of the town ethnically divides into the native Kaje-Fantsuwan majority and the settler Hausa-Fulani minority who invaded and subjugated the indigenous people during the Islamic jihad fomented by Dan Fodio in 1803. In defiance of their new overlords and surrounding powerful Moslem neighbours, the natives embraced Christianity. They also took advantage of the educational opportunities provided by the mission schools, and have thus achieved relatively more socio-economic progress

than their Hausa/Fulani rulers. They are well educated and have many sons in top places in the army, the universities, business and public service. Yet the Hausa/Fulani have maintained a firm grip on the lever of political power in the locality. They have provided all the rulers (emirs) for the community since 1810, and all of them have been Moslems. Among the native Kaje-Fantsuwan, therefore, Islam is not just the religion of the door neighbour, but the symbol of Hausa-Fulani hegemony. The political dominance of the Hausa-Fulani has, for long, been viewed with resentment and irritation by the Fantsuwams. This uneasy coexistence burst into violence in March 1987.

Violence was ignited by a religious scuffle between Christian and Moslem students of the College of Education located in Kafanchan. A group of Moslem students led by a young lady started the conflict. According to reports (Newswatch 30 March 1987) trouble began when they went to disrupt a meeting of Christian students being addressed by an itinerant reverend who converted from Islam to Christianity. The Moslem students accused the reverend of denigrating Islam and blaspheming the holy name of Prophet Mohammed in order to illustrate the superiority of Christianity over Islam. The Christian students who were in the majority chased the Moslems out of the campus. The latter regrouped and returned to the campus to confront the Christians. In the ensuing conflict a few buildings and vehicles were destroyed and several students injured. This incident occurred on Friday March 6th, 1987. When the news of this incident reached Kafanchan town on Sunday it ignited the age-long hostility between the native, Christian Fantsuwan and politically dominant Hausa-Fulani Moslems. On that day, about nine people were killed and several mosques and churches destroyed. In the resultant melee ethnic, political and religious resentments became intertwined. The other Kaje communities in the neighbourhood of Kafanchan trooped out to aid their kin against the Moslem Hausa-Fulani (The Guardian, Sunday Supplement, 3 May 1987: B1).

News of the riot in Kafanchan first reached most people in the state and the country in general through the regular bulletin of Radio Nigeria, Kaduna. Its reports that Christians were killing Moslems and destroying mosques in Kafanchan galvanised people in the other predominantly Moslem cities of Kaduna state into action. In towns like Kaduna, Funtua, Zaria, Katsina, Ikara and Kania, the target was broadened. Apart from Christians and their churches, business establishments like hotels, offices, shops, private houses, petrol stations and vehicles belonging to non-Hausa/Fulani ethnics, regardless of whether they were Moslem and Christians were attacked.

No sooner had the riots gained momentum than other interested cleavages hiding under the cover of religion took over to

achieve their selfish ends. In Zaria, for example, the greater number of vehicles were burnt for reasons unconnected with the religious aspect of the riot. There had been tension among commercial motor drivers in town due to the claim of precedence over members from the southern and other northern, non-Hausa-Fulani, states like Niger, Kwara, Benue, Plateau, Gongola and Borno, by indigenous Hausa-Fulani drivers of Zaria. They seized the opportunity offered by the riots to burn and destroy the commercial vehicles of their opponents. In the same manner, various other groups used the chance to visit violence on their enemies. The riot which took a heavy toll of lives and property was not religious in its totality. As President Babangida said in his address to the nation:

the rioting which lasted for about a week on a sporadic basis....might have been religious in origin, the wanton destruction of lives and property in Kaduna, Zaria, Katsina, Funtua, and other places in Kaduna state were carefully planned and master-minded by evil men with sinister motives, who saw the incident in Kafanchan as an opportunity to subvert the Federal Government and the Nigerian nation. What we are dealing with therefore, is not just a religious crisis but rather a civilian equivalent of an attempted coup d'etat.

The riots meant different things to different people because of the diversity of issues and cleavages that became involved in it. As Governor Abubakar Umar of Kaduna state, where the riot occurred, has explained (*Quality Magazine*, November 1987: 36) the riot was simultaneously economic, religious, political and communal.

A more defined and less confusing collective riot, in terms of the religious cleavage involved, was the Maitatsine riots which ravaged different cities in the north between 1980 and 1984. The moving spirit behind these riots was a Cameroonian emigre, Mohammed Marwa Maitatsine, who settled in Yan Awaki quarter of Kano as an Islamic preacher. He was a fanatic who preached an unorthodox form of Islam. Maitatsine's sect comprised about 10,000 highly mobilised and fanatical followers. Members were predominantly recruited from among the large lumpen-proletariat of the city and young children studying Islamic theology. They were divided into groups, with members of each being identified by a sign tattooed on their stomachs or backs. Even though members of the sect professed to be Muslims and subscribed to the teachings of the Quoran, they hated and relentlessly condemned prophet Mohammed. The sect was anti-authority and particularly hated the police and the military. It preached against the extant religious and political leadership and patterns of Islamic practice. It, therefore, supported the violent suppression of other people who did not belong to their

sect. Towards this end rigorous military training was given to all members.

The Yan Awaki quarter, together with public schools, markets and hospitals, was taken over, fortified and constituted into a "state within a state" between 1973 and 1980. The sect became a daily threat to the citizens and authority of the government. Towards the end of 1980, the sect struck following a two week ultimatum given by the state government to its leader, Mohammed Marwa, to quit the area occupied illegally. The riot precipitated by the sect was savage and grave. About 4,177 people were killed in the carnage and property worth millions of naira destroyed. (Newswatch 30 July 1987). The area occupied by the fanatics was so fortified that it required the use of the military to bomb and force the fanatics to surrender. Mohammed Marwa was killed in the riots, and his followers dispersed to other cities in the north where they went underground. Since then five other similar riots have occurred in the cities to which they dispersed. These include the second Kano riots, Bulumkutus and Kaduna riots all in 1982; and Gombe and Yola riots in 1983 and 1984 respectively. In all, Maitatsine riots took about 7,000 lives and destroyed property worth several millions of naira. They killed Moslems, non-Moslems, in short, anyone who did not belong to their sect. Children and particularly pregnant women were not spared. They usually killed the latter because of the fear that they could bear male offspring. Spinsters and unmarried women were, however, spared and held as hostages to perform conjugal duties for them. They never looted or stole, they simply killed and destroyed.

Generally speaking the Maitatsines can be described as Islamic fundamentalists. Apart from their disgust and rejection of contemporary practice of Islam, individualism and materialism, their socio-political grievances and objectives are unclear. What can be surmised from their inchoate utterances is that they would prefer a theocratic order if given the chance to choose (African Concord 30 May 1985: 15).

Other religious riots have occurred in various parts of the country since Maitatsine's. These other types have been between persons of different religious persuasions. For example, at Ibadan the religious cleavages involved in the latest riot were Muslims and Egungun traditional worshippers. And in Ilorin it was between Muslims and Christians. The level of violence and degree of destruction of property involved in these other religious riots was nothing compared with Maitatsine's.

The next form of collective violence we want to consider is that between socio-economically differentiated classes. If the orthodox and still widely accepted criterion of relation to the means of production as the determinant of individual class position is used, there have been few actual incidents of

collective violence across class lines. And these have, predominantly, been peasant uprisings. Proletarian struggles in the form of strikes, demonstrations, work stoppages and so on, have generally been devoid of violence.

Agbekoya riots between 1968-69 remain the most extensive and clear example of violent class conflict in contemporary times (Beer 1976: 160-205; Williams 1980: 121-131). The riots took place in various parts of Western Nigeria. Several local peasant groups in Ibadan, Egba, Egbado, and Ijebu areas of the West took part in the riots. It is popularly called Agbekoya, after the most virile and largest among the groups. The name which literally means "farmers reject suffering" aptly sums up the causes of the riots. The riots began as a spontaneous reaction by peasant cocoa farmers against economic exploitation and political oppression by the state and local governments. The initial demand on the government was a reduction in flat-rate tax imposed on them which had gone up from ₦6 to ₦12. In addition they were also expected to pay other sundry levies such as increased water rate, and a newly introduced State Development Contribution of ₦1.50, and an additional five percent Federal National Reconstruction Levy as contributions to civil war fund. During the year farmers were being asked to make these payments, the price of cocoa had not only fallen, the average output of farmers had gone down due to the swollen shoot disease which attacked and destroyed cocoa trees. In the light of these, the farmers appealed to the state government to lighten their burden by reverting the flat-rate tax to the former ₦6.00. The government refused and directed officials of the local authorities to enforce the new rates.

In addition to the taxes levied by the state government many local councils imposed local rates (like market, health and educational rates) for services which were not usually rendered. Repressive methods were often used by the local authorities to collect both state and local taxes which farmers knew were mostly embezzled. The farmers complained that the police stationed in their villages together with sanitary inspectors spent most of their time harassing them for bribes. They also complained about other council officials like market and motor-park supervisors whom they accused of collecting dues from petty traders and drivers without improving the infrastructure. Hence, in addition to their demand for reduction of taxes, they also demanded the abolition of local councils.

The state government rejected all these demands, and adamantly set the hated local officials out to collect taxes. The first wave of riots began at Ibadan in November 1968 and quickly spread to other divisions of the state like Ijebu, Egba, Oyo and Oshun. After some respite violence flared up again in 1969, this time more devastating and more widespread. The targets of attack

were local councils and officials, police and military personnel deployed to break the riots, traditional rulers and citizens perceived to be colluding with the government, prison and police posts. All government officials and traditional rulers sympathetic to the government were attacked and driven away to the cities. Road blocks were mounted on the roads leading to the various rural villages and cordoned off against government officials. About 150 people were killed in the riots and a lot of property was damaged. Agbekoya riot was an agrarian uprising against the urban based political class. The riots which largely centred on the villages challenged the necessity of local governments and authority of the state in village affairs. As the Agbekoya leader explained. 'What we want is farmers' control of farmers' life... We are fighting for farmers' kingdom' (Beer 1976: 160).

The 1980 riots in Kano following the disagreement between the socialist Government of the state, Abubakar Rimi and the traditional ruler of Kano city, Emir Ado Bayero, is another example of collective violence which has very strong undertones of class conflict. The ancient commercial city of Kano, which is the most economically developed town in the north, has a long tradition of radical politics which the ruling, traditional, feudal oligarchy of the city had been contending with. The struggle between the progressive forces represented by Peoples Redemption Party, the successor to Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the conservative traditional oligarchy who formed the backbone of the NPN had often engendered minor skirmishes. The contradictions between these forces became intensified and exploded into violence in July 1981.

Many factors contributed to the eruption of violence. These consisted of some policies of the PRP government which tended to weaken the socio-economic and political stranglehold of the traditional oligarchy on the people. These policies were the abolition of poll and cattle tax, investigation and exposure of oppressive land transactions, reform of the feudal local government system, introduction of mass education and socio-political mobilisation of the people, particularly the large number of unemployed and lumpen elements (Usman 1982: x - xi; Diamond 1983: 56). The purported cause of the riot, according to the police, was an alleged attempt by the Governor to ridicule and embarrass the emir. The former had queried the emir for flouting laws regulating traditional institutions and office-holders. The query, purportedly, caused an immediate storm which erupted into violence two days after it was issued. About 12 people were killed in the riots and property worth about ₦100 million destroyed. The rioters carefully chose their targets which included the state secretariat, Radio Kano, headquarters of the PRP, state House of Assembly, the premises of the state owned



Triumph newspapers still under construction and several private buildings of key governmental officials (*Nigerian Tribune* 21 July 1986; *Nigerian Standard* July 1986). There was evidence of police connivance with the rioters. Throughout the period of riot, and two days after, no arrests were made. Thus it has been impossible to interview the rioters on the reasons why they went on rampage. However, there is agreement among scholars (Usman 1982; Diamond 1983: 59) that the real causes centred on the struggle for control of the state by the conservative forces seeking to preserve the traditional socio-economic structure and their privileged position within it, and radicals committed to its transformation.

The last type of collective violence we want to consider is police or military riot. An event can be described as police riot (Stark 1974: 311-2) when a band of policemen or soldiers inflict indiscriminate violence which is either excessive for the maintenance of law and order or on non-provocative persons or property. This form of riot can be grouped into "spontaneous" and authority-instigated or sanctioned types. Spontaneous police or military riot has been relatively rare. In this category belong the Ugep riots in Cross River and Oshodi bus stop riots in Lagos. Information on this type of riot is scanty. Little is known about them probably because political leaders, preferring to be more discreet, have tended to hush up demands for investigation and punishment of culprits by the people. What can be generally said about these incidents is that they were precipitated either to avenge some perceived affront to the dignity of the military or to enforce some presumed values of the military. Even though the actual causes of riots were nebulous the degree of violence usually surpassed all reasonable bounds. In the Oshodi bus stop incident several people were injured and the adjoining market was completely destroyed and looted by soldiers of the near-by Air Force base.

The authority-instigated or sanctioned riots are those in which police or military detachments which are deployed by the government or officials to maintain "law and order" unleash indiscriminate violence on the people. Examples include the police riot at Ahmadu Bello University in 1978 and 1986 (*African Guardian*, 12 June 1986), the 1981 University of Ife crisis, Bakolori farmers massacre (Beckman 1985; Odeyemi 1982; Oculi 1982) and Ikot-Abasi riot (*The Guardian*, 12 July 1987). The targets of violence in the last two examples were rural peasants who were protesting against the activities of Impresit-Bakolori and Shell petroleum companies respectively. Only two - Ahmadu Bello 1986 riots and Bakolori massacre - will be discussed here.

Bakolori is a small peasant agricultural village in Sokoto state. It was one of the many villages whose farmland was flooded, crops destroyed and a substantial portion of its land

expropriated by the government due to the construction of a dam in the area by Impresit-Bakolori Limited, a joint Nigerian-Italian construction firm. Instead of paying compensation for the land appropriated and crops destroyed, the Federal Government decided to pay for crops destroyed and relocate the farmers on new land. Administrative ineptitude and official corruption (Odeyemi 1982: 83) prevented the compensation of all farmers. Some were paid while the greater majority got nothing. Even then the land provided for the farmers was infertile. Apart from its infertility its distribution was standardised such that all farmers got the same size of land, regardless of the differences in the sizes of individual land expropriated. In addition to these was the farmers disagreement with the authorities on cropping. The agricultural development scheme of which the dam was a part, was primarily designed for growing wheat in the dry harmattan season. The project's management, therefore, insisted that the land allocated to farmers should be used for wheat cultivation only as against guinea corn, the staple food of the people.

All representations to the government to ameliorate their grievances were rebuffed. The project management, for instance, ordered the destruction of the guinea corn planted by the farmers instead of wheat. Thus the farmers were forced to resort to direct action by blocking the access roads to their farms, the dam and the project's powerhouse. Tension heightened and on 26th April the mobile para-military police was let loose on the villages, their farms, animals, grain storages and other properties. About 150 persons were killed and incalculable damage inflicted on property. (Odeyemi 1982: 88-94). As Beckman (1985: 17) explains:

The brutality and destructiveness of the police riot contrast sharply against the organised and disciplined manner in which the farmers had pursued their campaign... There is no evidence of any rioting by the farmers of Bakolori.

This much can also be said about the 1986 police onslaught on the students of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU). This institution, an oasis of knowledge in the comparatively least educationally developed part of Nigeria, has had more than its fair share of riots and police brutality compared to similar institutions in the country. The latest in the series of carnage there occurred on May 22nd 1986. The crisis which led to it began a month earlier, on April 21. This is the day set aside by the students in all the country's higher institutions to honour the memory of students killed by policemen during the nation-wide demonstrations against withdrawal of the food subsidy in 1978. ABU lost six students in that crisis, and therefore, had good reason to commemorate it. Students made a peaceful procession,

on that day, carrying a mock coffin through all male and female halls of residence in the university. A majority of the students, male and female, participated in the procession. No student was injured or molested, university life was not disrupted and no property was destroyed (*New Nigerian* 26 May 1987; *The Guardian* 24-30 May 1987; *Daily Sketch* 25 May 1987; *African Guardian* June 12 1987). However, the student's union leadership was queried for taking the procession through the Amina Hall, an act which contravened the university's regulation forbidding the entrance of males into female halls. They were threatened with expulsion if they failed to offer satisfactory explanation. In their reply, they pleaded that the decision to go round all halls of residence was taken by the student congress, and asked for leniency. They also approached individuals and organisations within and outside ABU to plead with the authorities. Despite these efforts the chairman of the student union was rusticated and others given various forms of punishment. Angered by the action of the Vice-Chancellor, all students began to boycott lectures, and went round chanting that **Ango Abdullahi, the Vice-Chancellor (VC) must go.**

They proceeded to the Vice-Chancellor's house and offices and disorganised the books and furniture in the latter. Even at this stage the demonstration was still peaceful until the police were invited by the VC. The police threw teargas at the students who ran in all directions. In the ensuing melee three police vehicles were burnt. The police returned the next day with live ammunition, and gave the students one hour to leave the campus. Before the expiration of the time, they locked the gates and began to shoot indiscriminately, killing and maiming the students and just anyone in sight. Students were beaten, raped and shot. Doors and windows were smashed, students' properties like books, radio, television, boxes and clothes destroyed. People who wanted to help wounded or dead students were shot at. Officials put the number of deaths at four, but an eyewitness account recalled that 'By Saturday morning, when we went back to make an effort to pack our things, I saw eight dead bodies, three of them women. Still, later that day, three were discovered who had fallen by the fence when they were trying to escape, they had been shot at'. (*African Guardian*, 12 June 1986: 19).

### Conclusion

Against a background of the multiplicity of overlapping social cleavages this article has illustrated the diversity of collective violence in Nigeria. A certain underlying unity among the various types of social conflagration is detectable. They all fit into one or the other of the following categories: religious violence by groups threatened by the spread of

secularism, heresy and competition with another faith; violence by low ranked rural peasant groups threatened by the spread of capitalism and urban elite exploitation; riots by communal or ethno-political groups competing for or advocating a redistribution of values and resources; and repressive state-directed violence by the political class threatened by articulate groups, like students.

None of these forms of collective violence can be described as revolutionary or creative. They were precipitated to preserve or to restore certain socio-political relations. In this sense they can all be classified as one or the other form of vigilantism (Rosenbaum and Sederberg 1976: 3-29).

The fact that these conflagrations began in the early fifties and have been proliferating ever since is, largely, due to the increasing penetration or incorporative drive of the Nigerian state which has been integrating the various cleavages into the mainstream of the country's socio-economic and political life. This process which began, in earnest, with the Mcpherson and Lyttleton constitutions of 1951 and 1954 respectively, had proceeded so far in 1982 that Claude Ake (1983: 24) could write that 'the Nigerian state appears to intervene everywhere and to own everything'. The incorporative drive has engendered modifications in socio-economic structure and transformation in cultural values which are in harmony with them. In fact one of its consequences has been the unprecedented proliferation of new groups - religious, economic, political, cultural and so on; all of them responding to the dynamics of state directed socio-economic forces. Some groups have been strengthened, some broken up and others weakened or threatened. Vigilantism has been one of the dramatic forms of response to this phenomenon.

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