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## Echoes of Resistance: Social Groups and Mass Violence in Nigeria

This article recognizes the gap in existing literature, regarding the capability of social groups in resistance to mass violence. The basic assumption of this article is that social groups as networks could serve as platforms of resistance to mass violence, regardless of their organizational goals and objectives. In order to explore this fundamental assumption, one research question was formulated: what is the utility of social groups in resisting mass violence? In a bid to provide an answer to this question, the article analyses the religious affiliation, geographical location and spread, ethnic stock and dynamics of selected social groups in Nigeria. The article is based on a review of academic articles, published newspaper reports and articles, and commonly used reports from the human rights circle. The article notes the linkage between social groups, on one hand, and prejudices, fears, and identities within societies, on the other. It recommends empowerment, which would allow social group members to find paths towards the solution to the problem of mass violence.

**Keywords:** ethno-religious conflict, genocide, mass violence, resistance, social groups.

## Odmevi odpora: družbene skupine in množično nasilje v Nigeriji

Članek obravnava vrzel v razpoložljivi literaturi, ki se nanaša na zmožnost upora proti množičnemu nasilju s strani družbenih skupin. Njegova osnovna premisa je, da bi družbene skupine kot omrežja lahko služile kot platforme odpora proti množičnemu nasilju, in to ne glede na njihove organizacijske cilje. Za poglobljeno analizo te teze smo izoblikovali naslednje raziskovalno vprašanje: kakšna je uporabnost družbenih skupin v odporu do množičnega nasilja? Članek v odgovor podaja analizo verske pripadnosti, geografske lociranosti in razširjenosti, etnične pripadnosti in dinamike določenih družbenih skupin v Nigeriji. Članek temelji na pregledu akademskih člankov, časopisnih poročil in člankov, kakor tudi poročil o kršenju človekovih pravic. Izpostavlja povezavo med družbenimi skupinami in predsodki, strahovi ter identitetnimi problemi v družbi. Zaključuje se s priporočilom za večjo moč in ozaveščenost družbenih skupin, ki bi svojim članom omogočala lažje vključevanje v reševanje problematike množičnega nasilja.

**Ključne besede:** etnično-verski konflikt, genocid, množično nasilje, odpor, družbene skupine.

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## 1. Introduction

Decades ago, one of Nigeria's founding fathers, the late sage Obafemi Awolowo (1947, 47) was inspired to describe the country as merely a geographical expression that lumped together an arbitrary collection of disparate groups following colonial rule. Till date, the country strives to maintain national unity amongst an ethnically diverse population split evenly between Christians and Muslims (Schwartz 2010), which historians tend to over-simplify through a religious dichotomy of the Muslim north against the Christian south. Africa Report (International Crisis Group 2006) says that demagogues often exploit such social cleavages for their own ends, thereby fuelling civil strife. For example, the attempted secession of Nigeria's oil-rich southeast as the Republic of Biafra in 1967 was induced by regional and ethnic tensions (Freedom House 2008).

Nigeria has also experienced sporadic episodes of mass killings of other tribes. In a decade, inter-communal violence reportedly claimed the lives of more than 12,000 people (Ogundele 2009, 3). The World Report 2012 (Human Rights Watch 2012) puts the human casualties of inter-communal, political, and sectarian violence, since the end of military rule in 1999, at more than 16,000 lives. Expectedly, these conflicts have opened a flood gate of scholarships, regarding the causes, nature and management of ethno-political conflicts in Nigeria. This is evidenced in the resurgence of memorization of the Nigeria-Biafra war as an element of postcolonial Africa (Heerten & Moses 2014). Ndigbo in Diaspora have also been involved in post-conflict reconstruction through literary and cultural scholarship (Adichie 2006; Achebe 2012). However, writings on the influence of social groups in resistance to mass violence in Nigeria are scanty.

This article seeks to fill the gap. The basic assumption of this article is that social groups as networks could serve as platforms of resistance to mass violence, regardless of their organizational goals and objectives. In order to explore this fundamental assumption, one research question was formulated: what is the utility of social groups in resisting mass violence? In a bid to provide answer to this question, the article analyses the religious affiliation, geographical location and spread, ethnic stock and dynamics of selected social groups in Nigeria. The article is based on a review of academic articles, published newspaper reports and articles, and commonly used reports from the human rights circle. To the extent that points of relevance can be extracted for understanding resistance by social groups elsewhere, the article potentially fills a void in the literature.

## 2. Literature Review and Analytical Notes

Out of the numerous empirical literature, one extensively evidence-based study was reviewed in this article, supported by the conceptual mass violence, genocide networks and resistance. In addition, debates on identity politics or symbolic

politics were used to frame the work. Stephan and Chenoweth (2008) sought to fill the gap in knowledge regarding the scanty analysis of known observations of nonviolent and violent insurgencies as analogous resistance types. The study explored the strategic effectiveness of violent and nonviolent campaigns in conflicts between non-state and state actors using aggregate data on major nonviolent and violent resistance campaigns, spanning over a century (1900 to 2006). The researchers' use of the term resistance refers to major non-state rebellions, either armed or unarmed. Campaigns were identified as the main unit of analysis. The researchers constructed the Nonviolent and Violent Conflict Outcomes data set, including aggregate data on 323 violent and nonviolent resistance campaigns within the temporal scope. The list of nonviolent campaigns, initially gathered from an extensive literature review on nonviolent conflict and social movements, was later corroborated by use of multiple sources, including encyclopedias, case studies, and a comprehensive bibliography (Carter, Clark & Randle 2006). The cases were also circulated among experts in the field for the purpose of assessing the appropriateness of the characterization of the major nonviolent conflicts. The assessment was also intended to determine the omission of notable conflicts. The outcome of research activities comprised data sets including major resistance campaigns that are primarily or entirely nonviolent.

On the other hand, campaigns that led to a significant volume of violence were coded as violent. Gleditsch's (2004) updates to the Correlates of War database on intrastate wars and Sepp's (2005) list of major counterinsurgency operations for information on conflicts after 2002 fed into the study's data on violent campaigns. The unit of analysis was the country year in which the campaign peaked. The campaign's peak was captured by the campaign observation of the country year. The outcomes of the campaigns were identified as success, limited success, or failure. A successful campaign met two criteria: (1) its stated objectives occurred within a reasonable period of time (two years) from the end of the campaign, and (2) the campaign must have a discernible effect on the outcome. The campaign recorded a limited success when it obtained significant concessions, such as limited autonomy, local power sharing, or non-electoral leadership change in the case of a dictatorship. The campaign was coded a failure if it did not meet its objectives or did not obtain significant concessions.

Four hypotheses were formulated for testing with data collected on multiple independent variables, as well as dummy variables and control variables. To tease out the causal relationship between resistance type and level of effectiveness, the researchers examined three cases where both nonviolent and violent forms of resistance were deployed by campaigns in Southeast Asia: the Philippines, Burma, and East Timor. Among others, the study revealed that major nonviolent campaigns have achieved success in 53 percent of the instances, compared with 26 percent for violent resistance campaigns. On the violent stream, terrorist groups have fared much worse. One recorded reason for the successful campaigns

of nonviolent movements was domestic and international legitimacy as well as broad-based participation in resistance, enhanced by nonviolent methods. A second reason was the likely failure of regime violence against nonviolent movements, whereas it was justifiable against armed insurgents. In conclusion, the study contends that nonviolent resistance methods are likely to be more successful than violent methods in achieving strategic objectives (Stephan & Chenoweth 2008). Perhaps the study would have been more robust if it had focused on the influence of social groups in conflict mutation. More challenging was the lumping together of over a century-long data, which do not appear to acknowledge the changing nature of conflicts globally. These shortcomings, notwithstanding, the study provides an inroad into the analysis of resistance to mass violence, which this paper seeks to achieve.

In its simplest terminology, mass violence is a term for describing an episode where a large number of people are either killed or injured. Mass violence leads to displacement from homes, including financial losses due to attacks on houses, possessions and businesses. It reduces people to living in fear (Chopra et al. 2012, 13). It is understood in debates as a premeditated violent criminal act that leads to injury, whether physical, psychological, or emotional, of a sufficiently large number of people (Office for Victims of Crime and the American Red Cross 2005). Mass violence may target a particular group defined by culture, religion, nationality, politics or ethnicity. It may also be perpetrated by individuals from a specific group. Mass violence is caused by human evil intent, deliberate socio-political act, human cruelty, revenge, hate or bias against a group, as well as mental illness. In mass violence, victims are suddenly caught unaware in a dangerous life-threatening situation. Many victims experience terror, fear, horror, helplessness, betrayal, and violation. The unfortunate social realities to mass violence include acts of blame, scapegoat stereotype, and prejudice to inflict additional trauma on already affected groups. On the other hand, "anger and the desire for revenge may motivate some people to aggressively act out their fears and feelings of powerlessness" (Office for Victims of Crime and the American Red Cross 2005, 4).

The distinguishing characteristic of mass violence is the degree of medium and intensity. This explains the elephant headed task regarding the question about numbers. Mass violence claims more than an estimated 1000 victims per annum or as an average during the course of the conflict. In contrast, the cases are either reduced by governments (in avoidance of perceived failure of responsibility to protect) or inflated by rebels (in furtherance of campaign towards winning the war). Since the Second World War (WWII), global mass violence has undergone significant changes. Yet, the term world war is misleading, for there was never a war that involved all countries and all continents (Scherrer 2007). The world conflict index shows that majority of over 400 violent conflicts that have occurred since 1945 were intra-state conflicts. Half of all violent conflicts are either ethnic in character or ethnicized. The worst type and the most historical deadly form of

mass violence is genocide, comprising only a few percent of all conflicts (Scherrer 2007). Succinctly, genocide is “state-organized mass murder and crimes against humanity characterized by the intention of the rulers to exterminate individuals because of belonging to a particular national, ethnic, racial or religious group” (Scherrer 2007, 3). This agrees with the binding definition given by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in its Resolution 260 (III) A of 9 December 1948. In some cases, representations of genocide are linked with the Holocaust, deployed as a racial hate campaign sponsored by the state and driven by ideology (Heerten & Moses 2014).

There has been a demonstrable lack of will on the part of the UN 1948 Convention to prevent the dynamics arising from genocidal onslaught, which the groups in conflict are unable to manage (Deng 2010, 17). This is evidenced in repeated genocides around the globe, which Harff put at not less than thirty-seven between 1955 and 2001 (Harff 2003). The 1948 Convention’s mandate to establish an International Criminal Court only materialized after another 50 years in June/July 1998 at the Rome Diplomatic Conference. The UN has also engaged in other preventive initiatives, such as Security Council Resolution 1366 of 30 August 2001, and the establishment of a special advisor on the prevention of genocide in 2004, in addition to the special advisor on responsibility to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2008. Apart from preventing mass atrocities from ever emerging, the successful mandate covers issues of sovereignty and responsibility, hence “the adoption of the principles of an international as well as governmental responsibility to protect exposed populations from the risks of genocide” (Melber & Wallensteen 2010, 6).

What has now become the principle of responsibility to protect (*RtoP*) was first articulated by the Independent International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in its 2001 report (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2011). *RtoP* was later adopted at the 2005 World Summit by the heads of states and governments, wherein they pledged to protect their populations by preventing genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, as well prevent the incitement of such acts. One balanced, but cogent assessment of *RtoP* as a policy tool can be gleaned from the record of its too little use in Somalia, its ineffective use in Darfur, and effective employment in Kenya (Bellamy 2001). This comparative study reminds of the mixed capabilities of *RtoP* to deliver on prevention of genocide and resolution of armed conflict. Yet from the *RtoP* perspective, there are no magic solutions “to stubborn and deeply entrenched political, economic, and security problems” (Luck 2010, 350).

Perhaps, genocide persists because of state ineffectiveness and the inability of international community to collectively and responsibly respond to the UN

framework. Perhaps, the ineffectiveness of UN mechanism of RtoP also creates a vacuum for social groups to fill.

Social groups are presented as networks, which not only symbolize informality and personalism, but have become ubiquitous (Ernst 2008). Ernst describes the involvement of individuals, institutions, and perhaps things in all human social and economic spheres, and points out that the economic, social and political development processes can be formed and better understood with the application of network concepts (Ernst 2008). The popular network-centric advocacy has since been espoused (Ernst 2008). In Ernst's views, "network-centricity in social advocacy groups signifies a crucial shift from direct engagement and grassroots management models to an approach where the individual participates as part of a coordinated network" (Ernst 2008, 3). Examples of these networks abound. Drawing on the experiences of well-established democracies, Georgia's Rose Revolution, Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution, Serbia's Bulldozer Revolution, and Ukraine's Orange Revolution utilized the network-centric approach, in agreement with the principles and techniques of nonviolent protest, popularized by the Clausewitz of nonviolent warfare, Gene Sharp (Siegle 2008). The case of Serbia's Optor reminds one how a network-centric movement, comprising 100,000 registered reform-minded young people, brought down the regime of Slobodan Milosevic on October 5, 2000. The hallmark of this democratic resistance was a day-long protest, in which the bulldozer operator Ljubisav Dokic "fired up his engine and charged the building of Serbia's state television" (Siegle 2008, 39).

Siegle (2008) identifies certain defining characteristics of social networks. Social networks have differentiated agendas and parade geographic coverage. They grow citizen participation and engagement, because of their pluralistic governing structures and sense of ownership. Their power diffusion also enables checks and balances. The limitation for centralized structures enables maximum flexibility in pursuing agendas. They maintain a broad underground movement. They build links among individuals and small groups, which accelerate information access. By connecting like-minded people, and linking the individual to a broader national or global issue, the accessed information empowers "individuals by ending their isolation and showing that their grievances are widely shared" (Siegle 2008, 41).

Scholarly debates (Stephan & Chenoweth 2008) point to the effectiveness of violence as a means of waging political struggle. Particularly for opposition movements, violent methods are more effective than nonviolent strategies in achieving policy goals. These prevailing assumptions, notwithstanding, nonviolent methods have also been deployed by organized civilian populations to challenge power and exact political concessions. This finds a comfortable space in resistance. Anna Raffai (2007) clearly elaborates the terms defence and resistance. While the military use the former, nonviolent actors have a preference for the latter, and Raffai describes both as struggle for obvious reasons. Both responses require preparation and organization. Both actors have strategies of actions, goals

and analyze how to achieve their aims and objectives. The protagonists also need bravery because of the risk of losing their lives in both situations. Regarding the differences, Raffai examines the use or refusal to use arms as a means of struggle. While defence is a response to an attack, resistance seeks justification in reasons emanating from the values of care and attempts to change unjust conditions (Raffai 2007).

The choice of resistance is the path other than violence as a realistic alternative. It entails endurance in situations of violence, rather than inflicting pains on others. It is the choice of not to kill another person, even if it is the only way to save one's own life. "The closed cycle of violence" (Raffai 2007, 21) was broken when Rosa Parks, a seamstress, in 1955 violated the racist law to sit on the front seat of a bus in Montgomery, in the company of whites. This gave rise to nonviolent resistance of black people against racial discrimination. But there are still pockets of racial and state violence against African Diaspora in American society. Anna Raffai draws attention to the French alternatives *nonviolentes* (nonviolent alternatives), and Croatian *aktivno nenasilje* (active nonviolent), suggesting achievement through action and removal of misconception regarding passivity in opposition to violence. The German *Gewaltlosigkeit* (nonviolence), *Gewaltfreiheit* (freedom from violence), and *Gütekraft* (the force of goodness) are also noted. Perhaps, Gandhi's *ahimsa* (lack of harm) and *Satyagraha* (the force of truth) are more useful in calibrating the French, Croatian and German alternatives to nonviolence. *Ahimsa* captures the stance of nonviolence and respect towards others, while *Satyagraha* relies on the power of love, justice and truth in locating "different forms of struggle that are in accordance with the stance of respect towards others" (Raffai 2007, 23). Central to this analysis is an embodiment of the philosophy of nonviolent resistance, but as noted by the civil activist Lara Lee, "resistance in face of oppression – or indifference – can spark anger" (Hallinan, 2012).

Back home, Africa has a history of resistance. During the king's autocracy in pre-colonial African states and societies, withdrawal of customary services, refusal to participate in rituals, revolt by tributary leaders, and emigration to escape misrule were forms of resistance (Ubhenin 2014). But the template changed with the super-imposition of the white man's rule, and this varied between countries. In Malawi (Nyasaland), Hastings Banda led the Nyasaland African Congress to launch a major campaign of nonviolent resistance, including tax refusal against the colonial authorities in 1958. The government repressive measures led to the death of 51 and detention of 1300 Africans. In Zambia (Northern Rhodesia), there were signs of resistance to white rule from the 1930s, as evidenced in trade unionism, strikes, boycotts of racist shops and beer halls. While the influential leader Kenneth Kaunda drew inspiration from Gandhi's nonviolent approaches to develop his own version of positive action, many of the followers were hesitant to join the resistance group. Nigeria's colony witnessed the Aba women riot of 1929, against a proposed tax.

On its part, the miners' strike was organized by the Zikist movement, a militant group that was banned in April 1950. Apart from strike, the African populations also utilized desertion as "a form of spontaneous and individual rebellion" (Fall 2012, 13). During coercive labour practice, desertion usually arose from complaints against poor food quality, harsh working conditions, absence of remuneration, supervisor's brutality, amongst others. Other forms of response to harsh working conditions were sabotage and outright refusal to work, or even the more subtle absence of zeal, which the "colonial discourse invariably referred to as 'negro laziness'" (Fall 2012, 14). Perhaps these forms of resistance have fizzled out with the emergence of post-colonial African state.

One consideration from the foregoing literature review is the necessity of analyzing the responses of groups in multi-ethnic societies to perceived changes in the prevailing ethnic hierarchy of dominance and subordination. This resonates in identity politics or symbolic politics, which has been well elaborated in the literature (Tajfel 1979; Huntington 1997; Hewstone & Cairns 2001; Kaufman 2001; Oberschall 2010). Expectedly, ethnic cleansing, massacres and atrocities result from divisive ethnic myths, symbols, stereotypes, suspicions, and fears. Powerful symbols and myths with emotional appeal are created by leaders and the resulting identities would lead to violence due to the struggle for control of resources. In the same vein, fears of extinction are exaggerated (Oberschall 2010, 180).

In understanding the root causes of conflicts in Nigeria, it will be imperative to ruminate on the country's geographical expression (Awolowo 1947, 47) of "an arbitrary collection of disparate groups following colonial rule" (Africa Report 2006, 1). Since the attainment of political independence from British colonial rule in 1960, this geography has mirrored the country's political and cultural factions. The northern region is dominated by the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, the western region is home to the Yorubas, and the Ibos are pre-dominantly found in the eastern region (Hunsaker-Clark 2009). The Catholic cleric, Matthew Hassan Kukah says "every Nigerian carries an excess luggage of identity" (Africa Report 2006, 2), and the people constantly negotiate "with the others on behalf of a religion, an ethnic group or a state" (Africa Report 2006, 2). The exact number of the ethnic groups in Nigeria is in contention. Cherry Hunsaker-Clark puts it at "more than 250 separate ethnic groups with just as many languages" (Hunsaker-Clark 2009, 116). The International Crisis Group (Africa Report 2006) describes the phenomenon as more than 250 ethno-linguistic groups and numerous communities. The eminent sociologist Onigu Otite (1990) identified 374 ethnic groups in the country, which Abdul Raufu Mustapha (2007, 3) has broadly divided into ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities. The environmental rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa had also given a vivid account of the existence of an oppressive ethnic majority in the country. In his views, this group has "the wherewithal to pursue its genocidal tendencies" (Saro-Wiwa 1992, 1).



Perhaps the foregoing is a fairly discredited theory within the field, but its combination with religious and other factors, such as “demographic explosion struggle for the control of state power and resources” (Imobighe 2003, 13-35) could sufficiently explain Nigeria’s ethno-religious conflicts as communal conflicts. Regardless of the multiplicity of ethno-religious groups in the country, there is a near even split between two dominant religions, namely: Christianity and Islam. Historians approximate this scenario as the Muslim north against the Christian south. Islam and Christianity are by no means homogenous, but both of them manifest strong suspicions and distrust of each other, a tense situation that has “provided fertile ground for both local and external incidents to spark violent confrontations” (Hazen & Horner 2007, 20). This explains the status of some of the country’s regions as “spiritual and sometimes physical battleground in competition for religious and political control, often entangled in land tenure, migration, community boundary or local inequality issues” (Africa Report 2006, 24).

### 3. Mass Violence in Nigeria

Mass violence in Nigeria finds a comfortable space in the ruling elites’ quest for power and assets, which engenders the politicization of ethnicity and religion, including factional mobilization along these same lines. In effect, social discrimination is widely practiced in the country, and clashes frequently erupt among the country’s many ethnic groups (Africa Report 2006).

There is hardly any region in Nigeria that has not gotten its share of violence, albeit some regions appear to have had more of violence than others. For example, Nigeria’s Middle Belt is a region where the Christian south meets the Muslim converge, and therefore constitutes “a tinderbox of ethnic and religious rivalries over fertile land and power between local people and migrants from other areas” (Bello 2012). The ethno-religious conflict in Kaduna State and its environs is traceable to January 1986, when the then military government decided to enlist Nigeria as a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. As a result, vicious and emotional campaigns ensued between the Jama’atu Nasril Islam and the Christian Association of Nigeria, and this precipitated a Muslim-Christian clash among students at Kafanchan, which is the biggest town in Southern Kaduna. There has also been the Zango-Kataf violence of May 1992. Following the return to democracy in May 1999, Sharia Law was declared in Zamfara State, and this created acute insecurity among Christians. There was the anti-Sharia demonstration by Christians on February 21, 2000, thereby leading to massive killings on both sides (Fwa 2003a).

Another conflict within the middle-belt region is the Bassa-Egbura conflict in Nassarawa State, regarding the chiefdoms, leading to a major clash in 1986. There has also been Hausa/Fulani-Sayawa conflict in Bauchi State. In 1948, a Sayawa

activist, Baba Peter Gonto masterminded the first revolt to challenge the authority of the Bauchi Emirate over the area. There was also the 1991 violence between Sayawa and Hausa/Fulani, along religious lines. In 1995, violence also broke out over the appointment of an Hausa resident as Commissioner in the Bauchi State Government. In 2001, the implementation of Sharia Law in Tafawa Balewa town led to protests by the youths under the banner of Zar (Sayawa) Youth Association. This snowballed into another round of violence. (Fwa 2003b).

The south-west of Nigeria has been a hotbed of violent resistance against imposition of unpopular leaders through election rigging and other forms of political malpractice. This has been represented in the First Republic's wild, wild west, and operation wetie. Beyond these politically motivated conflicts of the 1960s, there have been clashes between Yoruba and Hausa communities in Shagamu, Osun State, in July 1999, and in Idi-Araba, Lagos State, in February 2002. Beyond these, the Ife-Modakeke conflict in Osun State is said to have commenced in 1893, with varied manifestations. The issues of 1997 revolved around the status of Modakeke community, the request of the Ogunsua of Modakeke to wear beaded crown, and the relocation of the headquarters of Ife East Local Government from Modakeke to Oke-Ogbo. "The violence that followed led to the wanton destruction of property and loss of lives and it was carried out by the youths of both communities" (Peters 2003, 157).

There is also the Aguleri-Umuleri conflict in Anambra State, in Nigeria's south-east whose two break-outs in 1995 and 1999 demonstrate the centrality of animosity in the communities. A counter-value-four-day war in September 1995 led to the destruction of public and private properties worth billions of naira, including the killing of about 200 people. Between April and July 1999, the renewed hostilities also had devastating effects regarding human and material costs. About 1,000 persons reportedly lost their lives in the four-month-long violence (Ibeanu 2003). The South region of Nigeria has not been left out in the record of violence. One can recall the Ogoni episode, the Odi massacre, and the Warri mayhem. The Ijaw/Itsekiri conflict was due to the location of Warri South Local Government Headquarters at Ogbe-Ijoh, an area principally occupied by Ijaw, whereas the Itsekiris alleged to have requested for a local government area, which was in gazette to be at Ogidigben. This led to the slaughtering of human beings and burning of houses. The scope of violence was widened by the involvement of the Urhobos on the side of the Ijaws due to their standing grievances against the Itsekiris (Eguavoen 2003).

Conflicts in the Niger Delta have earned for the region, descriptions such as "a place of frustrated expectations and deep-rooted mistrust" (Isine 2008, 46) and a region that is "generally restive, with pockets of insurrection and armed rebellion" (Ikelegbe 2005, 208). In the far-north, on the other hand, the dreaded Islamist group Boko Haram has drawn global attention regarding its mode of attacks, and the number of casualties that have been recorded.

**Table 1: Selected cases of mass killings involving 100+ casualties**

S/n	Date	Location/description	Casualties
1	26 – 29 October 1982	Borno and Kaduna states: Maitatsine's lieutenants-masterminded riots arising from the killing of their leader, Mohammed Marwa Maitatsine.	400+ persons killed, 3 million naira worth property destroyed.
2	27 February – 5 March 1984	Gongola (now Adamawa state): Violent attack on Jimeta community by Maitatsine followers.	763+ persons killed, 5,913 internally displaced.
3	21 – 22 February 2000	Kaduna state: Religious riot arising from the introduction of Sharia.	About 3,000 persons killed.
4	28 February 2000	Abia state: Religious riot in Aba and minor disturbances in Umuahia, as reprisal killings for Kaduna crisis.	450+ persons killed.
5	21 October 2001	Kano state: Religious riot in protest of US invasion of Afghanistan in search of Osama bin Laden.	150+ persons killed.
6	18 November 2002	Kaduna state: Muslims attack on Christians, triggered by an article on Miss World in Thisday Newspaper.	250+ persons killed, several churches destroyed.
7	28 November 2008	Plateau state: Local election-sparked violence between Muslims and Christians in Jos.	700+ persons killed.
8	17 – 20 January 2009	Plateau state: Resurgence of religious violence in Jos.	320+ persons killed, 40,000 displaced, 300 arrested.
9	26 – 30 July 2009	Borno state: Boko Haram uprising in Maiduguri.	140+ persons killed.
10	January 2010	Plateau state: Violence in Jos.	300+ persons killed.
11	7 March 2010	Plateau state: Attacks by Fulani Muslims on Christian-dominated villages of Dogo Nahawa, Shan and Far in Jos.	500+ persons killed.
12	21 January 2012	Kano state: Multiple bomb blasts in Kano.	200+ persons killed.
13	7 – 8 July 2012	Plateau state: Ethnic clash between Muslim Fulani migrants and Christian Berom indigenous tribes in Barkin Ladi. Attack on a mass burial ceremony for victims at Matse village.	100+ persons killed, including PDP's senator Gyang Dantong and a state lawmaker.

Source: Author's compilation from various sources.

For the purpose of this analysis, conflict data collection was restricted to high volume of casualties, apparently to avoid unwieldy compilation of date. This is because there have been too many cases of mass killings, and a compilation of all cases would overwhelm the ideal space for the analysis. It is also important to note that these cases were derived from different sources (Onuoha 2011; Bello 2012). Therefore, Table 1 above illustrates the selected cases of mass killings involving 100+ persons in three decades (1982–2012).

## 4. Social Groups in Resistance to Mass Violence

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The persistence of mass violence in Nigeria has defiled the logic of conflict resolution. On the other hand, social groups have taken refuge in the ethno-religious space, which sometimes provides an alternative platform for resistance to these conflicts. At the heart of the construction of resistance to mass violence is the ethnic group. For the purpose of this analysis, Ndigbo is taken as the point of departure and unit of analysis. This is because of their historical experience. Ndigbo are people of Igbo origin. Strictly Igbo refers to one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, located in the East of River Niger. The Ndigbo have a fighting spirit. Ohanaeze Ndigbo leader Raph Uwechue describes the Igbo as industrious, enterprising, and indispensable in Nigeria's country's pursuit of greatness. In his words, "there are several millions of Igbo people living, working and helping to develop significantly parts of Nigeria within and outside Igboland ... in remote villages and towns nationwide", and "heavy Igbo presence attests to Igbo people's belief and commitment to pan-Nigerian nationhood" (TheNigerianDaily.Com 2011).

The Igbo believe they migrated from the lost tribes of Israel. Just like the Jews were persecuted by Europe and Asia, the Igbo claim to have been persecuted for centuries, apparently because of their talent and social status. Other considerations by Ndigbo are their missionary education and exploits as businessmen, professionals and administrators in the British colonial government. Ndigbo sometimes consider relocation out of conflict zone as the best option. For example, Barth Okpala, President, Igbo Community in Uyo, had relocated from conflict flashpoint Bauchi to Akwa-Ibom state (Onyedika & Akpan-Nsoh 2012). This is reminiscent of the 1966 pogrom in Nigeria's north, wherein many Ndigbo were "hacked to death with machetes, having their eyes gouged out, being told to run and then shot down, and being buried alive" (Africa Report 2006, 230). Thus on migration to their homeland to evade the pogrom in the north, the Igbo recounted tales of betrayal, persecution and massacres, which fuelled the secession bid. Empowered by the Eastern Region Consultative Assembly Resolution of May 26, 1967, Lt. Colonel Odimegwu Ojukwu proclaimed the Republic of Biafra, in the order of the Bight of Benin, a bay of the country's Atlantic coast, on 30 May 1967.

The response of the Nigerian federal military government was to label the conflict as insurgency and branded the Biafrans as rebels. Pursuant to winning the war, the Nigerian federal military government decided to blockade the Biafran state by cutting off their communication lines with the outside world. This depleted Biafran access to sea, air, food and valued currency, thereby activating mass starvation and portrait of the use of hunger as a weapon of war in genocidal terms. The bloody three-year civil war and the ensuing devastating famine caused an estimated one to three million deaths among Ndigbo. Good enough, Ndigbo

have the conviction that just as the Jews, they would triumph over all comers in persecution.

The other major ethnic groups are Hausa and Yoruba. Hausa claim to have migrated from Arabia in the Middle East, while Oduduwa is believed to have migrated from Egypt to establish the Yoruba dynasty. Debates have recorded that Igbo does not refer only to the ethnic group that bears the name, in terms of geo-politics. A typical Hausa man in Northern Nigeria would refer to Igbo as all non-Hausa speaking people from southern Nigeria. "The Northerners call the Igbo *nya miri*, which is concocted from the Igbo phrase, *nyem miri*, meaning give me water" (Onyekakeyah 2015, 19). Thus *nya miri* refers to anybody from the Southern Nigeria, regardless of ethnic affiliation. In the same vein, the Igbo would perceive anybody from the North as Hausa. The Igbo call the entire North *Ugwuhausu*, meaning the hill country of the Hausa. On the other hand, a typical Yoruba in South-western Nigeria sees all non-Yoruba as Igbo, including the Hausa. For the Yoruba, Igbo are non-indigenes in Lagos, including people from the Southeast, South, as well as Edo and Delta.

A case of this general usage of the Igbo terminology is the case of threat allegedly issued by Oba of Lagos, Alhaji Rilwan Akiolu, during the 2015 general elections. Oba Akiolu was reported to have urged all Igbo to either vote for the All Progressives Congress Candidate Akinwunmi Ambode, or perish in the lagoon. This statement of threat was condemned by prominent Igbo groups across the country. For example, Igbo think tank Aka Ikenga condemned the threat as "mind boggling and insensitive" (Obiagwu & Njoku 2015, 4). This statement was however refuted by the Palace, saying the Oba Akiolu is the father of all irrespective of tribe, religion or political persuasion (Oyebade 2015, 4).

Ndigo have also been attacked in the course of discharge of their responsibility. For example, an Igbo, Lt. General Azubuike Ihejirika, former Chief of Army Staff, has been blamed for his alleged involvement in the killing of innocent civilians in Baga town, Borno State. This was during the military engagement with Boko Haram insurgents in 2013. The Northern Elders Forum threatened to drag Ihejirika to the ICC. In response, Senator Uche Chukwumerije who was the head of Biafran information averred that: "as Ango Abdullahi's team opens the doors and walks into the hall of the world court, let them realize that they have at last opened the Pandora's Box. The indigenes of Odi, Zaki-Biam and Katsina Ala will in quick succession file into the hall. At the same time, Ndigo of South East and Aniomu will dust their files and head for Hague" (Agbakwuru & Erunke 2014, 1).

When decomposed, the major ethnic groups can factor into social groups in resistance. The remaining part of this section illustrates social groups that demonstrate the capability to respond to mass violence, despite their state goals at founding. These groups seemingly support their members and parade geographic coverage. The groups cover different organizational choices and cultures, and shape key features of engagement to ensure the direct participation of the victims

of mass violence and injustice in the country. Their heterogeneity and diversity enable them to organize around peer-based solidarity and exchange at a very local scale, in order to face the concrete challenges that confront them daily.

The social groups are South-east Igbo in Lagos, Southern Kaduna Peoples Union, Eastern Mandate Union, and Jama'atu Nasir Islam. A common feature among these social groups was their resistance to the 2011 post-presidential election violence. South-East Igbo in Lagos comprises 58 major unions and professional groups, formed by Igbo people in Lagos. The groups are found in major markets in Ikeja, Ladipo, Ojo, Ojuelegba, and Trade Fair Complex in Lagos. South-East Igbo in Lagos permeates other groups, such as Ohanaeze Ndigbo, the apex socio-cultural group, Ndigbo Lagos, and Aka Ikenga. Some of these groups have been visible since the 1930s, in the urban townships of Port-Harcourt and Lagos. Perhaps Ndigbo emerged from the Igbo Union that was formed "in 1934 to unite all town, clan and district unions in Lagos into one national body" (Rise of Pan-Igbo organizations in the 20th century). South-East Igbo in Lagos believe "in an all-inclusive, all-embracing, people-participatory government" (Sunday & Okolie 2011, 5) as solution to the conflicts in Nigeria.

Southern Kaduna Peoples Union (SOKAPU) is the apex socio-cultural group of the Southern Kaduna people in Nigeria's north central zone. It advances the interest of members to foster unity between its members and other Nigerians, regardless of religion or tribe. Like the Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus, they see themselves as peace loving people, and are always at peace with everybody. The group condemns any group that threatens the peaceful coexistence of Nigeria. SOKAPU suffered violence during the 2011 post-presidential election episode. They reported the case of an imminent war to Police, and this was denied by the Hausa/Fulani at a meeting with the DPO. Whereas, they were attacked with firearms, the indigenous youths in Kafachan, Zankowa, and Madakiya and other villages only summoned the courage to confront their attackers with sticks, cudgels, and bare hands. Regrettably, innocent civilians, who were defending themselves and their possessions, were allegedly shot by soldiers. Some of the victims were killed in the Cathedral Church of St. Peter's Clever, Kafanchan (Southern Kaduna Peoples' Union 2011). Southern Kaduna Peoples Union believes that the post-election violence was premeditated and not spontaneous Nigerians were being made to believe. Their position hinges on the fact that violence broke out long before the results of the presidential polls were collated and announced. The group believes in identification of aggressors, so that they can be punished.

Eastern Mandate Union (EMU) was founded by tribal leaders and politicians from the southeastern Nigeria, particularly Patrick Dele Cole and Chuba Okadigbo. EMU has been described as an organization of leaders in eastern Nigeria, a political association, and a pro-democracy group. EMU fights for the protection of the interest of easterners in the country. EMU also spoke against the use of post-election protest by certain groups to attack Ndigbo. The group

warned that Ndigbo might be compelled to aggression in defence of their lives and property.

Jama'atu Nasir Islam (JNI) is Nigeria's umbrella Muslim organization. In its DU'A, JNI seeks a platform for religious, political and traditional leaders at all levels to come together and salvage the country from greed, injustice and corruption. JNI calls on everyone to avoid provocative statements that would overheat the polity. JNI had challenged the leadership of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to explain why suspected Christian terrorists dress in Muslim attires while attempting or committing terrorism in the country. JNI calls on Nigerians to follow the teachings of Allah, by embracing each other, shunning violence and corruption, allowing peace to reign, changing attitude, and engaging in fervent prayers to deliver the nation from the clutches of Satan. In the same vein, Nigerians appear to believe that injustice must end for mass killings to stop but whoever is involved in killings should be punished. For example, JNI wants perpetrators of violence to be fished out to face the full wrath of the law, regardless of their status in society. It joined other groups to condemn the unwarranted violence and demand the probe of its masterminds.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has dealt with the resistance to mass violence by social groups in Nigeria. It explored the various forms of violence that have bedeviled disparate groups, expressed merely geographically. The article focused on debates in identity politics in order to explain the nature of ethnic cleansing, massacres, and atrocities resulting from divisive ethnic myths, symbols, stereotypes, and fears.

The article further notes the vacuum-filling power of social groups, pertaining to the ineffectiveness of the UN mechanism of RtoP. Having taken refuge in the ethno-religious space, social groups in Nigeria have developed the capability to mobilize for resistance to mass violence. While ethnic group is at the heart of this construction, Ndigbo was taken as the point of departure and unit of analysis, apparently because of their historical experience. The article also recognizes the lace of other major ethnic groups, including Hausa and Yoruba. Yet, the minority ethnic groups should also be considered in the construction. The decomposition of ethnic groups gave rise to the social groups that factored into resistance to mass violence. Despite their religious interests, the social groups serve as platforms of resistance to mass violence in Nigeria.

One key element of this discourse is the linkage of social groups to prejudices, fears, and identities within societies. Mass violence transcends borders and territories because groups do not see themselves as primary citizens of states within territories. If there is going to be a change, it has to come from the groups within the society itself. Therefore, the solution starts with an attitudinal change within groups in Nigeria, particularly towards grievances that are solved through

the eloquence of violence. Achieving a common purpose among social groups would require shared values and norms. The recommended strategies include peaceful demonstrations, saying no to violence, and exiting conflict flashpoints. Social groups can also glean resources from the social media to draw the attention of state authorities to persistent violence. However, this has to be done with caution to avoid the temptation of offending the sensibilities of other groups. Finally, there is a point in recommending empowerment, which would allow social group members to find solutions to the problem of mass violence.

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