

## Sociological Implications of Communal and Ethno-Religious Clashes in New Democratic Nigeria

Emeka Emmanuel Okafor

*Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*  
*E-mail: eemfor@yahoo.com*

**KEYWORDS** Clashes; ethnicity; democracy; religion; poverty; violence

**ABSTRACT** This paper examined the ethno-religious and communal clashes that have bedeviled Nigeria since the inauguration of the present democratic government in May 1999. Using Marx's conflict perspective, the paper argued that these clashes and conflicts are in-built in socio-economic and political arrangements of post-colonial Nigeria. However with the renewed attempt to democratize the polity, struggle for political and economic space has intensified between and among the various religious groups and ethnic nationalities at the community, state and national levels thereby making these clashes inevitable. The paper identified widespread poverty in the country occasioned by social and economic dislocations under the present dispensation, ethnic and religious manipulations by the political class as the forces that sustain and perpetuate these clashes. On this basis, the paper argued the main implication of these crises is that pluralism and diversities of Nigerian people, abundant human and natural resources which ordinarily would have been the major strength for uniting and strengthening the people and a foundation for stable and durable nation, have deepened suspicion, hatred and distrust among the citizenry under the current democratic dispensation. This has combined to make the country to remain underdeveloped and continue to manifest from time to time symptoms of a failed State. The paper therefore recommended that adequate distribution of positions and resources between and among various religious organizations and ethnic groups at the community, state and federal levels; promotion of equity and fair play, poverty alleviation programme, adequate public enlightenment and political inclusion will strengthen democracy while reducing incidence of suspicion, hatred and distrust between and among the various communities and ethno-religious groups in Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION

Conflict and consensus are not new to human societies; in fact they are necessary characteristics of every human society (Otite and Ogonwo, 1979). It has been argued that the absence of overt conflict does not mean that a society is stable. This is because there may be some unrecognized cleavages and mutual suspicion between and among individuals and groups, which if not addressed could render the society apart. Therefore, clashes and schisms are only but one way of manifesting overt conflict (Boulding, 1989; Otite, 1994; Albert, 2001a).

No doubt conflict could be functional especially if it leads to innovations and other positive changes in the society (Burton, 1972). On the other hand, it could be dysfunctional especially if it threatens order and stability - the very foundation of human society (Nnoli, 1986; Lave, 1990). One cannot overemphasise the fact that peaceful co-existence is a major requirement for any meaningful development to take place in the society (Okafor, 1982), hence the need for order and stability in the society.

As a plural society, clashes, crises, violent and non-violent demonstrations are all part and parcel

of Nigerian history dating back to 1914 when Southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated (Otite, 1979; Okafor, 1982; Otite, 1994; Onyeonoru, 1996; Alubo, 2006). All these later culminated into the Nigerian civil war that lasted for some two and half years (Nnoli, 1986).

What is however a major concern is that during the current democratic arrangement that started on May 29, 1999, one would have expected that these negative and divisive tendencies which characterised the successive military regimes should have abated in view of the fact that most Nigerians irrespective of their ethnic and religious leanings had suffered a great deal under the period. Quest for economic and political space appeared to have aggravated these clashes against the basic tenets of democracy which prescribed justice, peace and mutual co-existence between and among the various ethnic and religious groups in a plural society like Nigeria. Against this background the relevance of this paper is predicated on the fact that under the present democratic dispensation communal and ethno-religious clashes with attendant loss of lives and property, backlash, etc, are all drawbacks to democracy and derailment of the nation's quest for socio-economic development.

Therefore the questions that are considered in this paper are: what communal and ethno-religious have occurred in Nigeria since May 29, 1999?; what factors have generated and sustained these clashes under the current democratic dispensation?; and what sociological implications could be deduced from such clashes and crises?

### **A Brief Overview of Communal and Ethno-Religious Clashes in Nigeria Between May 29, 1999 and September, 2006**

With the restoration of democracy in Nigeria on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1999, after a prolonged period of Military rule, which devastated all segments of the Nigerian society, most Nigerians were full of hopes and expectations. The ecstasy with which most Nigerians ushered in the new democratic administration headed by Olusegun Obasanjo did not surprise anyone because of obvious psychic damages and a great deal of sufferings people undergone during the period of successive military regimes. The euphoria which greeted democracy in Nigeria made most people think that it would unite the people and give everyone equal sense of belonging which on the long run would reduce the incidence of communal and ethno-religious clashes, political assassinations, armed banditry, mutual suspicion and perceived marginalization - all which characterized the previous military regimes.

However of all these problems, the one that has stood out as the most intractable, and most threatening has been the circle of violence that trails communal and ethno-religious clashes within the short period of democracy in Nigeria. Gradually, Nigeria seems to have become a society one can gauge its socio-economic and political maturity by how many communal and ethno-religious clashes she frequently generates. It is pertinent to note the violent communal and ethno-religious clashes that have swept across the nation since the inception of the present democratic dispensation are too numerous to mention. However one can only but highlight a few of them.

Barely twenty-four hours after President Olusegun Obasanjo took the oath of office as the elected President of Federal Republic of Nigeria on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1999, Ijaw youths numbering about two hundred sacked residents of Aiyatom, an Itsekiri community in the Warri South Local

Government of Delta State. From that period onward, the circles of violence involving communal and ethno-religious crises have continued unabated (Olanitori, 2002).

In July 1999, there was a clash between the Yoruba and Hausa groups in Shagamu in Ogun State. It was reported that more than five hundred people were killed and properties worth several millions of Naira were destroyed. Sequel to this violent clash, in Kano, which is considered as the hotbed of religious and Arewa micro-nationalism, retaliatory massacre of Yorubas took place. It was reported that some returnees of Shagamu crisis, apparently yearning for revenge deposited some of the corpses in the Kano central mosque, hence the violent bloody clash (Akanbi, 2002).

In Anambra state, the Aguleri - Umureli clashes which dominated late military era continued to the extent that it drew national and international attention by the sheer sophistication and number of weapons used to kill each other which had led to the death of a staggering number of people. Moreover, the intractable intra-ethnic violence which had turned the ancient town of Ile-Ife and Modakeke into a battle ground during the military era also surfaced in March 2000, with valuable property and human lives of unimaginable magnitude wasted in areas like Akarabata, Oke-Eso, Isale-Ope, Shagan, Oke yidi and Isale Agbara areas of Modakeke. Also in the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) gate end of the Ile-Ife-Ibadan road, Sabo, Fajuyi road end of the town towards Akure and Ilesa are details of mindless destruction of worthy legacies and inheritance (Albert, 2001b; Akanbi, 2002).

Also in the year 2000, there were various ethnic clashes that took place in Lagos, with the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) being in the forefront. For instance, there were ethnic clashes in Mile 12 and Ketu in Lagos, in which death toll was put at about one thousand. There was an ethnic clash in Agege abattoir in which the gladiators left the animals alone and slaughtered human beings instead. The death toll was put at over five hundred. Furthermore, there was an ethnic clash in Ajegunle in Lagos, involving the Ijaws, Ilajes and Yorubas. The death toll was said to be so high that it was unmentionable. (Oyelede and Akinteye, 2001; Akanbi, 2002).

Within the period under review, Nigeria was also plunged into religious crises following the controversial adoption of Sharia as the supreme

legal code in Zamfara State by the state governor Ahmed Sani Yerima in 1999. Ever since October 27<sup>th</sup> 1999 when Sharia legal system was launched in Zamfara state, religion has been reinvented as a more divisive rather than unifying factor under the current democratic dispensation. The crises fueled by sharia, like a cankerworm has seriously plagued the northern states of Kano, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi and Bauchi. The Sharia has spurred Muslim Youths into bloody actions while trying to enforce its adoption and application in the states, despite protests by non-Muslims. For instance, a month after the formal launching of Sharia in Zamfara, Ilorin, the Kwara State capital, noted for its religious tolerance and hospitality shattered this record with a religious crisis that lasted for three days in November 1999. The militant Muslim Youths numbering three thousand and armed with cudgels invaded more than sixteen churches vandalized properties and killed some people (Akanbi, 2002; Amor, 2002).

Also in November 1999, a religious crisis occurred in Ogun State, in which a 16 years old girl and another teenager (boy) were matcheted to death. The clash occurred when members of a group of traditional masquerade “*gelede*” attacked the Bayyinutu Deen Islam Society of Nigeria Olurekemi Mosque in Ago Egun areas of Isabo, Abeokuta, Ogun State (Guardian February 3, 2002). In February 2000, religious clashes occurred in Kaduna, over the planned introduction of Sharia in the state. The riots spread to other parts of the country. In Abia and Imo states, the Igbo attacked the Hausas to avenge the killing of their kinsmen in the northern parts of the country. This unfortunate development ignited series of religious violence in the country for the better part of that year. The other trouble areas where religious fanatics wrecked havoc included Sokoto and Kano states. The police in Kaduna argued that more than 3,000 persons including four policemen were killed. Igbos in particular and non-natives who sensed the mounting tension fled the volatile areas and took refuge in barracks. The Kaduna incident is reputed to have recorded one of the highest levels of casualties since the inception of the fourth republic. Acknowledging of the magnitude, problem, President Obasanjo said these riots were the worst incidents of bloodletting that the country had ever witnessed since the civil war (Akanbi, 2002).

In addition to the above incidence, the usually

serene Uyo, capital of Akwa Ibom state also erupted in an orgy of violence during the same period. Moslems fled immediately the Owerri and Aba religious riots began. Unknown persons in Uyo were said to have ransacked business premises owned by Moslems and areas mostly frequented by Moslems. The theatre of the violence was said to have been experienced in the Hausa quarters along Udi Street. Rivers state was not left out in the spread of ethno - religious clashes within the same period. As normalcy was creeping into Aba, tension shifted to Port Harcourt. However, the timely intervention of security agencies prevented what could have resulted in heavy casualty (Amor, 2002).

Furthermore, in the year 2000, in Dombua, a town in Borno State, property worth millions of Naira were either damaged or looted over religious crisis. A Police station, two churches, three beer parlours and hundreds of bicycles parked at the police station for safekeeping were among the things burnt. Giving the genesis of the incident, the then council Chairman, Lawal Kabu said the crisis had to do with controversy trailing the siting of a church in the largely Moslem dominated vicinity (Akanbi, 2002).

The year 2001 also had a long calendar of violent deaths in the country. Precisely in February 2001, Governor of Delta state, James Ibori escaped by whisker when irate youths armed with dangerous weapons unleashed terror on a church where he and his entourage went to worship. It later climaxed to an intra-party crisis. About this time, an inter-communal war erupted in some local government areas in Nassarawa state between the Hausa/Fulani and Tiv ethnic groups in which a lot of people were slain as a result of land dispute (Mohammed, 2001).

Later in the year (2001), President Obasanjo’s anger was vented on the members of militant *Oodua People Congress* (OPC) when he endorsed a shoot on-sight order, following the group’s constant clashes with the Hausa/Fulani in Ajegunle area of Lagos. In September 2001, the relatively peaceful capital city of Plateaus state, Jos was shattered by violence between indigenes and the Hausa/Fulani migrants who have been living there for more than ten decades. That clash which had both ethnic and religious undertone left over 1,000 people dead. In October 2001, at least 200 Nigerians were killed and several churches burnt in a two - day anti-American riots in Kano city following the American invasion of

Afghanistan over September 11 attack on the former (Akanbi, 2002; Amor, 2002).

Also in October 2001, in Zaki Biam in Benue State, ethnic clashes erupted between the Tiv in Benue state and Jukun in Taraba state, in which nineteen soldiers who were sent to broker peace were abducted and killed by the local people. During the burial ceremony of those slain soldiers, President Obasanjo mandated that those who committed this heinous crime must be identified and punished. Based on this, some two weeks later armed soldiers invaded and massacred over four hundred natives of four communities in Benue state (Alubo, 2006). This appeared to be the reminiscent of what happened in 1999 in which the Federal Government has been accused of visiting violence on the Odi Community in Bayelsa state. Soldiers had invaded and practically sacked Odi community, after the community had killed about ten policemen and three soldiers who had gone to the community on law enforcement mission.

In the early part of 2002, violent ethnic clashes erupted between the Militant *Oodua Peoples Congress* (OPC) and a section of the Hausa community in the Idi - Araba area of Lagos. This clash which later spread to other areas of Mushin and Oshodi (mostly inhabited by Hausas) left more than a hundred persons dead including ten policemen (Abawuru et al., 2002).

The year 2002 ended on a very sad note with the massacre of more than 150 persons between 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of November in Kaduna and Abuja riots respectively over the Miss World Beauty Contest which was scheduled to hold in Abuja on December 7, 2002. Muslim Groups in Kaduna had alleged that *THISDAY* newspaper had published an article considered blasphemous to Prophet Mohammed (Babarinsa, 2002; Eleshio, 2002; Offre and Abah, 2002; Oshunkeye, 2002; Ugbolue, 2002).

The month of May 2004 opened on a tragic note with native Tarok Christians and settler Fulani Muslims in Yelwa, Shendam Local Government Area of Plateau State resuming their bloody war over the control of fertile farmland, leading to the declaration of a state of emergency on May 18 by President Obasanjo, the suspension of the state governor, Joshua Dariye and appointment of General Chris Ali (rtd) as the state administrator for six months. The last time the two sides clashed, three month earlier, the Muslim Fulani were the aggressor and had inflicted

heavy casualties on their ethno-religious rivals. Having waited in vain for justice, the natives exhausted their patience on Sunday, May 2. On the day and next, heavily armed local militia struck visiting their Muslims neighbours with death and destruction. The number of death was put at over six hundred, an alarming figure compared with the three hundred and fifty estimated to have died on both sides in previous clashes (Umunna, 2004). As news of the tragedy spread, the rest of the usually restive and Muslim-dominated north was on edge. The *Jama'atul Nasril Islam* (JNI) stoked the fire of revenge. It claimed that the Governor had issued Muslims in the north central state a quit notice. Although the governor vehemently denied the allegation, it was not enough to placate Islamic zealots. Therefore on Tuesday, May 11, 2004, what was supposed to be a peaceful rally in Kano, the hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism, to protest the Yelwa killings snowballed into violent attacks on Christians most of whom were from the Southern parts of the country and lived in Sabon-Gari, the area of the town inhabited mainly by non-natives. By the time a combined team of police and military troops quelled the riots, Kano was brimming with dead bodies and burnt property. The main victims were the Igbos from Nigeria's South-east and another major ethnic group, the Yorubas from the South - west. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) put the death toll at over a thousand, but the police confirmed only thirty casualties (Umunna, 2004).

Finally the year 2004 ended on a very sad note when on December 16, Muslim Students of Federal Polytechnic Bauchi (MSFPB), went on rampage, reminiscent of the 2002 Kaduna riots, burning churches and Christian Students' residence. A day earlier, some students had distributed tracts to their fellow students, and some tracts considered offensive were photocopied and pasted on the walls by a Muslim student. The blasphemous tracts allegedly depicted Prophet Mohammed as 'incestuous' when he married Zainab, wife of his adopted son. The posters, pasted all over the campus added that the Prophet did this in spite of having twenty-two wives of his own. In a jiffy, Muslim Students of the school met and demanded that the Rector of the Polytechnic hand over the student responsible for the act for imminent death. But while the Rector lingered promising to investigate the matter, the Muslim students joined by their

counterparts from the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU) chose to avenge the 'blasphemous act' by unleashing terror and destruction on Christian Students, churches and other residential buildings housing Christian Students. Sunday Ezekiel, the then President of ATBU Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) was dragged to the front of a mosque and killed, while a Nigerian Fellowship of Evangelical students (NIFES), bus and secretariat respectively were burnt down (Oladipo, 2004).

In late January, 2005, violence swept through Benue state, which at first left twelve persons dead and forty-five houses and properties destroyed. The crisis erupted when Ullam community in Gwer council clashed over land with its Ugambe neighbours in Konshisha council. According to the then Police Commissioner for Benue State, the crisis was fallout of fighting between two women on a farmland at Ugambe. According to the commissioner, the woman from Gwer had gone to the farm and noticed another woman harvesting her cassava. An argument ensued and the Gwer woman was beaten up (Nwakaudu, 2005).

The yearly hostility between cattle rearers and local farmers in Adamawa State also continued towards the end of the month of January, 2005. In the hostility twenty-eight persons were killed and 2,500 displaced when trouble erupted in Demsa local council of Adamawa State. Trouble broke out when Fulani cattle rearers invaded some farms and destroyed harvested products worth thousands of naira and also attacked some farmers who attempted to prevent them from entering their farms. It was alleged that the cattle rearers enlisted the services of their counterparts from Niger Republic to carry out the mayhem (Ande, 2005).

The month of April 2005 witnessed a very tragic conflict between two communities and Ebonyi and Cross Rivers states, south eastern Nigeria. For over a decade, there had been tension and mutual suspicion between the kinsmen living on both sides of the States border. The conflict was precisely between the Izzi community in Ebonyi State and the Ukelle of Yalla in Cross River state. Both communities though mostly farmers, have enjoyed conviviality of culture since they had been in the former Ogoja province and have existed together for over 200 years. However, the peace that existed between them suddenly came to an end when wanton

destruction of lives and property erupted within the area. It was reported that the conflict claimed more than sixty- seven lives from both sides. Sources from both sides indicated that the cause of communal dispute was based on mutual suspicion. The Izzi people claimed that the Ukelles were jealous of their entrepreneurship and established farms, that Ukelles were afraid that Izzi would sooner or later dominate them. On their part, the Ukelle people claimed that the Izzi people were tenants on the land and therefore must vacate the land (Agbo, 2005).

Also in the succeeding month (i.e. May 2005), sixteen persons were killed in the communal clash between Kusuv village in Buruku and Ikyurav in Kastina-Ala local councils of Benue State. In the clash over one hundred houses and farmlands were destroyed by the warring communities in the clash that lasted for two weeks. Thousands of persons especially women and children were displaced. It was learnt that both communities took up arms following a disagreement over the fertile farmland along their boundaries. Two families along the border have been involved in a legal battle over a fertile land. The disagreement got to a head when one of the families attempted to forcefully seize a portion of the disputed land. The alleged seizure of the farmland ignited the crisis, which engulfed both communities (Nwakaudu, 2005).

Further on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 2005, Mariri and Gusa communities in Lere Local Council of Kaduna State engaged each other in bloody skirmishes where deadly weapons were used leaving many people wounded apart from the five people that were killed. According to the reports, the indication of trouble had first emerged when the people of the two communities disagreed on the name to give a new secondary school located in the area and who would have full control over its administration. The people of Mariri had wanted the school named *Government Junior Secondary School* and the Gusa people refused, insisting that it should be named *Government Junior Secondary School Gusa*. The youths in the area who were already poised for war brought dangerous weapons against themselves and villages. At the end of the conflict quite a number of people were seriously wounded and five people killed (Akhaine, 2005).

Moreover, fighting broke out on Tuesday, June 28, 2005 between the Ijaw of Taibor in Odigbo

local government council and people of Ikale from Irele Local Council, both in Ondo State over the ownership of some villages in the border areas between the two Local Councils. In the said fight two persons were killed, several others were injured and property worth millions of naira were destroyed (Oladoyinbo, 2005).

Also in the month of July 2005, no fewer than forty-eight persons were feared missing and eight person confirmed dead in three separate communal clashes in Delta and Edo States, while several houses were burnt following the outbreak of bloody violence over boundary disputes. In one of the incident, mayhem broke out between the people of Ugbodu in Aniocha North Local Council of Delta following invasion of the community by the Orhodu Community, while the second involved Ekiugbo and Iwhreko in Ughelli (Ogwuda and Okhomina, 2005).

For the third incident, eight persons were feared dead and twelve others declared missing following renewed hostilities between the Akuku and Enwan communities of Akoko-Edo Local Council of Edo State. Reports said the communal crisis which started a week earlier continued unabated with some men, suspected to be members of Enwan youths, making incursion into the Akuku community without any meaningful resistance. The youths entered the community at about 3 p.m. in a reprisal move against the destruction of some properties built by prominent sons of Enwan some two months earlier. The youths who were mostly armed arrived Akuku community in two buses and attacked houses and indigenes of the community with guns, machetes and charms, rendering so many of the indigenes homeless. Attempts by the Akuku youths to resist the attack failed as they were overpowered by the armed men (Ogwuda and Okhomina, 2005).

In the early month of December, 2005 about 20 people were killed in various parts of South Eastern States of Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo and Abia in separate clashes involving the Police and members of the Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) – an ethnic separatist militia group based in the South Eastern part of the country. Earlier the MASSOB had ordered a two-day sit-at-home to be observed in the five states that make up the South East and Igbos throughout the world to protest the arrest, detention and arraignment of its leader, Ralph Uwazurike over treason charges. The

clashes occurred as a result of the invasion of prominent markets in the affected States by MASSOB members in a bid to enforce the sit-at-home order and the action of the police to frustrate the efforts of MASSOB. The clashes resulted in the death of about twenty people dead (Mgbeahurike et al., 2005, Ogubaja et al., 2005; Okoli et al., 2005; Soriwei and Iheaka, 2005).

The last week of February 2006 started on very sad note in Nigeria. The anxiety, panic and protests caused by *Mohammed Cartons* (published in Danish newspaper, *Jyllands Posten*, in September, 2005 and reprinted in Yemen, Malaysian, Algerian and Jordanian newspapers early in 2006) in Europe and other parts of Arab world reawakened the religious intolerance between the north and south in Nigeria. The riot which started on Saturday February, 18 in Maiduguri, Borno state quickly spread to neighbouring Bauchi, Gombe and Nassarawa states and created tension in Kano, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kaduna, Benue, Katsina, Enugu, Abia, Delta and Anambra states. In Maiduguri for instance, 35 people, 20 churches, 400 shops and 12 houses belonging to the Igbos were killed, torched, looted and burnt (Ojewale et al., 2006).

However in a reprisal attack, trouble started in Onitsha, the biggest commercial city in East when luxury buses that traveled all night from the North started off loading some corpses as early as 7 am, February, 20. Traders who could not control their emotions went on rampage looking for Hausa Muslims for vengeance. At the end of the first day of the attack about 45 people were killed and two mosques burnt. When the reprisal attack ended after three days more than 135 people had been killed and 585 inmates of Onitsha prisons were set free by the rioters (Ameh and Lartey, 2006; Ameh et al., 2006).

Disturbed by the continued ethno-religious and communal clashes and to curtail the ethnic militia ahead of 2007 general election, the Federal Government in the months of September through November, 2005 moved against and arrested, detained and arraigned some leaders of ethnic militia groups based in the Southern parts of the country. Prominent among them were leaders of Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) - Fredrick Fasheun and Ganiyu Adams; Asari Dokubo, the leader of Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) and Ralph Uwazurike, the leader of MASSOB. Early in 2006 the federal government also arrested and

detained the *Hisbath* coordinator in Kano for presiding over illegal security outfit entrusted with the mandate by the Kano State Government to enforce the implementation of Sharia in the State.

The month of June 2006 witnessed another bloody clash between the MASSOB and the police. The clash which lasted for three days in Onitsha left several members of the Movement dead and other injured. Also the clash led to burning down of the police armoured vehicle while quite a number of mobile policemen injured. The clash overwhelmed the police such that the governor of Anambra State, Peter Obi in the statewide broadcast not only banned the Movement but asked the federal government to deploy troops to the troubled city to maintain peace (Ameh, 2006; Nweze and Odogwu, 2006).

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2006, violence broke out in Dutse, capital of Jigawa state following an outbreak of religious-motivated riot. In that incident about 50 young Muslims had attacked and burnt ten churches and over ninety Christian-owned shops in reaction to a Christian woman's remark about Prophet Mohammed, which they deemed blasphemous (Alechenu, 2006; Orose, 2006).

Overwhelmed by the spate of violent communal and ethno-religious clashes, activities of restive militant groups, political assassinations, abductions and hostage takings, Obasanjo once remarked:

"The issue as I see it is grave, unacceptable issue of criminality and lawlessness, murder and arson which no government can tolerate... we cannot allow this country to be taken over by hoodlums and criminals and whatever it is that we have to give to have peace in the country, this administration will give it." (Akanbi, 2002: 39).

Considering all these clashes outlined above the question is; what theoretical explanations could be given for these clashes and what are their sociological implications?

### **Theoretical Context and Implications**

The above clashes could be explained using Marx's conflict perspective. The conflict perspective as advanced by Karl Marx could be summarized as follows: Marx is concerned with conflict in human society. This he demonstrated clearly in the opening of *Communist Manifesto*

that the history of hitherto existing society has been characterized by conflict along group interests. As long as society remains stratified, Marx argued that conflict becomes inevitable. Except perhaps, in the period of primitive communism, where classes did not exist and the primitive men commonly shared with others what they had gathered through hunting expeditions, all other stages i.e., slavery, feudalism, capitalism are characterized by conflict between two opposing classes, until a revolution occurs during capitalism leading to socialism and finally communism. The mode of production, Marx argues determines also the relationship in the super structural elements of society i.e., polity, and religion, law, and the entire social structure (Mayo, 1960; Cuff and Rayne, 1979; Ritzer, 1996).

Marx's theories of class, labour and alienation are some of the explanations of this conflict especially during capitalism when man is highly alienated and exploited leading to intense class struggle. The proletariat i.e., working class has nothing but his labour that he exchanges for wages, salaries, etc. Marx's theory of religion is that it is the opium of the masses. It is used by the bourgeoisie to postpone class struggle on this earth to the world beyond (Coser and Rosenberg, 1976; Ritzer, 1996).

Society therefore according to Marx is characterized by man's desire to satisfy his material needs, which often leads to conflicts with the groups. It is the satisfaction of this economic goal or wants by man that also determines his relationship in the social structure. The mode of production characterized by the forces of production and social relations of distributions constitute the foundation for understanding the nature of human society as contended by Marx (Marx, 1981; Bottomore, 1964; Ritzer, 1996).

Using this theoretical framework to explain violent communal and ethno-religious crises in Nigeria, would indicate that Nigerian society since its foundation by colonization and colonialism is highly and deeply complex and pluralistic. The development of the Nigerian state in the post-colonial period has added new dimensions to Nigerian pluralism. One can therefore categorize the Nigerian society along several lines (Nnoli, 1986). There is the dimension of multiple ethnic nationalists and especially of the rate of transformation of each nationality into the mainstream of the political economy of capitalist development.

Over the years the political elites have exploited ethnicity to their advantage. Otite (1979: 98) regarded ethnicity as:

“..no more than an ideology of exploitation, an ever ready instrument in the hands of the elite. The members of the elite camouflage their class interests, mystify the variable of ethnicity, and indoctrinate the masses by making them believe that they share common interests which are threatened. This suggests that the leaders merely exploit ethnicity thereby reinforcing its potency as a factor in the relationships among Nigerians. Ethnicity becomes a strategy for the achievement and retention by the elite of their leadership position....In the process, class interests are subsumed under, and projected as ethnic group interest”.

Nigerian pluralism has in recent times acquired the vocabulary of six zonal structure, namely the Northwest zone sometimes referred to as the core Islamic North, Northeast zone; North central zone, sometimes also referred to as the middle-belt or Northern minority zone; Southwest zone which corresponds to the majority Yoruba nationality; Southeast zone which corresponds to the majority Igbo nationality and South-south zone which generally corresponds to the Southern minority nationalities (Boer, 2001; Albert, 2001(b)).

The development of the postcolonial state and social relations of production has created additional pluralism in terms of social stratification that cuts across the other dimensions of pluralism. There is in contemporary times a pluralism of the very wealthy and rich class as against the middle and lower classes, the poor and the very poor. There is pluralism of organized labour or the working classes and of organized capital or the employer classes (Otite, 1979, 1994; Otopo, 1994, 2000; Onyeonoru, 2005).

Obviously the natural resources have been differently endowed with certain areas producing the bulk of the Nigerian wealth while some areas are perceived to have been appropriating more. Since democracy encourages fair competition, equal distribution of wealth and justice, the areas that produced the bulk of the wealth have felt that they have not benefited as they should hence the formation of ethnic militia to protect and safeguard their interest even if it involves the use of violence. The new concept of ‘*resource control*’ could be traced along this line, hence the conflict which transcends community to

include ethnic dimensions becomes inevitable. Some politicians who have personal stakes have also manipulated this thereby creating mutual suspicion and fear of domination between and among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria (Nnoli, 1986; Alubo, 2006).

On the economy, the continued implementation of the IMF/World Bank prescribed economic programme under the current democratic dispensation has impoverished most Nigerians thereby dichotomising the elites (educated and skilled) and the masses (generally uneducated, unskilled, petty traders and unemployed). The removal of subsidies on the petroleum products, liberalization of the economy, privatization of government agencies and parastatals, mass devaluation of currency, e.t.c. as prescribed by the IMF/World Bank economic programme has led to social and economic dislocations, and further widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Indeed widespread poverty is the obvious manifestation of this IMF/World Bank induced economic programme (Okafor, 1998).

Poverty is demeaning, depressing and dehumanizing. And for the poor it is a dead end, a state from which neither they nor their children can escape. Under the new democratic dispensation, there are two indisputable facts of current reality. Firstly, poverty and inequality within and among Nigerians has increased; the number of poor has increased in Nigeria both in the South and in the North. Secondly, issues of poverty and equality have made young employed men and women vulnerable to the dictates and manipulations of the politicians. Hence the high incidence of state and politically motivated assassinations, thuggery and violent ethnic and communal clashes can be traced along side with various social and economic dislocations people have experienced under the new socio-economic and political dispensation (Alubo, 2006).

On religious aspect, one observes that there is the pluralism of religion. It is generally acknowledged that the two imported religions of Islam and Christianity dominate the human landscape. They actually compete not only between themselves but also with the variety of traditional religion, such that persons and family members can, and do transcend the three religious terrains simultaneously depending on the community location of such persons or families and the depth of their faith in God or

level of ignorance, afflictions and fears. In Nigeria the North is predominantly Muslims while the south is predominantly Christians.

In Nigeria for a long time, it is believed that there was a balance of power between the North and the South. While the North was assumed to dominate the political landscape, the South was assumed to be controlling the economy of the nation (Nnoli, 1986; Otite, 1994). With this there appeared to be power equalization between the two zones. However, the election of Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian from Southwest and his subsequent inauguration on May 29, 1999 seemed to have punched the power equalization, which hitherto existed. Having conceded political power in addition to economic power controlled by the South, the North felt threatened in the Christian dominated federal government (Mazrui, 2001). However, for the Northern politicians to remain relevant in the scheme of things, protect the identity of the Northern Muslims (against westernization), and counteract the political power conceded to the Christian South, "political sharia" appeared to be the last option to push this through.

Northern Nigeria has always been known to be religiously volatile because of the peculiarity of the area. For one thing, it is an area where most people are only educated in Islamic jurisprudence, law and culture mainly because of the religion of Islam. There also exists a large number of social miscreants popularly called *almajirai* and *Gardawa*. According to Adewuyi (1998), the ages of the *almajirai* and *Gardawa* range between 6 and about 18. In other words, they comprise children and teenagers some of whom have escaped parental care, are being domiciled by a mobile or sedentary mallam and fed by kind-hearted members of the public. He argues that many adults who were subjected to this disgraceful practice (begging) during childhood have less respect for human life and dignity; they are those that are easily recruited for thuggery and religious violence by people with strong persuasions and personalities. By implication *almajirai* have become manipulative tools in the hands of the maverick politicians who have been using religion to cover up their obvious deficiencies and inefficiencies (Otite, 1994; Alubo, 2006).

As a whole, Nigeria has made major progress towards expanding and consolidating democracy during the last eight years. The widespread

increases in freedom of speech and media, freedom of assembly and association, and the growth of the civil society have given more Nigerians greater freedom and stability in their lives than at any other time in the recent past. While achievements like these are indeed impressive, significant challenges to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria remain.

These clashes have a number of sociological implications. First, democracy cannot be regarded as an end in itself but rather a means to an end. Because of several freedoms and liberties associated with democracy, most Nigerians of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds have released their otherwise bottled emotions, and this has increased mutual suspicion and distrust between and among various ethnic groups and major religions. The consequence is that religion, which for instance should have been a uniting factor, has been politicised to the extent that it has become a divisive factor. This is capable of scaring foreign investors who may wish to take advantage of the emerging democracy to invest in the Nigerian economy. All these clashes and crises indicate that almost after five decades after Nigeria gained her independence she still has a long way to go to evolve into a strong and durable nation that would unite her people in order to overcome deep-seated mutual suspicion and distrust between and among the various religious and ethnic groups.

Second, development and legitimate fulfillment of needs, desires, expectations and aspirations will continue to elude the nation and its people. This is a great threat to democracy, democratic institutions and structures.

Third, vast natural and human resources, huge population and pluralism of culture, language and religion which ordinarily should have become the major assets for socio-economic and political development will continue to be a big burden which Nigeria and her people to continue to carry.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusively, communal and ethno-religious conflicts and crises pose a major challenge to Nigeria's nascent democracy. Conflict threatens to undo much of what has been accomplished in Nigeria within the last seven years. These past years witnessed some tragic examples of how violent conflict can impact on fragile democracy.

The OPC-Hausa crisis in Lagos, the Umuleri-Aguleri clashes in Anambra State, the Ijaw-Itsekiri clashes in Delta State, the Tiv-Jukun clashes in Taraba state, the Tiv-Hausa clashes in Nassarawa state, the Ilaja-Ijaw clashes in Ondo State, the Ife-Modakeke clashes in Osun state, the religious crises in Kano, Kaduna and Jos, the activities of militant youth organizations in the Niger Delta e.t.c, have profoundly affected the Nigerian nascent democracy because of general insecurity they have created. Reconstructing social relationship damaged by conflict requires expenditure on social services and they can distract political and economic reforms. Generally, the spin-offs of conflict – refugee and environment crises, mutual suspicion and distrust can only threaten stability and undermine the chances for democratic growth.

Studies of democracy in the various parts of the world show that there is no uniform model of democracy. To function effectively, a democratic system should reflect the unique needs and culture of a given country, while fostering citizen participation, maintaining accountability and transparency, promoting respect for human rights and delivering social services. Also there is a need to accommodate ethnically diverse population, while at the same time promoting political inclusion. It is assumed that this will assist in reducing mutual religious and ethnic suspicion that from time to time lead to violent clashes.

In addition, there is the need for government to take seriously the issue of job creation and poverty alleviation. Evidence has shown that economic and social dislocations that pervaded the Nigerian society has made possible for unemployed and impoverished youths to become willing tools in the hands of disgruntled and scrupulous politicians who manipulate these youth at will to perpetuate mayhem at slightest provocation.

Moreover there is also the need for vigorous public enlightenment programme by governmental and non-governmental organisations on ethnic and inter-group relations. Together with this is the need for security agencies to be trained on crises management skill so crises could be detected and nip in the bud, rather than allowing them to escalate

Finally government has the constitutional duty to protect lives and property in all parts of Nigeria. This constitutional duty must be taken

very seriously and all those politicians and economic elites who have been manipulating ethnic and religious differences must be identified and be brought to justice. Also to reduce the incidence of the elites manipulating the youths and other vulnerable members of the society to achieve their personal gains as a result of high incidence of social and economic dislocations, government must create jobs or make the environment conducive for individuals to create their jobs. At present this is grossly lacking in the country. Moreover for equity, justice and fair play all the victims or families of victims of communal and ethno-religious clashes must be identified by government and compensated in addition to mounting massive enlightenment campaign on the need for peaceful co-existence among the citizenry.

## REFERENCES

- Abawuru, L., E. Agha, K. Adeyemi, and E. Anyigor. 2002. "Fifty-Five killed in Lagos ethnic clash." *The Post Express*, February 5, 2002 pp. 1-2.
- Adeyemi, S.A. 1998. *Socio-cultural Determinants of Street begging in Northern Nigeria: The Case of Sokoto*. Ph. D. Thesis (Unpublished), Ibadan: University of Ibadan.
- Akanbi, F. 2002. "Civil Unrest: Third World Phenomenon?" *The Sunday Punch*, January 20, 2002 pp.37-40.
- Albert, I.O. 2001a (Ed). *Building Peace, Advancing Democracy: Experience with third Party Intervention in Nigeria's Conflicts*. Ibadan: John Archer Publishers Ltd.
- Albert, I.O. 2001b. *Introduction to third Part Intervention in Community Conflicts*. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd.
- Alechenu, J. 2006. "Curfew in Jigawa, 20 Arrested." *The Punch*, September 22, 2006 p.6
- Alubo, O. 2006. *Nigeria: Ethnic Conflicts and Citizenship Crises in the Central Region*. Jos: Ehindero Press.
- Agbo, D. 2005. "Kinsmen at war on the borderline." *New Age*, September 14, 2005 p. 11.
- Akhaine, S. 2005. "Five Feared dead as communities clash over school." *The Guardian* May 12, 2005 p.3
- Ameh, J., S. Olatunji and F. Soriwei. 2002. "Onitsha riots: Death toll hits 100." *The Punch* February 23, 2002 pp.1-2, 7.
- Ameh, J and O. Lartey. 2006. "Cartoon: 22 feared killed in Onitsha reprisal riots." *The Punch* February 22, 2006 pp. 1,7.
- Ameh, J. 2006. "Seven die in Fresh Police/MASSOB clash." *The Saturday Punch* June 17, 2006 p. 6
- Amor, S. 2002. "Death as national pastime." *The Post Express*, February 5, 2002 p. 40.
- Ande, E. 2005. "Twenty-eight feared dead, 2500 displaced in fresh Adamawa crisis." *The Guardian* February 7, 2005 pp. 1-2.

- Babarinsa, D. (2002) "Terror in God's name" *TELL* Dec. 9 p.66
- Boer, W. 2001. "A perspective on the post-Colonial Roots of Identity and Conflict in Nigeria", (pp.76-91) in I. O. Albert (ed.), *Introduction to Third Party Intervention in Community Conflicts*: Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd.
- Bottomore, T.B.1964. *Karl Marx: Early Writings*. New York: Macmillan Press.
- Boulding, K. 1989. *Three Faces of Power*. Newburg Park: Sage Publication.
- Burton, J.W. 1972. *World Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coser, L.A. and B. Rosenberg. 1976. *Sociological Theory*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Macmillan.
- Cuff, P. and C. Rayne. 1979. *Perspective in Sociology*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Elesho, R. 2000. "The road to the end." *The News* December 9, 2000 pp. 20 – 26.
- Lave, J.A. 1990. "The Emergence and Institutionalization of Third Party Roles in Conflict", (pp. 124-136) in John Burton and Frank Dukes (eds.), *Conflict: Reading in Management and Resolution*: London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Marx, K. 1981. *Selected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publication.
- Mayo, H.R. 1960. *Introduction to Marxist Theory*. New York: Double Day.
- Mazrui, A. 2001. "Shariacracy and Federal Models in the Era of Globalization: Nigeria in Comparative Perspective." *A paper presented at the International Conference on Restoration of Sharia in Nigeria: Challenges and Benefits* in London, England on April 14, 2001.
- Mgbeahurike, E., C. Oji, and K. Olanmi. 2005. "Six killed in MASSOB Protest." *The Comet*, December 7, 2005 pp.1-2.
- Mohammed, A. 2002. "Nine killed in communal clash." *The Post Express*, May 6, 2002 p. 40.
- Olanitori, B. 2002. "Eleven killed, six wounded in communal clash." *The Sunday Punch*, January. 20, 2002 pp.1-2.
- Nwakaudu, S. 2005. "Sixteen Feared dead in Benue Crisis." *The Guardian*, May 11, 2005 p.3.
- Nwakaudu, S and E. Ande. 2005. "Twelve feared killed in Fresh Benue, Adamawa crisis." *The Guardian* February 3, 2005 p. 80.
- Nnoli, O. 1986. *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Nweze, A. and E.O. Odogwu. 2006. "Obi bans MASSOB, NARTO." *Sunday Champion* June 18, 2006 pp. 1-2.
- Offre, D. and F. Abah. 2002. "The killing fields of Kaduna." *The News* December. 9, 2002 pp.29 -30.
- Ogugbuaja, C., B. Davids, C. Collin, and N. Elelewachi. 2005. "Eight feared killed in Imo, Anambra over MASSOB Protest." *The Guardian*, December 7, 2005 pp1-2.
- Ogwuda, A. and O. Okhomina. 2005. "Forty-eight feared missing in Delta, Edo communal clashes." *Vanguard* July 20, 2005 pp. 1, 14.
- Ojewale, O., A. Agbo, A. Orimolade, T. Suleiman and A. Lawal. 2006. "Deaths over Cartoons." *TELL*, March 6, 2006 pp. 20-27.
- Oladipo, F. 2004. "A Gospel of rage." *TELL*, December 20, 2004 p. 25.
- Oladoyinbo, Y. 2005. "Two killed, three kidnapped in boundary dispute." *The Punch*, July 8, 2005 p. 10.
- Okafor, M.I. 1982. *The Groundwork of Social Studies in Nigeria*. Onitsha: Emba Press.
- Okafor, E.E. 1998. *Workers' Adaptation and Work Commitment under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria: A study in Lagos, Nigeria*. Ph.D. Thesis (Unpublished), Ibadan: University of Ibadan.
- Okoli, A., C. Nkwopara and E. Ugbor. 2005. "Twenty killed in Bloody Police, MASSOB clash." *Vanguard*, December 7, 2005 pp. 1, 14.
- Onyeonoru, I.P. 2005. *Industrial Sociology: An African Perspective*. Ibadan: Samlad Press.
- Onyeonoru, I.P. 1996. *Nature and Management of Students Conflict*. Sociology Series No. 4. Ibadan: University of Ibadan
- Orode, J. 2006. "Devil's Day in Dutse." *TELL*, October 9, 2006 p.60.
- Oshunkeye, S. and M. Mumuni. 2002. "The Miss World Tragedy." *TELL*, December 9, 2002 pp.24 – 31.
- Otobo, D. 1994. "Industrial Sociology", (pp. 209-234) in O.O. Otite (ed.), *Sociology: Theory and Practice*: Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Otobo, D. 2000. *Industrial Relations: Theory and Controversies*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Otite, O. 1979. "Ethnicity and Class in a Plural Society", (pp.87 -107) in Marret, C.E.and C. Leggon (eds.), *Nigeria in Research in Race and Ethnic Relations*: London: JAI Press
- Otite, O. and W. Ogionwo. 1979. *Introduction to Sociological Studies*. Ibadan: Heinemann.
- Otite, O. 1994. "Social Structure in Africa", (pp.38-53) in Otite, O (ed.), *Sociology: Theory and Applied*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Oyedele, W. and A. Akinteye. 2001. "Lagos Abattoir Intervention", (pp. 45- 63) in Albert, I.O. (ed.), *Building Peace, Advancing Democracy: Experience with Third Party Intervention in Nigeria's Conflicts*: Ibadan: John Archer Publishers Ltd.
- Ritzer, G. 1996. *Sociological Theory* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: The McGraw-Hill Co. Inc
- Soriwei, F. and I. Iheaka. 2006. "Eight killed, 11 injured in MASSOB Protest." *The Punch*, December 7, 2005 p.5
- Ugbolue, H. 2002. "Counting the cost." *The News*, December 9, 2002 pp. 26-28.
- Umunna, I. 2004. "Presidential Temper tantrum." *Africa Today* June, 2004 pp.12- 14.