

More on Riots and Their Causes

NOTE: This paper, like others in this section, was originally written to be included in the series but did not make it. However, as already explained, too much research went into it and too much history that makes it into an invaluable source for other researchers. Unfortunately, the bibliographical materials are not included here, but most of them can be found in the Bibliography at the end of the section in which these papers are found and in Volume 8-2.

Focus on Zangon-Kataf (1992)

You are reminded that as is the case with all the major riots, the basic facts of the Zangon-Kataf story are told in Volume One and the Muslim interpretation in Volume Two. The materials in this chapter assume familiarity with the parallel materials in both previous volumes, especially the first.

The general take of the Kataf people, mostly Christian, is very similar to that of Kafanchan and Tafawa Balewa. For decades, a smoldering situation had existed between the local Kataf villagers and the Muslim Hausa settlers in the town. These settlers arrived around 1650 and were welcomed by the then Traditional Kataf people. Eventually the settlers became the dominant economic and political power in the area. Muslim chiefs and non-indigenous Muslim emirs were imposed on the people. The indigenes complained that Muslims referred to them as “*arna*” and “*kafiri*,” Hausa terms meaning something like “pagan” and reeking of utter contempt. The Muslim community resented the sale and consumption of both beer and pork on the part of the locals. While local women were allowed to marry Muslims, the Kataf were offended that the reverse was never the case. The Muslim explanation that this situation was according to Muslim law hardly removed the sting.¹ The situation was indeed very similar to that of Kafanchan and Tafawa Balewa, though the immediate provocation differed in each case.

¹ Consult Jega and Bilkisu Yusuf for background issues as well as the sections on Zangon-Kataf in the earlier volumes.

The Kaduna State Branch of CAN, during its World Press Conference in 1992, expressed itself in an unusually aggressive tone. They viewed this riot in the larger context of the entire riot series from the beginning. It was not just local Muslims, but the entire Nigerian Hausa-Fulani Muslim community that was the aggressor against all Christians. All Muslims are expected to support each other in this struggle, including governor and security apparatus, no matter the nature of the provocation. Islam “*uber alles!*” That is why it was so dangerous that, according to CAN, the “National Security System in Kaduna State is firmly controlled by Hausa-Fulani officers.”

How did this riot actually start? And who started it? It will be an interesting exercise to compare CAN’s answer to this question to that of Muslims in Volume Two and to the flow of events as reported in Volume One. I will not repeat those here, but to whet your appetite, let me just intimate that they are by no means the same! CAN, however, was not plagued by different interpretations; it had no doubts on this score.

It all started on February 6, 1992, the day on which the market talked about in the earlier volumes “was to move across the street to a better location *already prepared by the Local Government Council.*” The claim in italics—which are mine, not the original—is in hot dispute. Here’s the CAN version:

On getting to the new site on this fateful day, unsuspecting early market goers, largely Christian Kataf Natives, were attacked by the largely Muslim Hausa-Fulani settlers, using dangerous weapons such as machine guns and daggers, leading to loss of lives and massive destruction of property. The situation rose to this uncontrollable level because of the stand taken by Hausa settlers who think they are above the law. Of even greater threat to peaceful co-existence are those who believe they have divine authority to rule over other and to control and determine their spiritual, social and economic life. Because of their lofty position in Government, these very few powerful and well-connected individuals, openly vowed to prevent duly constituted authority from implementing

decisions taken by the Local Government Council in the interests of the larger society.

So far CAN's explanation of the first installment, but what of the next on May 17? Who started that one? Was it a "spontaneous action, a mere spillover or was it carefully planned?" The document backtracks to May 9, the day on which "a letter was written to Sultan... Dasuki to formally notify him of plan to start a *Jihad*..." It came from the "radical" Muslim Nigerian Aid Group of Jama'atul Izalatul Bidi'a/Ikamatul Sunna in Zangon-Kataf. It was a "strongly worded letter in Hausa" and copied to the Emir of Zaria, the Commissioner of Police and some other security officials, to the Chairman of the Zangon-Kataf Local Government Council, the District Head and to "some Islamic groups." Charges CAN, "Subsequently, they made good their promise to start a war five days after this letter was written to their spiritual leaders." That is the background.

The immediate cause for the renewed rioting was "the dramatic entry into Kaduna" on May 17 of some powerful Muslim personalities who carried with them "the wounded and corpses of some of the rioters" of Zangon-Kataf, some 400 kilometres away. The vehicle was provided by the Governor, himself a Muslim from Zango. The riot was clearly premeditated. It was carried out at night, which made it difficult to identify the culprits. Those who were trapped would be either killed or severely wounded if they could not recite the Muslim confession or some other Arabic passage.

The anonymous author of the lengthy account in *TC* (3/1992), reporting on the same "death parade" in Kaduna, suggests this was staged for the very purpose of arousing "religious sentiments not just against Katafs but all Christians." And so "a purely communal fracas in a village was transformed into a wider religious war covering the whole state and resulting in the death of many Christians" and destruction of their properties, including many churches.

The pattern was typical. A *TC* reporter began to notice that this particular riot had taken on the same pattern that other riots were following and that became very clear to me as I moved from one riot to the other and which I referred to already in Volume One. The pattern is that a quarrel arises between Muslims and

their neighbours in a remote place. The quarrel results in a clash, which results in deaths on both sides. The Muslims carry their dead bodies and injured ones to the cities where the sight will provoke those of their faith into rage. Consequently a vendetta is unleashed on innocent and unprotected Nigerians.² The Kafanchan series was classic.

It was classic in more ways. The familiar charge was once again that the security forces were slow in coming. The police did not intervene “until about 1:30 p.m. the following day.” People were under the impression that “police and rioters had reached an understanding, since the commanders are their ethnic brothers.” The rioters were left undisturbed until the military took over—but not until May 18.

The same ethnic power line could be traced everywhere. Both army and the SSS (a security force) were “fully controlled” by the same ethnic group. The State Governor himself, also a “Hausa-Fulani settler,” was “knee-deep in this conflict.” These ties were the reason no Hausa-Fulani were detained, only Kafafs.

The religious nature of the riots was demonstrated clearly by the fact that churches and pastors who were not Kataf at all were among the victims. It was directed to all Christians. Besides, the Governor called in the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna for consultation. Why, if it were not a religious riot?

The “remote cause,” to use bureaucratise, was the long-standing bone of contention of Muslim control over Kataf land came up again as well. “A situation in which a minority is more powerful and dictates to the majority... is unacceptable,” CAN proclaimed. The situation “only reminds one of the obnoxious apartheid system...against which this country has fought...”³

In the previous chapter we learnt of the general role of government media in such events. This riot was no exception at this front either. The *NN* showed “brazen partiality” in its editorials of June 4 and 5. They openly served “the interests of the Hausa-Fulani” and were clearly not written by the paper’s Editorial Board! Government radio stations in Kaduna also came out with

²Anonymous, *TC*, 3/92, p. 15.

³CAN, Kaduna State Branch, 17 Jun/92.

“deliberate distortion of facts” to such an extent that one could easily gain the impression that the radio was meant to benefit only Muslims. Thus far CAN.

Yusufu Turaki, at the time ECWA General Secretary, was invited to appear before the Kaduna State Tribunal on Religious and Communal Riots, the tribunal looking into the debacle.⁴ He prefaced his submission with a summary of the contributions ECWA has made to the nation through its schools and hospitals and emphasizes the good relations with Muslims that ECWA has always fostered. “Prior to the 1980s,” he affirmed, “the Northern States had lived in relative harmony and peace, especially the cordial and peaceful co-existence between the Muslims and Christians.” Of late this “balance of peace and harmony” has been “tilted and altered” and replaced with “mistrust, fears and suspicion.”

In the light of that history, he expresses puzzlement at the current hostility between the two religions. He summarizes the losses ECWA incurred during the various riots. Under the heading “ECWA as a Victim of Religious Riots and Blackmail,” Turaki “is sad to note” that the “peaceful atmosphere ... has gradually moved to that of confrontation, intolerance and violence. Thus ECWA now stands as a victim of a society which has benefited from its humanitarian, moral, spiritual and social services, which in consequence, has uplifted the lot of many Northerners.”

It is important that non-Nigerian readers should understand that the above reference to prior good relations is an example of typical Nigerian politeness that sometimes downplays problems in order to gain some advantage. From the Nigerian perspective, Turaki’s comments do not deny earlier problems as divulged, for example, by Tanko Yusuf. The raid on Christians by the Sardauna can hardly be described as example of “balance and harmony.” And, indeed, a little later in the same document, we read that “ECWA has always been a victim of social and religious forces of our society and she is greatly perturbed and aggrieved.” This statement hardly supports the notion of prior positive relations.

⁴ There were some very good reasons for calling Turaki to testify. (1) He was the General Secretary of ECWA, a prominent Christian denomination in the area. (2) He grew up in Kaduna State in an area contiguous to Zango-Kataf. (3) His doctoral dissertation deals extensively with the subjugation of the southern Kaduna people to the Emir of Zaria on the part of the colonialists.

If this may be considered contradictory in terms of Western logic, it makes perfect sense to Nigerians.

During his presentation he expressed surprise and dismay about the fact that documents associated with the 1987 Kafanchan riots were used by this tribunal five years later. The 1992 Tribunal obviously considered them relevant to the situation. It “beats my imagination,” he said, to see that “the same fabricated and false documents which Muslim groups have been parading around the country to boost their propaganda of incitement and violence were tendered ...” How can this be when these documents were already tendered at the 1987 tribunal, “perhaps by the same groups or their agents.” These documents and related events had been investigated by the security services and by Plateau State Government, ECWA absolved from all the charges and the perpetrators clearly identified as Muslims. So why accept them as relevant for the 1992 riots? This was a serious charge against the Tribunal indeed. “My honourable self had to stand before your Tribunal yesterday in question of this religious blackmail and bigotry,” he commented. Such procedures indicated that the derisive names some people gave to this tribunal, as for example, “kangaroo court,” may not have been so far fetched.

In consonance with other Christian leaders, Turaki considered this riot as well as previous ones “religious and communal riots,” an opinion expressed more than once in his document. The 1992 riots were “primarily communal but with some religious undertones, since the two parties... can be divided along religious lines, as the Katsina are predominantly Christian, while the Hausa are... Muslim.”

Apart from the general climate of violence, what were the major factors that led to the Katsina and subsequent riots, according to Turaki? His list of “immediate causes” is rather general and somewhat muddled. . He wrote, “Sensitive issues and questions of religion, ethnicity, property and security are quite capable of triggering immediate and spontaneous violence.” This should mean that somehow the two parties were insensitive towards each other’s concerns in these areas. That’s not very specific. Another one: “... discrimination, bias, stereotype... are capable of creating outburst of riots and

violence as one perceives to be looked down upon, demeaned or personality assaulted.” He is really saying that domination, bias and stereotype *have* in fact led to this violence. People *have* been looked down upon, demeaned and assaulted. There was no need to spell out exactly the identities of perpetrators and victims. The Tribunal understood: He was accusing the Muslims of oppressing the others, while in a very slight way pretending to be evenhanded. However, as he proceeded with his submission, he became increasingly concrete and specific.

Turaki’s list of root causes comprises three major subjects, each of which is broken down into smaller categories. Most of the points also apply to most of the other riots so that they are important beyond this immediate situation. I give the floor to Turaki as he presents us with his list of “Root Causes and Fundamental Issues:”

A. On Religion

1. Where someone’s... religion is known not to be respected or is looked down upon, and is also not accorded any important social status... by a substantial number of another religious or ethnic groups....
2. Where a particular religion is usually being used in a derogatory sense, profanation of its sacred places and religious rites by a substantial number of another religious or ethnic groups....
3. Where someone’s... religion is seen as a minority religion by a dominant group... and in consequence, discrimination and denial of religious rights and freedom are practiced against such.
4. Where a state machinery use its own political power to ensure the dominance of one religion over against another or where a powerful and dominant group captures or uses the state machinery to advance the cause of its religion at the expense of others.
5. Where religions and religious personalities are attacked or abused publicly by one religious group, the followers are usually aroused in their religious sentiments and can be potentially explosive and violent.
6. Where religious groups use crude and anti-social methods of propagation that are provocative and confrontational.

B. On Ethnicity

1. Where an ethnic group is ascribed an inferior status and socio-political role as a second class citizen....
2. Where the culture and tradition of one ethnic group are looked down upon, demeaned and held in contempt by others....
3. Where an ethnic group is discriminated against by virtue of its religion, culture, background or section in society.
4. Where there is uneven social, political and economic development of ethnic groups and areas of the same geo-political entity.
5. Where there is a dominant-subordination relationship between ethnic groups... which leads to social deprivation.

C. On Political Arrangements

How was the colonial social order established in Northern Nigeria? The colonial order was characterized by the following, which also have long-term consequences in post-colonial Nigeria.

1. The Colonial Administration of Northern Nigeria practiced internal colonialism by placing some ethnic groups under the rule of others. This fact had created an historical deep-seated hatred and feelings between ethnic groups
2. In some areas and in some cases, despite the fact that Great Britain granted political independence to those she conquered and ruled since 1900 to 1960, there are still many ethnic groups and tribal groupings that are yet to be politically and culturally independent... today. They are still subject to some Emirs, Chiefs... and do not have their own chiefs or chiefdoms. This fact can generate deep-seated resentments and hatred between ethnic groups.
3. The continued imposition of some Emirs or Chiefs upon some ethnic groups in... the Northern States and especially in Kaduna State without regard to their culture, religion, tradition and political wish is a serious matter of social justice in a modern... democracy. These ethnic groups have been pleading over the decades to political powers that be to have their own Chiefs and Chiefdoms

just as other tribes have, but have been denied their cultural and political rights. The perpetuation of this internal colonialism in modern Nigeria is one of the fundamental sources of religious and communal conflict, violence and injustice against the disadvantaged peoples.

4. Unless some ethnic groups in Kaduna State, such as, the Bajju, Kataf, Kagoma, Nimzam, Ikulu, Chaikwai, Kurama, etc., have their own chiefs and chiefdoms as it is by the same rights with which other tribes and ethnic groups were given, there cannot be social justice as their cultural, political and religious rights have been deliberately and consistently denied them.

5. I have also observed with great dismay the preponderance of cultural, religious and political discrimination in some parts of the Northern States, and especially in Kaduna State. This can be observed in the analysis of the pattern of political appointments, the religious and cultural domination of the State's media houses as is reflected by the views and opinions of the dominant ethnic and religious group.

In his conclusion, Turaki repeated some of the earlier problems. The crisis is a structural one. This was so in the north in general, but especially in Kaduna State. There were "structures of evil, manipulation, discrimination, preferential and differential treatment, the subordination of others under the dominance of others, the creation of First Class and Second Class citizens...." He decried the "political imbalance and inequality between the predominantly Muslim North and the predominantly Christian South of Kaduna State and the lack of full integration of the Christians and non-Muslims into the mainstream of the State political machinery." "... the preponderance of Islamic and Hausa culture which dominates the State machinery to the near exclusion of all others is another major socio-political factor... causing religious and ethnic riots and violence.... Where others feel deprived and discriminated against, justice must listen to them."⁵

Turaki also was National Vice President of CAN at the time and as such he represented CAN at the funeral of Rev. Tacio Duniyo, one of the victims. At

⁵Y. Turaki, 1992.

this occasion, he presented himself overtly as CAN's mouthpiece about the reasons for and causes of these riots. The reasons he gave were indeed identical to many other pronouncements and documents of CAN at various levels. Though tempted to merely summarize his main points, I have decided to include them in total here, because their passion cannot be captured in summary statements.

1. "The number one reason why there are frequent ethnic or tribal riots and violence in the Northern States is that the political regimes of many states, whether military or civilian, ...have consistently and deliberately refused to create and grant autonomous chiefdoms to ethnic groups, the so-called '*Kabilu*'⁶ of the Middle Belt of Nigeria. In the southern part of Kaduna State, there are many ethnic groups that have up to the present been denied out-rightly their rights to have their own Chiefdoms and their own traditional rulers and thereby cannot govern themselves nor determine their own political and cultural destiny.

2. "Another reason...is that the Governments in these states give preferential treatment and also grant superior and dominant socio-political role and status to settler peoples over against the indigenous peoples. It is the consistent and deliberate denial of any political, social, cultural and even religious rights and autonomy and political equality, participation, representation and distribution of resources to the indigenous people, the so-called '*Kabilu*,' that generates discontent....

3. "The primary reason...is that some state government have refused to implement and protect consistently and faithfully the constitutional rights of every Nigerian citizen under their domain. Rather, these government have sided with the strong and powerful sub-national and parochial interests that are increasingly becoming dogmatic and fanatical in denying both religious and cultural rights to those designated as minorities or '*Kabilu*' within their states.

4. "The predicament of the Christian and the '*Kabilu*' in the northern states is that when he talks, no one takes him seriously. When he cries, no one listens to him. When he begs, no one gives to him. But when he reacts to these, he is crushed to death."

⁶Hausa term for "tribes" or "ethnic groups." When used by Muslims in Nigeria, it is a term of contempt and stands over against the "civilized" Muslim culture of the north.

Turaki attached further explanation:

“The Christian in the northern states, however and wherever he is designated as a minority or a “*Kabilu*,” loses all constitutional rights, whether they are political, social, cultural or religious. The draconian Islamic laws, governmental practices and attitude are being systematically applied to Christian. Hence the loss of their human and religious rights.”⁷

It is noteworthy that, though Turaki was addressing the Zongon-Kataf riots, he spoke of “states” and “governments”—plural. He was talking about the entire northern situation. The same situation pertained in several of them that contained “*kabilu*” who were dominated by Muslims.

There was wide-spread agreement with these points of Turaki. Yohanna Madaki, another son of the soil, both lawyer and soldier by profession and former military governor of the defunct Gongola State and Benue State, is famous and popular with the people because he dared to face up to the Muslim emirate establishment of Muri and was subsequently “retired” by the army. He expressed himself in clear terms about the basic problems facing his people. “The main issue in this whole crisis is that of oppression. The issue is that of internal colonialism which is being rejected.” The fact that

people are oppressed in their own land...causes discontent. Note... that there is not any general anti-Hausa feeling or such thing. No one is against the Hausa or Muslims. The common Hausa man or Muslim is innocent and well liked. Rather the struggle is against the in-built domination of the Emirate system which in any case favours only the ruling class.

So let me repeat that the issue is not land. That is incidental and brought up to sidetrack people from the real point. The real issue is also not religion. It’s only when they want to becloud the issue that they bring in religion to recruit the fanatics. The real issue is power—who dominates whom.

⁷Y. Turaki, *TC*, 3/92, pp. 6-7.

This issue is of long-standing. “The outcry against domination,” asserted Madaki, “is age-old and successive governments in the state have done nothing.”⁸

Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna and chairman of CAN, northern chapter, Peter Jatau, identified three main causes for the Zangon-Kataf series. The first “remote” cause, according to him, was political. It was the determination of the indigenes for self-determination and their own chiefdom. A few of the indigenous groups, Kagoro, Jaba and Maro, had already succeeded, but others were still subject to the emir. “All attempt to secure their freedom have been resisted even with imprisonment.” He threw in the added comment, “In Nigeria we condemn apartheid, colonialism and neo-colonialism, but why should we practice similar things among ourselves? This is double standard and the attitude of the emirs and Kaduna State Government is against the principle of justice and fair play.” He warned, “I don’t think the crisis will end as long as only cosmetic measures are applied.” He told of a 1991 meeting of Christian and Muslim leaders in Kaduna about the incessant rioting. It recommended to President Babangida to grant the indigenes self-determination and chiefdoms, but the President had taken no action so far.

The second “remote” cause was the religious. Churches were targeted. Why, if the impetus was not religious? Various pastors and CAN leaders were killed. Imams were used to call Muslims to war and they called prayers for war at various times. Finally, some people were stopped on the streets. If they could not recite portions of the Qur’an, they were either maimed or killed. So, many indications of the importance of religion as a motive.

The third “remote” cause was ethnic. It referred to the fact that a minority was “lording it over the majority indigenes.”⁹

An anonymous author in *TC* put it similarly. There is nothing new about such clashes in Southern Zaria, he explained. Central to it all “is the issue of political and administrative control of the area. Since colonial times, political power has been with a tiny minority of Hausas in Zangon Kataf, because the British imposed Zaria emirate rule on the people of the area.” Then he digs into

⁸Y. Madaki, *TC*, 4/92, pp. 11-12.

⁹Jatau, *TC*, 3/92, pp. 14-15.

past history. Zango, he explains, means “a transit settlement of Hausa traders.” The town was known in the past as a “slave-raiding and trading post.” Thus it was part of the Muslim slaving culture that the British found on their arrival and that created so much havoc in the Middle Belt.¹⁰ To make sure non-Nigerians understand this situation, it was slaveraiding by the Hausa-Fulani Muslims among the indigenes in the area and caused terrible havoc and suffering. Northern Christians aware of their history, see the current Muslim campaign for control as merely a continuation of that pre-colonial pattern.

The British stopped the slave raiding, but they imposed the Muslim of Zaria on the indigenes. “The history of the area since then has been one of unease, tension, and revolts against political and economic domination and oppressive Zaria rule. Many Katafs were imprisoned in Zaria and some even died in jail in the struggle for their political and cultural freedom.”

Finally, in 1967 a Kataf was appointed District Head, the “fruit of years of continuous struggle against the oppressive feudal rule. Before then only Hausa Muslims could be District Head and even now the District is still under Zaria rule and any District Head an appointee of the Zaria Emir.” There is in effect a “political and cultural philosophy of separate development or ‘apartheid’” that “characterizes the Zangon Kata Hausa settlement.” From its beginning it has been “the exclusive reserve of the Hausa.” Only the non-Hausa District Head and a few officials have lived there as the only indigenes.

The Kataf and their indigenous neighbours have long yearned for “self-determination, to have their own chiefdom with no allegiance whatsoever to the strange rule either from Zaria or Jema’a [Kafanchan] Emirates. Not long before the riots, retired General Lekwot had delivered an application to the government for a chiefdom. Ever since then, he and other indigenous leaders have been targeted as rebels and been subjected to “wrath and intimidation.” This lay behind the arrests after the riots. Some have been fired from their posts in the civil service. The election of Muhammed Lere as governor made things worse, for he hails from the area and is related to Alhaji Mato, believed an important

¹⁰See Boer, 1979, pp. 126-129 and 1984, pp. 36-37 for brief but pungent descriptions of that part of Muslim slave culture in Africa that is always kept hidden.

factor in the crisis. Since “their son” is governor, the Muslims of Zangon Kata “became bolder and more daring in asserting their dominant and powerful position.... This relationship “led to the earlier crisis” about the market.

The market was located in the middle of the town and too crowded without room for expansion. The Kataf had long complained about various market issues, including “the maltreatment” of their women by the Muslims. When the local government wanted to relocate the market, the Hausa opposed the move, probably because “almost all the stalls and shops” were theirs. They wanted to retain control. They feared losing their privileged position through redistribution of stalls.

With his relative as governor, Alhaji Mato became brave and declared that the market issue was dead. He threatened a bloodbath over government radio if anyone would move it. He and his friends dealt directly with the governor and emir, bypassing local authorities, since they were indigenes and would favour relocation. The resulting riot has already been told in Volume One.

Afterwards, the emir visited Zango to condole the Muslims and even gave them money, but he returned to Zaria without seeing the local authorities or condoling the Kataf. Instead, he summoned the Kataf leaders to see him in his distant palace. They refused the summons. The emir then paid them a visit and gave the Kataf an equal sum of money. In the meantime, the Kaduna government had also brought relief materials, but only to the Hausa.

Relationships kept deteriorating. The Kataf started to demand return of land said to be “forcefully acquired” by a previous emir. This set in motion long drawn-out procedures and wrangling that ended up in favour of the Hausa. Life became “disruptive,” with “allegations of abduction, forceful ejection of Kataf from public transport vehicles, while the “Hausa never shied away from boasting about how prepared they were to deal with the Katafs.” Then, when the Hausa began to destroy Kataf farms, their youth threatened a *jihad*, strangers were bused into town, probably in preparation for violence and, finally, the display of corpses in the city, the situation was simply one of a riot waiting to happen.

As per tradition, the State Government appointed a Judicial Commission of Enquiry into the crises. Though it was headed by a Christian female judge, Justice Rahila Cudjoe, the Kataf boycotted its meetings. The reason was that they objected to the composition of the Commission--not a single Kataf representative among them. Apart from the chairlady, all members were Muslim appointees of the Emir of Zaria. Naturally, it was argued, it was biased in favor of the Hausas and therefore would reject all evidence provided by the Kataf.¹¹ The Commission sat in Kaduna, but visited the area twice. During the second visit, Alhaji Idiya, a member, allegedly publicly threatened in the hearing of the other members that the Muslims could “finish the Kataf community in three days.”¹²

Among those who submitted memoranda to the Commission were the Kataf Youth Development Association of Zaria. Their complaint is also worth hearing in its totality for its emotional value: Ever since the 1980's a tendency developed .

The Kaduna...government appoints people from the stranger communities of Zangon-Kataf [and others] to be the “representatives” of the people... on the executive council...and institutions.... The occupants of Government House always know that these so-called “representatives”... disdain the indigenous people, they never mix with them, and although they are born there and they live in those areas, they know nothing of the languages, customs and traditions of their host communities. These settler communities...call the people “*arna*”.... It is these blatant act of discrimination by the government that give the minority settlers...the audacity to attack the indigenes, whenever they wish, believing that the government is on their side.

The submission of these youths clearly indicated how little they expect from the government in terms of solutions. “In the final analysis,” they wrote,
we are left with the impression that government does not really care about
peace, it only pay lip-service to it. Government does not seem to be really

¹¹ TC 4/92, pp. 4-13.

¹²Anonymous, TC, 3/92, p. 8

interested in lasting solutions, it only wants stop-gap measures. Government does not seem to be really interested in creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect...., because it is unwilling to tread on some sacred toes. It is the ordinary people who get killed in these conflicts. It is they who are maimed, injured, rendered fatherless and motherless, who children are imprisoned.... The property owners get compensation, but who can compensate the poor for the lives they lose? Who can take away the burdens of decades of oppression and injustice through monetary compensation?¹³

As expected, the Commission exonerated the Hausa and blamed the Kataf for the rioting. The Hausa suffered most of the casualties and, it concluded, acted in self-defence. This panel rejected the market incident as "nothing but a smokescreen." Apart from making recommendations as to how to treat certain participants in the drama, the panel suggested that Muslims discontinue using terms like "*arne*" and "*kafiri*" to refer to non-Muslims, since they are insulting names. Beyond this, it merely urged tolerance and greater education.

According to Jega, the panel dodged the most sensitive issue, namely that of chieftaincy. This request, it suggested, should be processed through existing channels. But at least, this suggestion implied some official recognition of a problem that the Kataf saw as absolutely crucial. That was one up from the general Muslim denial of this issue.

Another inquiry, the Justice Benedict Okadigbo Tribunal, was established to try retired Major General Zamani Lekwot and other Kataf leaders for their role in the riots. Some of them, including Lekwot, were condemned to hang. This tribunal likewise was widely condemned for its one-sided composition and for the sentence it meted out.¹⁴ Fellow generals pleaded for clemency,¹⁵ something outspoken Anglican Bishop Benjamin Kwashi of Jos rejected, since Lekwot had committed no crime.¹⁶ Leaders of CAN and even Olusegun Obasanjo, at the time

¹³Anonymous, *TC*, 3/92, p. 11.

¹⁴ *TC* 1/93, p. 4.

¹⁵ *TSM* 14 Feb/93, p. 4.

¹⁶ *TC* 1/93, pp. 6-7, 8.

between his military and civilian position of Head of State, entered the fray in defence of the general and his fellows. The situation was described by various human rights activists as “a sham, a mockery, a travesty of justice and a horrendous national tragedy.” Others used terms like “kangaroo affair.” Madaki, one who has seen the depth of corruption, wrote that “we never knew until now, that a judge could descend to such a terrible and disgraceful level, and be used against the people. In fact, the evidence available is that these judgements were written for the judges before the action was filed.” Okadigbo “was very, very uneasy each time he realised that an accused person may be free. He started shouting on counsels, shouting on the accuse, just to make sure that he pleased... his masters.”¹⁷ A retrial was widely demanded, for it was seen as “an instrument of entrenching the will and wishes of the strong and the privileged.” In fact, unless quickly corrected, the tribunal was capable of “plunging the whole nation into a serious social, political and religious crisis,” according to an ECWA statement. Only Katafs were “arrested, detained and brought to trial.” No wonder, since the tribunal was stacked with Muslims.

The only Christian member, Graham Douglas, a lawyer of national prominence, withdrew and so did the defence counsels. They found it impossible to operate, given the terms of reference under which the Tribunal was established.¹⁸ In the national psyche, the issues of alleged crimes “receded in the face of the complex interplay between religion, ethnic hatred and legal chess-war.” The entire Zangon-Kataf story had become “a deadly addition to the national virus of sectional hatred and division. Its trial was complicated, if not muddy, and highly emotional. It was inevitable, therefore, that it would leave many casualties.” In fact, the entire attempt seemed like one grand legal, political and ethical mess beyond description. The exhaustive report in *TSM* on this extraordinary “legal” mess leaves one with his head spinning and shaking in unbelief. The term “judicial terrorism” justifiably became a popular phrase.¹⁹

¹⁷Madaki, 3/93, p. 5.

¹⁸ *TC* 1/93, p. 7.

¹⁹ *TSM* 14 Feb/93, pp. 4, 6-15.

The Federal Government seemed divided on the issue. No one less than Vice President Augustus Aikhomu, a Christian, had ordered the arrest of some prominent Hausa personalities, Alhajis Mato, Danbala A.T.K. and Idia, for their roles in fanning the violence. They had frequently been mentioned in the riot stories. Mato, uncle to Dabo Lere, then Military Administrator of Kaduna State, is said to have “threatened bloodshed” during a program on the federal radio in Kaduna, an action considered by many to be a most dangerous provocation in the midst of such violence, designed to intensify rather than alleviate the volatile situation. The arrest was prevented “because of pressures higher than that of the Vice President”! It is even claimed that these alhajis were among those awarded contracts to reconstruct Zango town. As to the fate of the Christian detainees, General Lekwot and cohorts were at one stage cleared of charges and released, but he was “re-arrested a few minutes afterwards” with no fewer than 22 new charges against him.²⁰ Eventually the general was released permanently.

The women from southern Zaria joined the struggle by means of a demonstration on July 8, 1992, in Kaduna city. When Nigerians appear in public events, they come out in colourful array, but this time they came in rags to demonstrate their displeasure at the way the government had followed up the riots. They wore ashes on their foreheads to symbolize mourning for their husbands and sons, who “were killed in their hundreds by Islamic fanatics during the... riots, while the charcoal on their cheeks symbolized the maltreatment of their kinsmen who are either in detention or have been thrown into the labour market as a result of ongoing victimisation in the civil service as a result of the incident.”

The purpose of the demonstration was to hold a press conference to inform the world about the chain of events, but the police formed a barrier between them and the press corps. The lead woman, Mrs. Chechet, spoke about the “one-sided arrests of people..., especially the Katafs” after the riots. She claimed “more than 400... men and women are languishing in ... cells and prisons, not because they have committed any crime or were caught committing any, but just because they

²⁰ Anonymous, *TC*, 4/92, pp. 4-9. Anonymous, *TC*, 1/93, pp. 4-8. *Nnanna*, pp. 7-8.

are Katafs. ...The Hausa/Fulanis who actually started the problem have not been arrested till date.”

The speaker demanded their immediate release. An acceptable alternative would be the “immediate arrest” of various prominent Muslims who were alleged to have caused the riots, including the Secretary to the Federal Government and the Emir of Zaria. She also objected to the “release of fanatics who were caught... actually slaughtering people. ‘We condemn this double standard,’ she said.” A non-negotiable, she declared, was the right of the indigenes to self-determination. “We will not be ruled again by strangers,” she announced, “who do not know, would not care to know and do not want to respect our customs and traditions.”

The Kaduna State Government’s response to the demonstration was to move the prisoners into more secure detention. The Government warned that such demonstrations were dangerous and could escalate the crisis, thus trying to turn the tables on the ladies.²¹

Others also accused the government of “direct victimisation and intimidation.” Dr. Harrison Y. Bungwan, a Kataf leader, alleged that “most of the Kataf people in positions of authority have been arrested.” He claimed to be “reliably informed that government intended to flush out Katafs from service on grounds of doubtful loyalty. A considerable list of prominents in detention appears in our source, including a variety of civil servants, local government employees and teachers. Local government officials were allegedly tricked into a meeting from where they were conveyed to prison. While there, they were said to be maltreated. The people supplied them with food, for the government failed to feed them²².

Jatau was unhappy about both state and Federal Government. He was disturbed by their “unwillingness or incapacity to...stop such riots. They are always caught pants down.” Their pronouncements are “one-sided and discriminatory.” With respect to previous riots, the government did not rush in relief. However, “now that the government thinks the tide has turned against the Hausa Muslims, it is treating the situation with bias.” Even during the current riot

²¹TC, 4/92, pp. 4-8.

²²TC, 4/92, p. 8

series, worse things happened in other communities than in Zangon Kataf, “but no one is talking about these, only Zangon Kataf.” When the President visited the place, he showed one-sided concern to the Muslims, none of whom have been arrested, while “prominent Katafs have been arrested and searched.”²³

One Austeen J. Tsedason also noticed that one-sided concern. In his letter to the editor he wrote, “the prompt reaction of Mr. President and his immediate order of relief measures, resettlement and full compensation of Hausa/Fulani Muslims leaves us with so many questions.” Among others, “What is so special about this incident?” Or, “Why did the president order the production of a film on this incident for all Nigerians to watch? Is it more grievous than the previous incidents where Christians were brutalised, killed or had their property looted?” Tsedason knew the answers. “The action of Mr. President depicts explicitly the role of the Nigerian Government in religious matters,” he explained. “In Kano riots, where...Southerners and Christians lost their lives and property, the President described the episode as an act of Allah. But Zangon Kata, which affected Muslim Hausa/Fulani, is described by him as a massacre. This is an eye opener.”²⁴

In the description of this riot in Volume One, there is also reference to violence in the Federal Prison in Zaria. The situation created a high degree of tension in the city, according to Isaiah Ilo, but this tension was not peculiar to this immediate situation. “It may be no exaggeration to say that all over the north, the existing situation between Muslims and non-Muslims is that of simmering tension, mutual suspicion and alleged preparations against an expected day when mutual slaughter will be sparked off.” Nigerians, Ilo asserted, were not happy with Babangida’s “pledge to beef up security.” They would much prefer that he pledge

that his government will...ensure that tacit support is no longer given to the perpetrators of religious intolerance and vexatious domination.

Nigerians would have taken to the streets in jubilation had the President

²³Jatau, *TC*, 3/92, p. 15.

²⁴Tsedason, p. 3.

promised that...government would not act in any way that could even be misconstrued as favouring a particular religion or ethnic group which has an avowed goal of subjugating others.

The problem is not one of poor security so much as “the reluctance of official authorities to use the forces for the protection of the targetted citizens.” The beefed security could even be turned against the people.²⁵

Six years later, the matter was still not settled to everyone’s satisfaction. Though a number of indigenous people were given their own chiefs, they were of a lower grade. But at least one step forward! During mid-1998, renewed rioting was reported over land in the area between the Katafs and some Hausa Muslims. It was serious enough to warrant the sending of anti-riot police, no doubt to ensure it would not escalate into yet another major fracas.²⁶

Focus on Bauchi 1991 and 1995

The immediate cause of the 1991 riot in Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi State, according to Christians, was the Christian challenge to the Muslim monopoly of the butcher's trade, including northern abattoirs. The really most basic and long-time simmering problem in the area was alleged Muslim suppression of Christians and the desire of the indigenes to have an indigenous chief replace Muslim chiefs imposed on them by the colonial regime. This issue, shared with the people of Southern Kaduna and many other ethnic groups, was the reason that the dynamic started by the 1991 riots continued in the psyche of the Bauchi peoples, both Christian and Muslims, and thus also undergirded the 1995 events.

Tafawa Balewa 1991

A report from “a Christian leader from northern Nigeria” in the files of the International Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity (IISIC) explains

²⁵Ilo, p. 1.

²⁶*Nigerian News Du Jour*, 15 May/98.

the incident as follows. To begin with, there was the Muslim nervousness at the growth of the Christian community. They feared that Bauchi could become predominantly Christian like its neighbour, Plateau State. Such anxiety easily translates into a flash. The spark was provided when a Muslim unknowingly bought pork from a Christian butcher. When he discovered his mistake and tried to return the item to the seller, the latter refused to take it back. The Muslim then killed the Christian butcher by stabbing him. Then a group of butchers comprising both Christians and Muslims killed the customer. When the two corpses were shown in public by the police, the violence started. At the end, according to the report, some 500 people were dead, with “about half” being killed by the police.

This incident has increased tension throughout the north and the Middle Belt to a flash point. Everywhere Christians and Muslims are ready to attack each other. “A huge amount of arms is moving around the country in the hands of civilians. People are arming themselves and training for guerrilla warfare.”²⁷

Minchakpu published a “Special Report” on the 1995 riots to explain the reason for “the unprovoked attack on the over 30 villages of the Sayawa Community,” the “Sayawa” being the name of the main ethnic group attacked. This 1996 report also does much to explain the earlier riots of 1991 and shows the relation between them clearly. This “attempt at ethnic cleansing of the Sayawa community, which is predominantly a Christian community existing in a Muslim-dominated environment...” was not a new thing, according to Minchakpu. It had been going on for “over 60 years,” with the “Hausa-Fulani Muslims” attempting “by all means to totally subject the Sayawa...to the ambit of their feudal exploitative system.” Prior to colonialism, the Sayawa were a “politically self-ruled and independent community,” Minchakpu wrote. However, the British device of indirect rule “provided the...opportunity for the Muslim exploiters to subject the Sayawa Christian community to all sorts of exploitations and inhuman treatment.”

²⁷IISIC, Jun/91.

The post-colonial period introduced no changes in this regard, since the “Muslim feudalists...received the mantle of political leadership” from the British. Minchakpu continued, “The attempt by the Sayawas to free themselves from the clutches of feudal Muslim exploitation was heavily resisted by the exploiters.... This degrading position ...has continued to be the bane of peace....” This situation was the more long-range history that led to the eruption of April 22, 1991.²⁸

The National Executive Committee of CAN issued a statement under the title “Enough Is Enough” which they borrowed from Sani Abacha, the Head of State, in which it demanded “on behalf of all Christians in the whole country, the protection of their fundamental human rights and an end to selective negligence.” After the mayhem of 1987, CAN expected that the government “would have taken adequate preventive measures.” Unfortunately, history repeated itself in Bauchi, when “well organized Muslim fanatics...burnt down about 34 churches and vicarages. Nearly 100 people were murdered....” The government once again failed in its constitutional responsibility towards a section of the Nigerian citizenry.” CAN threatened that the “Government is entitled to the loyalty of its citizenry *only* if it can protect the lives and properties of such citizenry” and referred to this principle as “an age-old doctrine.” At the moment the government does not appear to deserve such loyalty. CAN then called on the Federal Government “to discharge its avowed constitutional responsibility by guaranteeing the security of the lives and properties of all Christians...; because *Enough is Enough*. ”²⁹ Indeed, losing 34 churches to arsonists *is* enough.³⁰

Minchakpu reported that the “Justice Babalakin Commission” was appointed to investigate the 1991 riots. Its recommendations aimed at solving the basic problem. The Sayawas should be given self-rule by receiving their own chiefdom. However, the state government, being under Muslim control, “refused to implement these recommendations. Brief relief came with the appointment of a Christian military governor who brought a Sayawa son into the state cabinet.

²⁸Minchakpu, *TC*, 1/96, pp. 6-7.

²⁹CAN, 24 Apr/91.

³⁰CAN, 8 May/91. This CAN list was distributed by TEKAN among its members (14 May/91).

This was to give them a sense of belonging. Shortly afterwards, “the almighty feudalists” had him removed and replaced by Rasheed Raji, a Muslim. Raji, in deference to his mentors, “quickly dropped the...Christian Commissioner ...and appointed one Alhaji Ibrahim [Musa]” in his place.

And then comes a classic example of Muslim insensitivity. The Tafawa Balewa Local Government, the home of the Sayawa, decided on a reception for the same Ibrahim Musa who had replaced a Sayawa! Believe it or not, this reception was to be funded by compulsory payroll deductions from Sayawa civil servants! Sayawa women organized a peaceful during the first week of July, 1995, protest against this confiscation of their breadwinners’ salaries. On advice of security agents, the reception was cancelled.

Minchakpu then relates the reaction of the local Muslims. To them “it was an abomination to allow a Christian have his liberty. They could not accept why Sayawa Christians could be so bold as to reject being exploited. Who are they...to question their oppressors and exploiters from doing what has been ordained...by ‘Allah,’ the business of exploitation, suppression, and engaging in profane acts?” It was at this point that the Muslims began their 1995 riot by setting the Central Market of Tafawa Balewa ablaze.³¹

Tafawa Balewa 1995³²

Having explained the historical dynamics of these riots and the aftermath of the one of 1991, Minchakpu also treats us to the aftermath following the 1995 mayhem. As per tradition, Governor Raji appointed a military tribunal that was to try “some Sayawa Christian leaders. He disregarded a Jos Federal High Court order to restrain him.

That court order was in response to the Christian challenge in that court. They had argued that they would not receive a fair hearing, since the tribunal was “illegally constituted and that there was a tripartite conspiracy between the Government of Bauchi State, the Bauchi State Judiciary, and the Emirate Council of Bauchi State to ensure that they did not receive any fair hearing.” Furthermore,

³¹Minchakpu, TC, 1/96, pp. 6-7.

³²For more details of the story to come, see Volume 3, pp. 214-223.

even the way in which the tribunal was established bypassed legal procedure. This was because “there are some powerful forces...that are desperately looking for ways of eliminating the Sayawa leaders and the community in its entirety”—certainly an exaggerated claim of ethnic cleansing. After all the atrocities committed against the Sayawa as reported in Volume One of this series, “not even one Muslim” was on trial for the violence they perpetrated. Instead, it is the victims, the Sayawa, who were standing trial before the illegal tribunal. True, 24 Muslims were initially arrested, but “within the twinkle of an eye, they were all set free.”

Minchakpu asked, “For what are the Sayawa being tried? Are they being tried...for being victims...? How reasonable is it to think that the Sayawas attacked themselves, killed their wives and children, set ablaze their houses and churches?” He concluded that “there must be something behind all these manipulations.” He charged that Raji, in openly “championing the cause of his fellow Muslims,” is not a representative of “good governance.” His determination to proceed with this illegal trial “goes to prove that there is a hidden religious agenda.”

Yohanna Madaki, the deposed lawyer-governor who served as defense lawyer for the Sayawas, identified various illegalities and other irregularities in the trial, many of which would take us too far into legalities for our purposes. A startling one was the involvement in the tribunal of investigators of the case. By law, no one who has participated in an investigation is to sit on such a body. However, a policeman who had participated in the investigations and arrests, also sat on the tribunal.

In view of the falsehood of the charges, it was not surprising that the accusers could identify neither the victims of alleged Sayawa atrocities nor the alleged Sayawa perpetrators. It was “established,” according to Minchakpu, “that there was no case against the Sayawa.” Yet, at the time of Minchakpu’s report, a number of Sayawa Christians had been in detention for over seven months.

Minchakpu's incredible story continues. He alleged that the governor was behind this continued detention "without trial before a competent court of jurisdiction." In his own words,

On November 20, 1995, the Bauchi State Chief Judge having played his abracadabra and engaging in wuru-wuru antics without success, bowed to the rule of law by declaring that there were no standing charges against the Sayawa Christians. He declared that they are illegally...held. Yet, he still refused to direct that they be released. He instead asked the police to screen the Sayawas again.

In addition, the Sayawa Christian civil servants were victimized. 357 Sayawas in the police force posted to Bauchi were transferred to other states. The state's Emirate Council, chaired by the Emir of Bauchi, "decided that the traditional rulers in Toro and Tafawa Balewa...expel all Sayawas domiciled there. These [places] are the abodes of the Sayawas. This is in addition to the pressures being mounted by the traditional council on the government daily to ensure that the formula of ethnic cleansing be applied on the Sayawas." Minchakpu ends the story with a challenge to the Nigerian Christians, saying it is only they who can prevent the destruction of the Sayawas by forming a united front.

But Minchakpu could not possibly give us all the intricacies of the entire story and so *CT* included a lengthy letter written by Madaki to the governor, his military colleague. It is lengthy, but it gives such a clear picture of the entire unbelievable drama that I urge you locate the document.³³

Focus on Potiskum 1994

Minchakpu, ever ready to tell the Christian story, stated that the Potiskum riot is one more example of the manipulation of religion and of the "contradictions inherent in our own political and administrative systems in the country." He was thus making a sound akin to that of Nigerian Marxists, something I had not notice in him before. He tells of an official report that asserts

³³*CT* 1/96, p. 9ff. In Nigeria this can be located in ECWA archives in Jos. In North America, you can check it out with the Boer archives at Yale Theological Seminary. See also Y. Madaki, *TC*, 1/97, for another lengthy and less technical report.

that this issue was used as a pretext for “political machinations by the Bolewa ethnic group in active collaboration with the Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups in Potiskum.” The state’s Police Commissioner claimed that the incident was a case of “manipulation of the Islamic religion for political purposes” in the interest of “the feudal emirate institution..., and as such, Islam has become a ready tool... to suppress the other... ethnic groups.” He blamed the crisis on the Vice Chairman of the Local Government, Yusufu Umar Kukuri, who “mobilised the fanatics to carry out the mayhem.” His goal was to eliminate “prominent Kare-Kare personalities, who are Christians.” The manipulators were trying to “cover up such satanic acts with a frame-up story of an alleged conversion of a 19-year old Christian girl as the cause of the crisis. This is a shame and a disgrace!”³⁴

It is the story about Catherine Abban. The perpetrators of the violence, under the leadership of a Qur’anic teacher Hassan Adamu, claimed that they were “fighting the cause of Islam.” Their specific claim was that Catherine, a Christian, had converted to Islam but was denied the right to do so by both her parents and the police. Her father claimed that she was abducted by the aforesaid Adamu, who kept her in a secret place while forcefully converting her. How can these people be rioting because of Catherine, when they had her in their custody already for two months, he asked. While the riot was running its course, a church property next to that of Abban was burnt, but his was untouched. He himself was able to move around freely without being molested. Clearly, the issue of his daughter had nothing to do with the event.

The police declared this motivation a farce and that Catherine was used as an excuse. The real reason, according to them, was that the Muslims were engaging in the manipulation of religion because they had lost their power base to local people who had begun a quest for self-determination and had thus become a threat to the local “feudal emirate institution.” Here as elsewhere, Islam becomes “a ready tool.” It sounds like the stories of Zangon-Kataf and Tafawa Balewa all over again. It also is in line with my opinion expressed earlier that

³⁴Minchakpu, *CT*, 1/95, p. 8.

these riots, even when the result of manipulation, usually have religion at their base.

The police further revealed that the mayhem was organized by the Vice Chairman of Nangare Local Government, Yusufu Umar Kukuri, who had “mobilized the fanatics.” The local CAN chapter claimed that the attack on Christians “was premeditated and well planned through the active collaboration of the Yobe State Military Administrator Dabo Aliyu, the Emir of Fika, Minister of Agriculture Alhaji Adamu Ciroma and the administration of Nangare Local Government Council.”

The police reported the arrest of 50 people, but Minchakpu claims that Yusufu Umar, the brain behind the attack, was released by authorities before an official inquiry even began. Furthermore, the composition of the appointed committee “is one-sided in favour of the Muslims.... .of the five-man committee, four... are Muslims, while only one member is a Christian,” even though the government allegedly promised to include three Christians. In response to this imbalance, CAN told the Governor that they did not believe justice would be done and that they would not even submit the customary CAN memorandum.

Yusufu Turaki, of both ECWA and CAN fame, in an interview with *TC*, expressed the opinion that this attack was a “continuation of implementation process of the grand design by Muslims...to wipe out Christianity in northern Nigeria.”³⁵ It is simply one grand chorus about an alleged grand Muslim design that is sung as lustily as its antiphone in Volume Two—or should it be described as a grand lament?

TEKAN and ECWA published a joint press release on the last day of 1994, the last section of which was devoted to the Potiskum riot. It reads as follows:

Our constitution allows religious freedom of worship, but why are Christians, killed, maimed, and deprived of their rights? The recent killing

³⁵Minchakpu, *TC* 1/95, pp. 10-14, 20. For the detailed but unfinished story of Catherine, see Minchakpu’s interview with Abban. The distortions and corruption of the Muslim police, Muslim judges and all others in the case are beyond belief. The story is too long for inclusion in this book, but I hope to include major sections of it on the promised Companion CD.

of Christians, destruction of church buildings and burning of Christian properties in Potiskum... mark the peak and open oppression of government's unwillingness to protect her citizens. The security was absent. The government-owned dailies refuse to report such happening. The government describes such perpetrators of instability as "misguided elements" or "touts" and not Muslims. But such religious vandals do not kill Muslims nor destroy... mosques, except the churches and Christians. Is the government really sincere? How shall unity be maintained with such open hypocrisy? Why are these religious riots so rampant only in the far North? Christians and Muslims in the South and Middle Belt build churches and mosques side by side and live together in peace. Why are the far North Muslims so harsh?³⁶

Focus on Jos

This section is not about riots in Jos, but it is about the same issues that cause riots in the previous places.

Plateau State has long been an eyesore to Muslims, according to Christian spokesmen, for it serves as Christian beachhead in the north and is the centre of many Christian organizations. The alleged peaceful nature of the state is regarded as little more than propaganda and not more than skin deep. The 1995 riot was about an attempt to install a Muslim from Bauchi state as chairman of the Jos North Local Government. It was seen as the first major Muslim attempt to obtain control over Jos, the capital of Plateau State.

This struggle repeated itself in 1996, when there was a lot of legal wrangling over the election of another Muslim, Usman Mohammed Mukhtar, for the same position. His election was challenged due to falsified documents and some other legal irregularities and then nullified by a tribunal whose members were all Christians. Mukhtar's Christian rival, Christopher S. Jang, was declared the winner.

³⁶TEKAN/ECWA Release, 31 Dec/94.

Lawi Kyuney reported that the general population saw Jang's victory as "a triumph of true justice over the forces of darkness." That victory was not gained easily as tribunal members faced the temptation of bribery, the old Nigerian standby, as well as "blackmail, blatant lies and threats of physical harm." The chairperson of the tribunal, Mrs. Nimpar, reported that Mukhtar's supporters "were so desperate...that they went as far as approaching members of my family to try to influence me." The Muslim military state governor, Mohammed Mana, refused to accept the tribunal's verdict and openly sided with Mukhtar. He unsuccessfully demanded that the Federal High Court in Jos squash the ruling. He continued to deal with Mukhtar as the legitimate chairman. He also prevented the state's media, newspaper, radio and television, from reporting the tribunal's decision.

This Jos struggle was seen as "part of [the] plan by Muslims...to install a...Muslim oligarchy " throughout the Middle Belt, particularly in Jos, that goes back to the attainment of independence. Ever since then there has been a "consistent and deliberate denial of political, social, cultural and religious rights, equality and autonomy to the Christian community...by anti-Christ elements in power." To succeed in this plan, governments at both federal and state levels actively collaborate in the "injustice...perpetrated against Christians in the name of 'Allah' to ensure the complete marginalisation of the Christian community to stop the growth of Christianity in...Jos."

Muslims have long been envious of the dominant position of Christians in the Middle Belt and have scarcely hidden their "evil intention to destroy the popularity and acceptability of the Christian religion among the people." Hence, Plateau state always receives Muslims as military governors and state commissioners of police. Muslims have also "hijacked" the "people's genuine demand for the creation of a new state" to be carved out of Plateau. Muslims began to support this move and took it over. They gave a new state a Muslim name: Nasarawa. Though 90% of the proponents of the new state wanted Akwanga to be the capital, "the Muslims worked underground to ensure that the capital was sited in Lafiya which to them is a Muslim town" while they

considered Akwanga as “belonging to the ‘*kafiri*’ or ‘*arna* (unbelievers) and therefore unholy to be a capital of a Muslim state.” Kyuney predicted that the new state will soon be turned into a Hausa [read: “Muslim”] emirate “which will subjugate the dignity and culture of other indigenous Christian populations.”

Kyuney describes the “holy war to destroy Christianity” in clear terms:

They now use dirty politics of falsehood, manipulation, buying of votes and flagrant refusal to comply with electoral guidelines in their mad effort to gain political advantage over indigenous Christian tribal groups in their land. Once that is achieved, they will now use government machinery and resources at their disposal to deny the Christians their rights, especially in acquiring certificates of occupancy for the purpose of building places of worship or institutions of learning.... They are using politics or...government...to intimidate, suppress, subjugate and recolonise Christians and by so doing retard the spread of the gospel.... This is a matter of spiritual warfare. Politics is only being used as a gateway to achieve victory.³⁷

Other Forms of Hostility Directed against Christians

Though the emphasis in this paper is on the riots, the main concern demands that some space be given to some other forms of religious violence and harassment that illustrate those concerns as well. Though these are myriad, I will bring in only a few examples, trusting that your imagination has been shaken loose enough by now for you to realize that the sky is really the only limit.

The first example is that of the fracas that occurred in Numan Local Government of the former Gongola State and is described in Volume Two, Chapter One. Wilson Sabiya and Kenneth Eze, in their 1989 letter to Governor Isah Mohammed,³⁸ accused the latter of using the government to promote Islam and to “disparage Christianity.” They had six points of evidence to support their accusation, two of which have reference to the Numan event. In another context, I report that Governor Mohammed had apparently sponsored articles in the press

³⁷Kyuney, *TC*, 1/97, pp. 24-26; Nimpar, p. 27.

³⁸See Appendices 7A and 7B in Volume 2, pp. 266-270.

suggesting that his Christian predecessor, David Jang, during whose tenure the event took place, had collaborated with CAN to kill and maim the Hausa people concerned. Now Sabiya and Eze are charging that both the sponsorship by Mohammed's government of these write-ups and the silence of his government about these articles indicate his support of Islam. Point six of the letter is about "the silence of the Government in the face of a diabolical accusation of Government and CAN of "the outrageous and unbelievable collaboration between government and CAN to "mastermind the riots" and to kill and maim Muslims at Tingno and Waduku." Wilson explained that the "silence of your Government on this tells a lot about your view of your mission here." In fact, Wilson regarded this silence as a "tacit acceptance" by the governor of that collaboration. Then he warned CAN had "no alternative but to take appropriate action to clear the name of CAN." The governor did not bother to respond to Sabiya's correspondences, but the issue came up in the interrogation during his arrest. At that time the interrogator wanted to hear an explanation about the alleged sponsorship by the governor of those articles of accusation.³⁹

Another and totally different example is that of the events surrounding the attempted establishment of the Uniformed People Christian Fellowship (UPCF) by retired army officer Israel Odewale. As he tells the story, in October, 1991, he went to the UK to purchase supplies and find general support for the venture. While in the UK, he learned that his brochure about UPCF had prompted severe response from the Muslims, who accused him of causing unrest and undermining Islam.⁴⁰

The "severe response" referred to took various forms. For one, there was an "Advertiser's Announcement" by the National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations (NCMYO), Oyo State Branch.⁴¹ According to Odewale, the

³⁹Anonymous, *TC*, 1/90, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁰Odewale, I. Circular.

⁴¹Sanni, I. K. I will make every effort to insert information about this document in Vol. 2, where it belongs. That manuscript has already been submitted to the publisher. Even if it is too late for inclusion in that first printing, it will be included in the CD version and in subsequent editions.

brochure had not yet been circulated among the military. When he tried to have a response published in the *NT*, “authorities detained three members of staff of the paper and demanded to see the cheque that paid for the advertisement.” They even tried to arrest his mother to force the family to hand him over. Likewise, his sister was detained for three hours at an airport, while she was on her way to the US to visit her daughters there. His entire family was “threatened with arrest if he does not return by Easter.” Furthermore, his name was flagged at all points of entry into Nigeria. The Sultan of Sokoto allegedly said that he wants Odewale “alive or dead as he is accused of insulting Islam.” It was even engineered to have him fired from his directorship of the Nigerian Wire and Cable Company. He had been forced to retire from the army as a colonel, even though he had never been in trouble and was known to the generals. In addition, as a result of this episode, allegedly all retired colonels were prevented from traveling abroad without special security screening. And all of this supposedly because of the charge that he was “breaking army code of ethics.” According to Adewola, he was bound by military law for only three months after retirement and that time had past.⁴²

What was Adewola’s goal in all of this that called for such vehement reaction? Not much different from Christian fellowships in other areas of life. He listed “Bible study, prayer, evangelical meetings, seminars and outreaches, film shows, tracts distribution, etc.” In addition to this list, there were additional goals, all of which amounted to helping the poor, finding jobs, providing money for small businesses, encourage an industrious spirit and counselling.⁴³ None of this called for the stiff measures taken or the threats on the entire family. It is, moreover, highly unusual for Yoruba, a people known for their religious tolerance, to react so vehemently. I can only say that it is an indication that the Islamist or the Muslim Fundamentalist spirit is spreading—unless, of course, there is more to it than meets the eye or than is reflected in Odewale’s documents.

Adewola’s own interpretation is that Sanni and NCMYO announcement

⁴²Odewale, Circular.

⁴³Odewale, Brochure.

was full of “mischievous and wicked insinuations.” He wrote, “It is unfortunate that some people are quick to see red in any novel idea, no matter how laudable it may be.” Sanni and his people “twisted the facts and allowed their wicked imagination to run so wild as to ascribe wrong intention for the...Fellowship.” Indeed, their reaction was totally out of line and very extreme. It amounted to making a mountain out of a molehill, but that’s what you do when your logic is overtaken by anger and deep suspicion. It was nonsense, according to Adewola to suggest that the Fellowship would end up “endangering the security of the nation” or that it would “create bad blood between Christians and Muslims.” “It is a pity that we always kill every good idea or venture...in this country because of our intolerance of one another.” These associations are found in many countries and are accepted there. The Fellowship is not even meant for military barracks! These people are simply “suspicious of everybody who is not in their camp.”⁴⁴

I am reminded of the time I was encouraging a civil servant in Plateau State who wanted to start a Christian Fellowship among his colleagues to pray in order to enhance their sense of duty and efficiency as well as to reduce corruption. The ensuing ruckus led to several major headlines in *NS* and the man was transferred to a remote station. The squashing action was taken not by Muslims but by highly-placed Christian officials in “Christian” Jos! Some of these attended my church! This, in turn, was one up on the time my own mission authorities forbade me from cooperating with high Christian officials in the former Benue-Plateau State, who sought Biblical guidance for their official functions. So, for whatever reason, Muslims are not the only ones to fear and/or prevent Christian influence in national and state life! But the Adewola incident is definitely unique for its degree of overkill!

There is a group of Hausa people of considerable size called Maguzawa. They never became Muslim but retained their original African Traditional Religion, even though they have been heavily influenced by Islam. So here we have an indigenous Traditional community living in the midst of a sea of Muslims who are

⁴⁴Odewale, 2 Dec/91.

their kinsmen. They were marginalized, partially by Muslims who regard them as *kafirai* and partially due to their conservative non-progressive Animist type of culture. So far I have not been able to determine whether any kind of *dhimmi* relationship was ever established with them. On the one hand, they would not qualify, since they were not among the “people of the book.” On the other hand, neither they nor their culture were destroyed. In fact, it seems they lived quite peaceably among their Muslim kinsmen. I have not read either whether or not they were ever the target of Muslim slave raiders as were the non-Hausa Traditionalists to the south. Clarke does write that even though relations were fairly amicable, Maguzawa were taxed more heavily than were Muslims and they suffered “heavier state demands made on them.” But being an asset as “hard workers and bold fighters,” the Emir “was cautious not to alienate” them.⁴⁵

For decades there was little awareness of these obscure and marginalized people in the Nigerian church. However, as the missionary movement expanded into the north after independence, their existence was not only noted, but there was surprise as to their numbers. They were found everywhere, especially in rural Hausaland. The churches have moved in and begun serious work among them with the result that churches have sprung up among them in many places.

All of a sudden their peace was shattered. While they remained in their Traditional Religion, they were at least tolerated by their Muslim kinsmen, but as soon as they began to convert to Christianity persecution set in. Bode Opezelan wrote an extensive and seemingly responsible report on the situation from which we draw for our last set of Nigerian stories.⁴⁶ He opens as follows, “A minority group of Hausa Christians called the *Maguzawas* with tentacles in Katsina, Kaduna and Kano states has for almost one decade now been the victim of organized torture, persecution and oppression.” They are “treated as infidels and scums for having the ‘effrontery’ to practice Christianity rather than Islam.” Everywhere the “*Maguzawas* are groaning under various forms of persecutions exerted by their fellow Hausas.”

⁴⁵ P. Clarke, 1984. P.13.

⁴⁶ B. Opezelan, “Maguzawas—the Agony of Hausa Christians.” *Nigerian Tribune*, 26 Nov/94, pp. 1-2. The very title of the article is offensive to the Hausa Muslim, for they insist that all their people are Muslim. The thought of Christians among them is intolerable. The rest of the summary of this report follows without further reference footnotes.

Their “alleged sin is their resolve to embrace Christianity” and therefore they are “denied their rights and privileges including government patronage. They are also subjected to various forms of physical and psychological torture” and “to a reign of terror... they never witnessed when they were pagans....” Once they became Christians, “the Muslims rose against them, saying they should become Muslims or else they would be driven out of the land they occupy. When the new Christians of Musawa village built a church, the Muslims vandalised it. When Pastor Amedu reported this to Chief Salisu Jubril, the Chief promised to call the people to order, but, instead, he allegedly instigated his people to continue. A few years later, the church was burnt to the ground. The reason given was that it was built on land belonging to Muslims. Another form of vandalism was the destruction of their crops. Withholding government-distributed fertilizer from the Christians was also allegedly a common ploy by the same chief, though he never failed to demand their taxes. There was also physical abuse for which Christians went to court, but no details are given. However, the judge did threaten the Chief with arrest if the disturbances continued. The “strange” thing is that prior to their conversion, there had been good relationships between the two parties.

Another witness, one Mrs. Rahila Yusuf, reported the same sort of situation. She said their troubles started when they became Christians in 1985. She continued, “Immediately we became Christians, they... came and said we should move out of their land if we failed to repent. They labeled us infidels and threatened to drive us out of our lands. Every day they mock us and insult us. They have also extended the harsh treatment to our children. Before the case was filed at the...court, they would prevent us from going to our farms and assault us.” The culprits were awaiting the outcome of the court and then planned to drive the Christians away.

Another Christian witness, a ward head “Seriki Mato,” said he “had been called all sorts of derogatory names like infidel and an unbeliever who did not know what he was doing....” He complained they were not getting government facilities such as clinics or schools, while the Muslims just down the road had been given a mosque and school by the government. He also objected that he did not receive his allotment of fertilizer from the government. Though there was a primary school in

the village, Christians did not enroll their children because it was too dangerous for them.

A more recent development was that some Maguzawa Christians would move away to other states, while others “who could no longer bear the heat caved in and became Muslim. Seriki Mato “named Ishaya Lanto and other members...who were forcefully converted to Islam. He also told... of one Musa who... was forcefully converted... but later fled to Katsina State where he has now reverted back to Christianity..” I will not continue these eye witness accounts lest the reader become either numbed or bored.

However, I do want to share the affirmation of these developments by Prof. Ishaya Audu, one of our “fathers.” Coming from the same background, he has been very involved in supporting these new Christian communities and has personally taken me around some of these communities where I saw and heard some of these same things. Audu reported to Opeseltan that “the Hausa Muslims were bent on giving the world the impression that there were no Hausa Christians, adding that this was why Christians in the North came together under one umbrella to show that there are Hausa Christians.” That umbrella is called “*Massihiyawa*” or “Followers of the Messiah.”

The question is: Why do these Muslims persecute their kinfolk now, when they have actually climbed the Muslim hierarchical ladder from “pagan” to Christian, to the People of the Book for whom Muslims are supposed to have greater respect and a closer sense of affinity? And why did the Muslims do so little in earlier times to convert them to Islam? One possible answer is that, since they were subject to heavy taxation, converting them to Islam would have dried up a source of income. A tradition of live and let live had apparently been established.

However, since the cessation of slave raids under colonialism, as elsewhere, the frosty relationships with the Muslim community thawed and Muslim ways began to slowly penetrate their culture. Gilliland describes their relationship to the Hausa Muslims. On the surface the Maguzawa look like Muslims. Much of their Traditional religion has been erased and they have

adopted many Muslim customs. Traditional religion is of low repute among them. No one wants to be identified as a “pagan” or “*arne*.” Islam is seen as progressive. Embracing it provides protection and may be the key to employment or position. They often follow Muslim funeral rites.⁴⁷ It appears they were in a slow “semi-voluntary” slide into Islam. I believe the reason for the current persecution and oppression of the new Christians is that Muslims are unhappy that the islamizing process is in danger of being stopped and the people diverted to the competing religion—another front at which they are losing out to the onward march of Christians.

⁴⁷ Gilliland, pp. 21-22, 37-38, 48, 73, 94, 119.