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Vol. VIII No. 3

September 1989

ISSN 0280-2791

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## Special Forum on Ethnic Conflict and Indo- Sri Lanka Peace Accord

## CAUSES OF STUDENT UNRESTS IN NIGERIA: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION

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### I. INTRODUCTION

One of the major phenomena that has struck Nigerian society, particularly on the campuses of higher educational institutions, is student unrest. The concept, student unrest, is synonymous with student protest, demonstration, crisis or uprising. It basically means "the act of making known or evident by visible or tangible means....a public display of ground feelings."<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is a unconstitutional means sometimes adopted by students to put forward their grievances.<sup>2</sup>

In contemporary Nigeria, student unrest resulting in extensive campus violence and vandalism is fast becoming a daily affair. This has tended to create the misleading impression that our campuses have become grounds for breeding those who see no other way of putting across their feeling to others than through violence. This has tended to undermine campus security as well.

This is because such violent unrests by students cause psychological and physical torture to those on the affected campuses in particular, and the society in general. Consequently, they prove quite expensive in political, social and economic sense as well. In the end, every one is on the losing end -- the students, their parents, the campus community and the society at large.

This paper is concerned with an analysis of the causes of student unrest. Its major focus is on those factors that determine or influence campus violence. It is our belief that if campus violence is to be clearly understood and solved, such an analysis as this is desirable and necessary. Baker was thus right when he said that "Campus unrest can be easily solved once we recognize its basic cause."<sup>3</sup>

Because of the enormosity of the factors involved in student unrest, we shall examine them under several broad categories. Such an examination will certainly not cover all these causes of student unrest. They may however, be chosen in such a manner as to make them representative sample of the rest of the others.

### II. MAJOR CAUSES OF STUDENT UNREST

#### (a) The Turbulent Generation

Some theorists, in an attempt to explain student revolt, have tended to capitalize on generation conflict. These theorists start with a conception of the social system as generationally stratified. The various strata are then presented as opposed to one another especially the adolescent and adult categories. Thus,



Lewis S. Fever has asserted: "Student movements are the product of selfless, altruistic idealism combined with the resentment and aggression of one generation against another."<sup>4</sup> Margaret Mead, for one, calls the adolescent category, "Natives" of a "totally new technological world" and "over twenty-five" adults "foreigners in the land."<sup>5</sup> Perhaps, the most accurate description of adolescent is contained in Yale Psychologist, Kenneth Keniston's phrase, "Post Modern Youth". He defined this as "the first generation to be brought up by modern parents influenced by the emancipating social doctrines of the 1930s".<sup>6</sup>

Along a slightly different line, Professor E. Wight Bakke has maintained that "student activism is a function of the universal search of adolescent youth for an adult role in society, for self-identity and social integration, and of their predisposition to energetic self-assertion at this stage in the maturation process."<sup>7</sup> He defined adolescence as "that stage in life in which the person is being transformed from being predominantly a member of a family to predominantly a member of society."<sup>8</sup> Following him, one would be led to conclude that student revolt and protest is simply an attempt by the youth to demonstrate their "coming of age".<sup>9</sup> Further, it expresses and symbolizes their "arrival" both in action and expression. The motivating force being to gain a recognition, first, from their peers among students, and consequently, from all adults, that such self-assertion was not only "legitimate", but "a right to which they were entitled and were predisposed to make manifest in deeds as well as in words."<sup>10</sup>

Other generation conflict theorists add that at this adolescence stage, "University students are inclined to be irresponsible with respect to the norms of adult society."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, "they are also inclined to be idealistic... their capacity for identification with categories of universal scope, with mankind, or the oppressed or the poor and miserable, is greater than it was or than it will be later in life."<sup>12</sup> From this, one can deduce that for S.M. Lipset, an altruistic act by students manifested in form of revolt, is simply characteristic of adolescence stage, and therefore mere "idealism." This naked "idealism" never existed in the past, and it is most likely to vanish once the adolescence stage is over.

From the proceeding argument, it appears as if student revolt is inevitable since there must exist, at any point in time, different generational strata. But some scholars have found it difficult to see why this must be the case. The relation of conflict, they insist, is not the only one that holds between the different generational strata of a society.

In almost all cases, there is also that of cooperation and competition. Even in extreme instances where it appears only the conflictual relation holds, there is still no reason to regard it as abnormal. Quite on the contrary, it might well be regarded as a welcome development.

Perhaps, one of the most notable examples of this class of thinking is that which appears in Professor Edwin Diamond's article. He asserts that:

the students have forced the Universities to re-examine their purposes, Faculties to re-examine their careers and adults to re-examine their conscience. It is clear that the movement represents something more than youthful exuberance, more than a transitory stage of growing up...indeed, something more than can be encompassed by any of the other unitary approaches that "explain" the young.<sup>13</sup>

Henry F. May and Margaret Byrce have, on their part, questioned the tendency of apportioning blame only to the adolescence category whenever generation conflict is presumed to exist. As they put it: "Nobody suggests that both sides of the generation conflict are painful, that it is natural for people to be disturbed if they think their children are turning to ideas and practices they fear and detest."<sup>14</sup>

A Chief Judge of the United States District Court for Massachusetts, Charles E. Wyzanski, Jr., once objected to this attitude of view of viewing generation conflict as abnormal. He asserted: "It is rather strange that the generation gap is thought of as something to be regretted." For him, "Conformity is generally more to be regretted, and a search for unity is already a denial of the diversity of human life. The creativity of God as he created Adam involved a gap. And indeed, it is the kind of challenge that comes from the elasticity which crosses the gap that makes life meaningful."<sup>15</sup>

This conception of generation conflict falls in line with the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus' dictum, "that which opposes, also fits."<sup>16</sup> From this, one realises that, student revolt, if actually is caused by generation conflict, need not be regretted. But as it will soon become clear, others find it difficult to see why the basic causes of student revolt can be reduced to the issue of generation conflict. As of now, granted that Charles Wyzanski and Heraclitus view is accepted there seems to be no reason to regret the kind of challenge that comes from difference. As Wyzanski himself asks: "Could there be a clear indication of a static and decadent civilization than one in which each generation followed the pattern of the previous one?"<sup>17</sup> After all, to quote Heraclitus once more, "strife is the source of all things. Growth implies discord as well as advance."<sup>18</sup>

Basing on the foregoing argument, one can hypothesise that another source of explaining student revolt has to do with generation conflict. However, conflict is not the only relationship that exists among the various generational strata. Others are cooperation and competition.

And that even where conflict is assumed to exist, there is nothing to be regarded as abnormal about it. It may simply be indication of growth and progress. To regard every adolescent behaviour as indiscipline, and mere resentment to adult, as Lewis S. Fever, Edwin Diamond, E. Wight Bakke, S. M.



Lipset and other generation conflict theorists have sought to do, may be slightly misleading and inappropriate. As Mrs. Tayo Adetola recently observed:

There's never been a time when a generation gap did not exist. There have always been conflicts between the young and the old. But this thing called discipline has been exploited by the media and blown out of proportion, and this has created a situation that offers little understanding or tolerance.<sup>19</sup>

But that "there's never been a time when generation gap did not exist," yet, not always do we have student revolt shows that there is more to it than generation gap can explain. Another source of explaining this, others have theorized, lies in the socialization theories.

#### (b) Socialization and Student Unrest:

It is perhaps tenable to say that how a particular individual views his environment and acts toward it is a function of his attitudes. This is conditioned, in turn, by the socialization experiences the person underwent. As Edwin P. Hollander has stated "attitudes and values can be considered to be psychological representation in the individual of the influence of society and culture. They are very inseparable from the social context which produces, sustains, and elicits them under appropriate circumstances."<sup>20</sup> This, of course, is not to deny the fact that in some cases, attitudes tend to retain the flavour of unique individual experiences as well.

L. Pye, theorising on the basis of socialization, identified three basic "Processes which condition the individual's approach to political choice and action."<sup>21</sup> There are: First, "the basic socialization process", which involves constant learning of skills, values and attitudes that determine the adult life of an individual. Second, the "Political socialization level. At this time, the individual is said to "realise his political identity." Whereas at the third, which he termed "Political recruitment" level, the individual ceases to be a mere observer, and becomes an active participant.<sup>22</sup>

Applying Edwin P. Hollander's argument and L. Pye's model to explaining student behaviour, one would take, as an illustration, the family, peer group and school experience.<sup>23</sup> The average student is in some respects sensitised to the parental influences through the application of "rewards" and "punishments" during childhood. As the child grows he meets and becomes sensitised to his peer groups and subgroup in the society of which he had been a member. This subgroup may be a club, a church, a school, a political party, or an ethnic group. These socialization agents exert strong influences on the student that they may overcome biological or basic personality differences. It is with this in view that it is argued that social background will affect the political behaviour of university

students. For instance, that a student is an activist, Moderate or a non-activist, may be a function of the type of socialization undergone before or during the university career.

Thus, Roger L. Riffer has contended that the political behaviour of the student is a direct function of that of the parents. He further states that the more permissive the parents, the more likely are the children to see the need to disobey, radically, properly constituted authority in their later lives.<sup>24</sup>

S. M. Lipset, though agrees with Roger L. Riffer's point that parent are important on the socialization channel, sees the effect on the children in a way that is directly contradictory to Riffers. As stated above, Riffer feels that university students who come from homes that lack parental control are most likely to be political activities. But this is a complete anti-thesis of S. M. Lipset's theory. As far as Lipset is concerned, "the higher the degree of parental control exercised before youth leave home for university, the more violent the need to demonstrate 'autonomy' once they are 'free'."<sup>25</sup>

There is evidence from Leo Rosten's study which buttressed Lipset's theory. Rosten states that, "those who constitute the militant groups might be traced back to their childhood overprotectionism."<sup>26</sup> These are those, according to Professor David Riesman, "who were picked up whenever they cried."<sup>27</sup>

The *Sunday Times* Editorial of February 8, 1981, agrees also with this contention when discussing the 1981 crises in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and Bayero University, Kano. To the editorial,

it does appear from reports that what angered both the A.B.U. and Bayero Students more was the restriction of men's access to women hostels... Some parents, we do know armed with a revolver to prevent their daughters (in particular) from breathing fresh air outside the iron gates of their compound. Now out of the iron gates and into the free community of the academia these children do the damnest to recover lost grounds.<sup>28</sup>

Those who believe in discontinuities of socialization have quarreled this emphasis on parental attitudes as the major determinant of university students' political behaviour. The body of scholarly work nurturing this view of socialization, is mostly found in Sociology and Social Psychology. Here the emphasis has not been on the family. It has rather been on how group standards are passed on to individual members. Sociologist, Sidney Verba's analysis shows, at least as far back as Cooley at the beginning of the twentieth century, emphasised how group relationships effect attitudes and behaviour, and how members orientations might definitely affect group life. At present there are a great many propositions dealing with how groups, in this case university student body, pass on norms and train their new members for campus life.<sup>29</sup>



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A corollary area of sociological theory said to be relevant for studying political socialization is social role analysis. In a line of inquiry, probably stemming from the rich work of Cooley and Mead, social analysts have observed that assuming a role -- that of an undergraduate, for example -- is to take on behaviour expected of persons in that role.<sup>30</sup> One learns to become a university student, in part, by discovering what society expects of university students. For instance, if society expects students to protest against certain "unpopular" government policies, one feels this type of behaviour is incumbent on him from the very day he becomes an undergraduate. George Herbert Mead's analysis shows clearly that socialization does involve discovering what it is that society expects of us in our various roles.<sup>31</sup>

In his study of student revolt, contained in his article, "Class of '69: The Violent Years", Edwin Diamond has developed a thesis that sees undergraduates as having a distinct culture. This culture is not necessarily a derivation from the earlier socialization process. From his analytical discussion of student protests, "it is now recognised that a culturally distinct and apparently permanent youth class is emerging."<sup>32</sup> At any rate, it is difficult to see why this "permanent youth class" might have a "distinct" culture completely divorced from past experiences. However, it may be possible to assume that the "cross-cultural fertilisation" that goes on within the university underplays the individual student's earlier socialization. Hence, the "youth culture" that emerges becomes much more than a mere amalgam of earlier individual student's socialization. Yet, it retains, at least at the individual level, that parental socialization influences proportional to the number of sessions or years spent on campus. Even still, the degree to which the student was "properly" socialized at the family level may also play a part in the process.

Socialization theories, thus, despite certain loopholes, could be regarded as having presented yet another model of explaining student behaviour. Though even among them, there is no complete consensus. In fact, as we have seen above, there are clear contradictions, especially with their said effects of individual's behaviour, affective and cognitive dispositions.

Whereas some see the childhood socialization as been very crucial to explaining student behaviour, others would add other socialization agents like the peer groups, and the subgroup standard and societal expectations as more crucial. Even still, others would regard undergraduates as existing in a "world of their own" under a "distinct" culture. Their behaviour being explained by simply in a critical analysis of this culture. How all these schools are "functional" to our analysis of student revolt is another matter. It is our contention that if the disagreements and contradictions among them are anything to go by, they are clear indication that socialization theories alone can hardly explain and interpret all the complex issues of student revolt. For such issues, we shall still have to

look somewhere for their interpretation and explanation. Another area some scholars have suggested is Social Psychology and Psychiatry.

### (c) Social Psychological and Psychiatric Causes of Student Unrest

The complexity involved in explaining student behaviour has forced some theories to resort to Social Psychology and Psychiatry. From these disciplines, they have generated several different perspectives to the study of student revolt. Notable among them, though certainly not all, are Sigmund Freud and his disciples: Erich Fromm, J. Dollard, Anthony Storr, and Ted Gurr.

Sigmund Freud and his disciples, have attributed destructive behaviour among human beings to a "death instinct" that occasionally becomes dominant, and results in violent behaviour and then death. To an orthodox Freudian, student protests and demonstrations become attributable to this uncontrolled "death wish".<sup>33</sup>

This Freudian version is however rejected by other scholars. Erich Fromm, for instance, has written extensively about mass behaviour and the social psychology of violent protest.

But to him, it does not seem as if it is the Freudian "instinct" or a "death wish" that causes people to become alienated and destructive. The roots of such problems simply lie in the nature of technological society.

His technological society is a lonely and emotionless place where human expression is stifled. Here, supposedly free individuals seek escape from their loneliness through mass movements or aggression against others. It is only when the socio-economic conditions that induce aberrant behaviour are altered that aggression exploitation and manipulation among individuals, as well as student revolt, hopefully, will be eliminated.<sup>34</sup>

Erich Fromm's analytical argument appears appealing, except that it seems to be tied to technological societies alone. Granted that the statement that "Third World" countries, especially Africa, are not technological societies is accepted, then a problem arises:

How can one, using Erich Fromm's argument, explain student revolts in Nigeria, for instance? Certainly, Nigeria is not a technological society, by Western standards at least. His presentation becomes unduly ethnocentric, and, therefore, not reasonably comparative.

We can understand that the Freudian presentation, which he rejects, becomes more helpful in explaining student revolts, at least when compared with his. For one thing, it is unlike that of Erich Fromm, not tied to the level of technology. For another, it is not culture bound. In other words, the Freudian "death instincts" or "death wish" has no spacio-temporal restrictions. This, of course, should not be taken to mean that Freudian theory, as presented here is entirely sufficient. It can not, for instance, explain why Nigerian students revolted when they did. Certainly, they had their "death instincts" long ago. But



Freud's theory fails to explain why they delayed it to when it occurred. Conversely, why they never postponed it to a later date.

Much psychological research has also been carried out centering on frustration as a cause of aggression. According to this analysis presented by J. Dollard, an individual become frustrated and then aggressive when an event blocks the attainment of something that is very much desired.<sup>35</sup>

Frustration and aggression, it is argued, can be induced in laboratory situations, and there seems to be ample evidence of such behaviour among students just before any major revolt. The central issue(s) that are desired, and the consequent frustration and aggression differ from one crisis to another.

If one follows Anthony Storr's model, the origins of frustration in University undergraduate might even be traced back to their infantile stages, when they were predominantly dependent upon their parents! This was the frustration that could be said might have resulted in their attempts at independent acts.<sup>36</sup>

Some research findings by Ted Gurr also supports this view that frustration increases aggression. As he stated, "aggression is solely instinctual, that it is solely learned and that it is an innate response activated by frustration."<sup>37</sup> Ted Gurr, however, differs a little from others by recognising clearly that "aggression" is "instinctual", "learned" and "innate". To him, "frustration" which others see as the major cause of "aggression" or "aggressive behaviour" simply activates aggression. Nevertheless, it appears others assumed aggression as one of the biological givens.

Thus, the discussion of "frustration-aggression" theories, it is argued, seems a fruitful ground of exploring student revolt. Whereas one might not deny this fact, one might, however, acknowledge its basic limitations. For one, it requires more than frustration theory for us to understand why only a "minority" as opposed to the "majority" engage in student revolt. Of course, all students, or at least most might be expected to suffer the same privation, deprivation and so frustration. But the frustration theorists do not explain why not all are aggressive towards the given authority. Yet for another, though it lays claim to laboratory measurements and tests, frustration theory does not outline the level at which frustration can result in aggression. It also fails to explain why some universities in the same society revolt against certain issues, while others, expected to have suffered the same frustration, revolt in support of these issues. The fact is that university environment factors, just like any of the others discussed above, might play a part in determining the extent to which a student can be frustrated and aggressive either for or against and issue. To what extent and how could university environmental factors affect or even determine students political activities? The question appears crucial since it is now clear that the frustration-aggression theories, as currently applied to student revolt provide only an incomplete, indeterminate and therefore inconclusive explanation.

#### (d) University Environment and Student Unrest:

Another general proposition for explaining students' behaviour stems from our conception of the university community itself. In his analysis, S. M. Lipset maintained that, "the ecological concentration of universities within a limited area, bringing together many young men and women in a similar situation in life, and isolating them for the most part from the motley routine of adult life, contributes to the perpetuation of student restlessness."<sup>38</sup>

In the same vein, Bernard Pares arguing how the university setting may aid student revolt postulates:

united within their (Universities) walls a number of young men who were never again in all their lives to meet so many of their fellows under the inspiration of common ideal...still young in heart and brain, and as yet unhampered by the practical concerns of life....they did not represent any ruling class. Naturally, their interests were quite as much social as political.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, especially with undergraduates in developing countries,

they belong to the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. But their less fortunate compatriots in the villages were living in the eighteenth or sixteenth centuries...they felt themselves obliged to serve their peoples, to raise them to their level, and to fight against all those who had, or appeared to have, an interest in keeping them in their backward state.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that the "ecological concentration" of students in a given area increases the potential for student revolt is acknowledged by other scholars as well. This has led S. M. Lipset, for one, to hypothesise that,

whether student lived at home with their families, in university halls of residence or in "digs" will affect their involvement in politics in particular, the common life in a hostel or hall or residence or dormitory enhances the formation of common student attitudes, a consciousness of kind, and the readiness to mobilize for organised activity.<sup>41</sup>

Apart from the accommodation system, S. M. Lipset has also identified university academic standards as having a part to play. According to him, "the greater the pressure placed on students to work hard to retain their position in university or to obtain a good appointment after graduation, the less they will participate in politics of any kind."<sup>42</sup>



Closely related to this is the type of discipline of the students involved. This is because within the university itself, there are certain noticeable variations among students.

Field such as the natural sciences which generally require more concentrated study work than the Arts subjects or the Social Sciences, will inhibit inclination of students towards politics, Where there is sufficient concern for standards of instruction and student numbers are accordingly restricted to a level compatible with adequate instruction, as in engineering and medical faculties...student indiscipline is less marked.<sup>43</sup>

S. M. Lipset further states:

Students engaged in the courses of study which entail something like apprenticeship...where employment prospects are fair, are likely to be less rebellious than students in courses of study without determinate destinations and in which the pattern of instruction does not require personal contact between teachers and students.<sup>44</sup>

The most conservative presentation of this view analysed so far is represented by Henry F. May and Margaret Byrne in their article: "Living with crisis: A view from Berkeley." In their analysis, they have divided the student into various categories. Among them, they say, are:

the "tiny minority" of radicals, to whom conservatives always attribute semi magical powers of forcing "the vast majority" into subversive action. The "vast" also known as the "silent majority" can be divided into two groups. The vaster and more silent consists of vocational students. Most engineers, many students of applied and some of pure science belong in this category and take no part in campus political controversy. The other large group, made up mostly of...undergraduate student in the liberal arts, consists of those who are to one degree or another disaffected.<sup>45</sup>

One general observation and critique can be made regarding the above view shared by S. M. Lipset, Henry F. May, Margaret Byrne, and perhaps so many other scholars. Obviously, this view appears quite tenable. Its most defect, however, is that none of them has attempted to relate substantive content of the courses to the level of students' social and political activism. One feels that it is only natural that students in the humanities and social sciences are more

concerned with, and actively participate in social and political issues that others. For one thing, by the nature of their chosen disciplines, they deal directly with these issues. Therefore, could be said to understand and perceive their implications for society and themselves, much more than their professional counterparts. For another, there is always that driving tendency for one to apply the theories studied to empirical world. Thus "they can be triggered into political action quickly, but only by issues or symbols that appeal to their deepest feelings."<sup>46</sup> More so, "by their stress on scientific discipline and detachment from the idols of the market place, (Universities) have nurtured a critical attitude. Especially in the social sciences there has been a tension between the affirmation of the dominant systems of practices and beliefs and a critical attitude towards those systems."<sup>47</sup>

Apart from the accommodation system, academic standards and course of study, there is also another area where the university environment can affect student political behaviour. This area is what S. M. Lipset calls "alternative activities". In his view, "participation in politics is an alternative to other forms of extra-curricular activity."<sup>48</sup>

A number of scholars have attempted to spell out the logically possible ways in which this can affect students political activism. To start with, Professor E. W. Bakke states: "where the extracurriculum is virtually nonexistent, at least in the public universities, satisfaction of this leadership ambition must focus on participation in university management and in the opportunity to stimulate, organise and inspire student group action."<sup>49</sup>

Along this same line, Darkwart Rustow writes: "In most...Universities...students have no organised extracurricular activities and little or no personal contact with teachers...Thus...the excess energy of...students is easily sucked into the political vacuum."<sup>50</sup> Still in support of this same theory, S. M. Lipset reveals that,

students have more time and energy than they can or are willing to use on their studies, and they have no satisfactory outlet for them. Their sexual properties exist in a vacuum. The vacuum is sometimes filled by restless and freely floating hostility and sometimes by the precipitation of that hostility into a political forum.<sup>51</sup>

As fascinating and commonsensically appealing as it is, this theory does not seem to withstand empirical test, at least in situations where it has been tried.

M. Berger, in his analysis of American Universities in the Near East, has shown beyond reasonable doubt that this theory does not appear to withstand empirical test. He writes:



American Universities in the Near East have tried to reduce their (students) political activity, which takes the form of demonstrations and strikes, by providing more opportunities for extracurricular activities, such as athletics and clubs, of many kinds. The logic behind this policy has been that such hitherto neglected aspects of Arab campus life might drain the students' political energies into other channels. But this American technique has not worked. The new activities have only given the students additional stages upon which to play their political roles, more opportunities to disagree with one another, more areas in which to extend their political attitudes on the campus.<sup>52</sup>

Also in Japan in the 1920s, in a conscious effort to counter the growth of student radicalism, "political societies were banned in the universities, sports were encouraged instead, and the puritanical restrictions on high school love were relaxed in an effort to direct student energies to less dangerous channels."<sup>53</sup> But here too, as Ronald P. Dove has clearly pointed out, this never yielded any encouraging results.<sup>54</sup> Judging from all this evidence, one can argue, in S. M. Lipset's words, that,

the mere provision of opportunity for extracurricular activities does not...guarantee that all or even most students will make a satisfactory social adjustment. In all societies, some, for reasons of personality, inadequate income or family background, will find themselves to be "outsiders." Political groups simultaneously gratify the resentment of "outsiders", and give them a dignified position in the course of their activities.<sup>55</sup>

The last proposition to be mentioned in this section is the issue of part-time employment on the university campus. The saying goes that campuses that lack part-time employment opportunities are more likely to generate student revolt. This might necessarily be so, since

student poverty fosters and intensifies resentment which frequently focuses on question of fees, hostel, and food charges etc. The main themes of the resentments of impoverished students, particularly in countries without traditions of part-time student employment or without opportunities for it, are easily adaptable to the major theme of conventional extremist political agitation.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, some scholars assume that the relationship between availability of part-time employment opportunities on the campus, and student revolt, in an inverse

one. It is a fact that there never have been any part-time employment opportunities on Nigerian University Campuses as such, since their inception, beginning with Ibadan campus in 1948. But, in isolation, this can hardly explain student crises in Nigeria. It can not, for instance, tell us why they occurred when they did; and not before or after.

The general university environmental theories described here vary, of course, from campus to campus. The important point to remember is that attempts to explain student revolt have also been sought from the accommodation system, academic standards, course of study, alternative activities and part-time employment opportunities on the campuses concerned. As already observed, with the recent crises in Nigeria, any analysis based on these factors may not be very helpful, unless supplemented by other interpretations based on some other theories. This is because, for a long time, there has not been any fundamental change in any of these factors. To explain the recent crises, based for instance, on the type of accommodation system, academic standards or lack of employment opportunities on these campuses might prove too simplistic. They may have aided, but were, most probably, not the major determinants, as I have attempted to show elsewhere.<sup>57</sup>

#### (e) Collective Behaviour and Student Unrest:

Our survey of the above theories aside, student revolt may also be probably explained by appeal to theories of collective behaviour. Even the most serious protagonists of one, some, or all, of the previous theories analysed so far, can by no means be expected to be oblivious to this fact.

Robert Michels once theorized that individuals in a group lose their identity. As he contended: "the individual disappears in the multitude and therewith disappears also personality and sense of responsibility."<sup>58</sup> With the disappearance of "personality" and "sense of responsibility" he maintains, the individual becomes irrational and senseless; indulging in abnormal behaviour. In his view, therefore, student revolt is simply a product of this group tendency.

The obliteration of personality and self-control is also supported by psychologists such as G. Alport, Sonokin and Bon. In their study they have noted that "unconscious" dimension of crowd psychology and particularly its "de-individualizing" nature which may result in irrational behaviour.<sup>59</sup> Hooper also has seen that by "participating in mass or shared behaviour, discontented people become aware of one another; their negative reactions to the basic fact in their situations are shared and begin to spread ...discontent tends to become focalized and collective."<sup>60</sup> In a university setting, this perhaps depends on the accommodation system, as discussed above. The more students live together, the more they can discuss issues affecting them, and so, the more the level of group homogeneity.



Yet, another variable explaining collective behaviour centers on leadership. Following Gould and Kolb, we can take the term leadership to connote, "the occupancy of a status and the active performance of role that mobilised more or less organise collective and voluntary efforts towards the attainment of shared goals and objectives."<sup>61</sup> The Student Union Executives could then be taken as leaders in any student revolt since in almost all cases, they organise and mobilise other students to join. This definition of leadership is also in consonance with that of C. I. Bernard. C. I. Bernard defined leadership in his book: *Organization and Management*, as "the Quality of the behaviour of individuals whereby they guide people or their activities in organised effort."<sup>62</sup>

In contrasts with this, Stogdill states that leadership is "a relation that exists between persons in a social situation. Persons who are leaders in one situation may not necessarily be leaders in other situations."<sup>63</sup> From Stogdill's definition, it is possible to say that, a student union President, or any executive for that matter, is not necessarily the leader when it comes to staging demonstrations and protests. Hence, A. W. Gouldner's contention: "A leader is any individual whose behaviour stimulates patterning of the behaviour in some group who constitute the following, but not necessarily, the group as previously constituted."<sup>64</sup>

We have analysed, perhaps, more critically the various conceptions of leadership, because there appears to be a mistaken notion regarding the efficacy of sending student union leaders away from the university whenever a revolt occurs. Whereas one need not belabour this point here, it might be pointed out, this is usually based on the unquestioned assumption that they were the "ring-leaders" during the revolt. For one thing, it presupposes that since they were leaders, then they may have organised the revolt.

For another, it is assumed that their expulsion may lessen the chances of another occurring. At any rate, one sometimes thinks that the two assumptions are largely unfounded in most cases. Apart from the fact that they may not have been directly responsible for leadership role in the protest, their expulsion may even stimulate other students to further action.<sup>65</sup> Whether leadership in the process of a revolt is as previously constituted or not, one point is perhaps indisputable, i.e. the presence of this well defined leadership in every student revolt, helps its success. Apart from the organizational role it plays, it makes other student followers feel less individual risks, since there are leaders who would shoulder the responsibility of any outcome.

In a certain manner, influence and coercion could as well be regarded as characteristics of collective behaviour. Adopting R. A. Dahl's definition, influence is: "whatever causes one to deviate from expected behaviour due to anticipation of responses of others. Influence leads to effecting policies other than the self."<sup>66</sup> Coercion comes in where physical force or the denial of some valued item or condition is used to effect change in others. For instance, when some student force others to join them in a revolt physically, or prevent them

from attending lectures, it can be construed as coercion. All these are almost always present in every campus revolt.

Thus, as has been shown, the various group tendencies explained here as theories of collective behaviour, have been exploited by scholars in analysing student revolt. However, to a reasonable extent, it is perhaps more to the point to say that group theorists explain more the behaviour of student during revolts, than determinants of the revolts themselves. In other words, just as with the other theories considered before, by themselves alone, group theorists can hardly provide sufficient and necessary conditions for the occurrence of student revolts in Nigeria, or for that matter, any society.

#### (f) Class Conflict and Student Unrest:

To the Marxist, no explanation of student revolt is complete unless taken to mirror the "class struggle" inherent in capitalist societies at large. This view is completely ties up with their belief that:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. Freeman and slave...in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending class.<sup>67</sup>

Viewed from this angle, student revolt can be interpreted as the struggle by the students "against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them."<sup>68</sup>

The Editor of *Nigerian's Socialist and World Marxist Review*, made this point when he asserted:

Bourgeois analysts have often said that the crises that dominate February every year are caused by either increased student violence or moral degeneration of the youth. None of these so called analysts ever considers the maturity of capitalism in Nigeria as genesis for the annual crisis. As Marxists, we do not see the crises in isolation of the goings on in the entire system, that is Nigeria.<sup>69</sup>

The call to further extend the analysis to the entire system is heightened by a number of other factors. The crucial, however, is the fact that

the demands (of) the students...are those which have been worrying every patriot since 1960. The issues of free education...are the critical aspects of Nigerians' entire struggle to





achieve a truly democratic society. It is criminal of any person or group of persons to impute that the struggle for democratic rights is unpatriotic.<sup>70</sup>

Considered as a process of societal revolution, the Marxists feel that university students should champion. This is because, as Thomas Hobbes said, "the university is to this nation as the wooden horse was to the Trojans...the core of any rebellion in the country is the university."<sup>71</sup>

Able critics of this socialist conception of student revolt, such as Leo Litwark, have endeavoured to explain otherwise. For them, it is fallacious and entirely questionable to suggest that explanations for student revolt are to be found not only within the campus, but also the society at large. To substantiate this fact let us quote Leo Litwark at length. He wrote:

It has become common place to say that what is happening on our campus today cannot be separated from what is taking place in the rest of society. In this case, everything is connected, much as the ankle bone is connected to the leg bone, and the leg bone to the hip bone. But there is a deceptive simplicity in this argument. There are times when the ankle bone can be examined and treated by itself alone, for whatever ails it. The particular difficulties confronting our colleges and universities are both more or less than those afflicting our cities. They are also different -- different because a college campus is not simply an extension of "down town". It has a special way of life. And there are times when campus problems should be considered apart from what may be happening in the (society).<sup>72</sup>

Whatever the merits of Leo Litwark's argument, it seems very unlikely that any serious analysis of student revolt in Nigerian universities or any, for that matter, would exclude the "outside" society. For one thing, the students themselves come from the society. They can, therefore, be expected to share societal values.<sup>73</sup> Yet, for another, the demands they sometimes make, center on the whole society. In fact, in certain cases, the matters involved neither bother the university community, nor the students themselves. They simply concern certain other people or issues within the national or international system.<sup>74</sup> Hence, the socialist approach could, perhaps, be taken as appropriate and most comprehensive.

Of course, this is not to say that the socialist approach is itself self-sufficient. The socialist strict adherence to the holistic version of inquiry most likely results in a complete negation of the advantages inherent in sub-unit analysis. In other

words, one would in fact be led to think that for a detailed analysis of any important issue, it is not only desirable, but even necessary that it be subdivided into various units. This is perhaps most likely to reveal more of the salient points or facts that might have been omitted or simply ignored through an attempt at studying the whole society at the same time. Moreover, it does not seem very likely that even Marxist, except the most pedantic ones, would dispute the fact that the extent to which the various university campuses react to issues is largely determined by: the size, the historical experiences, the location, environmental factors, the reaction of the law enforcement agents or even the reaction of the university authorities or lecturers of that particular university.

Again, the Marxists, more than anyone else are noted for extending issues. If a student revolt takes place on the campus, it is a manifestation of the alienation of lower class by the bourgeois class in the larger society. Asked to explain further, they are likely to say that it is the alienation of that whole "larger society" by the international capitalist metropole. Especially if it happens in a less developed country, then it is yet another manifestation of the dependency relationship; a classic feature of capitalist development. But if it happens to be from a developed country, say, U.S.A., then it is the internal contradictions in that society. An inevitable process, a progression towards revolutionary take over by the exploited class. If asked the solution, Marxists are likely to say a total overthrow of the system and establishment of international communism in which every one will take according to his needs and contribute according to his ability.

But even the most serious defect of the Marxist interpretation of student crises is not simply a product of holism. That is, it is not just the problem of exclusion and inclusion of certain information or facts in formulating a policy on student crises. Marxism is often superb for the insight it gives into the behaviour of the upper classes (exploiting classes); but it is almost sterile for our understanding of lower classes (to which, as they may say, university students belong). In other words, the ways in which dominant classes pump an economic surplus out of the lower classes, thus constitute a major key to the explanation of any specific social phenomenon. Generation conflict, socialization factors, environmental issues etc. all play their parts, often one more crucial than the mode of production itself which generates classes, exploitation and alienation. Not taking due cognisance of these facts, the Marxist tradition is of little help in understanding those aspects of social structure among university students that lead at times to resistance and revolt against the prevailing order, or at other times to docile acceptance. For example, how can one explain the situation in which on the same campus, the "majority", prefer to be docile, and the "minority" revolt in issues that concern and affect both. Thus, like other factors considered above, class struggle alone, not supplemented by other causes can hardly explain the complete phenomenon of student unrest. Certainly, as we have seen, student



unrests have many causes -- some remote while other immediate to the particular crisis.

### III CONCLUSION

The paper has attempted to suggest that student unrest is too complex to be explained by one particular cause in isolation to others. This is based on the assumption that, a particular student unrest, contrarily to popular opinion in this country, is not to be seen and taken as the same with any that has occurred before. This is mainly because viewed more critically, there are recognisable and significant differences between one revolt and another.

Moreover, most of these causes of student unrests discussed above, no matter how sound or convincing they might appear to be, deal only with the background and predisposing factors of revolts. Using them in isolation, it would be difficult to arrive at all the factors that gave rise to a specific revolt. For us to be able to identify most of the causes of specific revolts, we might well have to analyse both these background and predisposing factors as well as the remote and immediate causes of the revolt in question.

Finally, this paper needs to be read in conjunction with my other paper that follows it titled: **Solutions to Student Crises in Nigeria**. The present one limits itself to the task given me by the organizers of the Workshop as the present title shows. But the other paper moves beyond diagnosis to suggesting policy recommendations to student crises.

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23. The application of their theories to explain student revolt is essentially my own handiwork. None of them attempted to do this with reference to student revolt. But space and time prevents me in this paper in going more in detail and offering my full critique as I did in my *Student Revolt in Nigeria*, op. cit.

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Vol. VIII No. 4

December 1989

ISSN 0280-2791

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