

ETHNIC MINORITY AGITATIONS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Volume I



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Political Thuggery and the Crisis of
Political Development in Tivland: A Comparative
Study of J.S. Tarka's Young Pioneer and Baver
Dzeremo's Strikers

John Tor Tsuwa

Introduction

Politics in a nutshell can be described as a process where people collectively decide the means and strategy of not only recruiting their leadership but also distributing the resources within their society. There are different strategies people or groups adopt to gain political positions which gives them access to play major roles in the distribution of societal resources. The need to acquire strategic positions is because the positions affords the individual or group(s) the authority to distribute the scarce resources that are highly valued. It is also because occupation of these positions are determined and shaped by the number of actors and their interests. It is worthy to point here that usually, the kind of strategy adopted by an actor or actors is or are depended on the nature and character of the society in which they are operating. This is because the nature of the society brings out the dynamics of the competition, the contending actors, and their degree of interest, their traditional and cultural belief especially as it relates to leadership recruitment, usage of power and

distribution of resources. It is wont to observe here that during the interaction to recruit leaders and give them the authority to share societal resources, contestations and disagreements usually ensue to the point that if they are not properly managed, they result to the breakdown of law and order which manifest in destruction of life and property.

Since politics is likely to become conflictual particularly in weak democracies where the democratic institution are not consolidated and capable to contend with the vagaries of contestation, the actors/political gladiators usually prepare in all ramifications to achieving their goals through all means including violence. The usage of violence in politics takes place in different forms ranging from intimidation and harassment of the political opponents, to outright killing of political opponents. It is worthy to note here that the activities of the thugs that manifest in political violence are sponsored by political gladiators to enable them capture and retain power.

This chapter is therefore aimed at interrogating the recruitment and usage of political thugs especially in Tiv politics with a special focus on the dynamics of political thuggery that occurred in Tivland during J.S. Tarka leadership of the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and Bayer Dzermo's leadership of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Tarka Local Government of Benue State.

Conceptualizing Political Thuggery

Political thuggery is an act use by political actors, parties and their recruited agents to ensure that they capture, use and retain political power within a political system. Political thuggery is machinery used to muscle out political opposition with the hope of depriving those on the opposite side a voice in the governing process of their community. This phenomenon Idris (2001:1) argues communalizes politics and leaves it in the hands of pufferies, thugs, hooligans and

chases the good people away. Political thuggery generates conflicts and violence in the political system as it is carried out with force and coercion. It is sometimes brutal that it may lead to elimination of opponents.

The nature of political thuggery in Tivland has been very brutal in the two cases under consideration. In the first instance, it was brutal because the entire Tivland had an agenda they had wished to protect and as such, they were all united to reject alien rule and domination that would prevent them from exercising their wish. The Tiv position was that, after suffering brutality from the colonial imperialists, they were no longer prepared to suffer from internal colonialism. In the second instance, the fragmentation in the political elites of Tarka Local Government and the desire to retain power created factions within the same political party and later an opposition political power. While the other faction wanted to rescue power from an incumbent local government chairman, the incumbent Hon. Bayer Dzeremo favoured by state and traditional power was not prepared to relinquish power. This created a violent situation in Tarja Local Government.

The Theoretical Problematic

The NPC created what Logams (2004:13) called internal colonialism. This is a theory that analyses structural political relationships between unequal groups, within the same national borders, in which some groups exist in a colonial situation and who, when they gain consciousness or their circumstances, they organize themselves politically for liberation by demanding separation. It is worthy to note that the indigenous colonial system established a centre and periphery to which it assigned surrogates to manage the periphery.

The middle belt groups existed in a situation of internal colonialism in relation to the Islamic society within the very

boundaries of the British created North after 1900. This, Logams (2004:13) argues resulted to the organization of the middle belt group of a political movement that demanded for the separation from the Islamic society and their constitution into a Middle-Belt Region as a unit of the Nigerian federation in the period between 1949 and 1967. This movement was to do away with the dependent and subordinate position in relationship to the Islamic society. The middle belt was not only dependent and subordinated, but its groups were considered to be and treated as 'second class' citizens of the North by the Islamic society.

In the post independence era, the Northern colonialists utilizing colonial power creation and with the middle belt drawn compradors were bent to continue the internal colonial structures. The middle belt therefore arbitrarily incorporated into the North became a part of Nigeria to suffer from unequal development in the allocation of socio-economic resources that were meant for the north as a result of their rejection of the Islamic Northern leadership. It is this continuum pattern of inequality that led to the political development of the struggle for a middle belt state which was subsequently led by the UMBC

J.S. Tarka and the Political Dynamics in Tivland

The emergence of Tarka as a leader of the Tiv people, a people that are traditionally egalitarian in nature and opposed to the capture and usage of power by a single individual made him a phenomenon. The UMBC had Achirga Abuul as their proposed leader before the elections, however, J.S. Tarka's level of education and his youthfulness gave him the advantage over Abuul and as such he was accordingly elected as the UMBC leader. With his election, Hembe (2003:6) argues Tarka's name became synonymous with Tiv politics. Hembe argues that, the acceptability of Tarka by Tiv people was so huge that if a pig was put up for election by Tarka, the Tiv would vote for it

rather than for any human being standing on any platform. It was based on this that Aba (1980:4) accepts Hembe's argument and point out that, Tarka's power, authority and glory was so great that he could ignore his party and select the candidates of his party single-handedly without opposition views from his members.

We can argue that, many factors accounted to why Tarka received this overwhelming support from the Tiv people. One, he became a leader at the time the Tiv people were fighting against the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Native Authority (NA) who were highly dictatorial and oppressive to the Tiv people. According to Abeghe (2004 :137) at the time Tarka emerged, the NA and NPC treated the Tiv with despise. They were autocratic and overbearing, the Tiv were therefore looking for a platform to dislodge the leadership of these group. Tarka emergence became the desired alternative. Two, as Makar (1994:217) confessed, Tarka came when the Tiv people were demanding for a dynamic and outspoken leader who could air the Tiv aspiration at the local and national levels. As a Grade I teacher, his educational qualification afforded him these qualities and he thus fitted perfectly into the desire of the Tiv people. In fact, Tarka overture endeared him to the youths especially the alienated ones who perceived that Tarka's prominence will acquire jobs for them. Finally, Tarka emerged when Nigerian politics became ethnically shaped and each ethnic group desired to own its political party which will be led by one of its own, Tarka emergence as a leader therefore came at the right time as the whole of Tiv division embraced not only UMBC but its leadership.

According to Tyuuluv (2008:2) the nature of Tiv politico-cultural setting which was closely-knitted and refused subjugation to alien rule made Tarka to be popular. He argues further that, the Tiv rejection of foreign rule was so strong that it formed part of their culture and was even expressed

in songs insinuating that any person or group of non Tiv stock shall be drawn by the Tiv people if they attempt to dominate the Tiv people. For instance, the following rhythm expressed clearly Tiv position and action against external subjugation

*Myam chier m er Uke mile, oh Uke mile.
Shima yam ngi awambe awambe, hoon agi awambe*

Translation: I have a dream that all foreigners have drawn, yes they have been drawn, my heart is filled with blood, yes it is filled with blood.

The implication of the above song is that, the Tiv will use their last ounce of blood to defend themselves from the penetration of their politico-cultural system by a person or a group of people. With this mindset, the Tiv remained cohesive and even when Tarka became more autocratic as exemplified by his imposition of Mallam Ibrahim Imam "Iwarwar Gatie" a non-Tiv from Borno on the Tiv of Jemgbah as member of the Northern House of Assembly, he won the election because the only opposition was from the NPC, which was considered as a foreign party.

The NPC-UMBC Struggle for the Control of Tivland
The NPC, a Northern regional party emerged according Schwars (1965) as cited by Hembe (2003:123) to respond to perceived threat of Southern domination of the Northern region. The fear of southern and Western domination of the North was a feared venture by northern leaders who apart from wanting to be in control of Nigeria after the departure of the British never wanted their hold on power to change. Thus united by culture and religion, the Hausa-Fulani formed and maintained the NPC and wished to not only capture power at the centre but also to spread its hold to power throughout

the country.

In their bid to spread their leadership tentacles, Tivland also shared in the onslaught of the NPC on two fronts. One, they wanted to spread the authority of the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy into Tivland which was considered as part of the North. Secondly, it was to continue its push towards the spread of Islam in Tivland and by extension penetrate other parts of Nigeria who had rejected Islam. To introduce NPC into Tivland, local corroborators were needed to liaise with the central Northern authorities. Late Akiga Sai who had been an employee of the Gaskiya Corporation in Zaria therefore became the first Tiv man to be used. When Akiga became weak as a result of health challenges, Lushakyya Anja took over and lobbied other prominent Tiv persons like Abaagu to join the NPC.

The arguments of these prominent NPC members of Tiv extraction, that the fight of the UMBC for a Middle Belt state was not realistic as the party in power—the NPC could not give such privilege to its enemy. Secondly, they lamented the state of development in Tivland and argued that, Tivland was backward because of their opposition to the central government. They argued that, to attract development to Tivland, there was every need for Tiv people to join the NPC. With zeal and vigor, Iyorfer Kumba of Mbagbera who took over the leadership of the NPC in Tivland after Anjo went on the street mobilizing people and educating them on the need to join the NPC. He also embarked on a campaign to change the people's perception of NPC as a Muslim party. With massive support from the NPC headquarters, the NPC in Tivland began to gain support and ground in Tivland.

It is wont to state clearly that the penetration of NPC into Tivland was not without skirmishes. This is because majority of Tiv people rejected NPC and anybody that belonged to it. The NPC therefore decided to force and coerce Tiv people

into submission as they utilized the instrumentality of the chiefs and NA officials who brutally implemented policies against members of the UMBC. Despite this brutality of the NPC, the Tiv people continued to reject the NPC as they considered the NPC as not only trying to Islamize Tivland but to also deprive the Tiv of their cherished independence.

It is worthy to observe here that, in the build up to Nigeria's independence, the Nigerian political process became highly ethnicized and agitations for power, sharing of resources amongst others became based on ethnic calculations. The control of the Northern regional power by the NPC and their desire to coerce all the minorities in submission to the authority of the crafted North was vehemently rejected by the minority groups such as the Tiv, Berrom, Angas, Eggon, Angwuta, Alago amongst others under Tiv leadership. In this struggle, a common political party for the minorities was needed with structures that will ensure their effective participation in the decision making process of their land.

The UMBC with the sole aim of creating a Middle Belt state therefore became the party for these minorities and Tarka became the leaders to mobilize the people for this task. Just as the NPC feared western domination, these minorities feared the economic, political and social oppression and subjugation of the Hausa/Fulani North. They also feared the Islamization of their region. The UMBC's propaganda became intensified with the brutal activities of the N.A. and traditional rulers. The resentment for the NPC and its followers became almost total. In fact, the tension, suspicion, resentment and hatred for the NPC was so deep that at UMBC campaigns, Abeghe (2005:56) argues the audience were asked, *u ngu Tiv shin u ngu Uke?* (are you Tiv or Hausa), in unison, the people will reply *m gu Tiv* (I am Tiv) and they will be told that the NPC is for Hausa and their agents who are determined to convert Tiv into Islam so as to compare them to wash their "anus", an act the Tiv consider as a dirty habit.

So as the NPC used the phrase "NPC power" to seek attention and humiliate UMBC members and coerce them into joining the NPC, the UMBC supporters continued with their propaganda of hatred against the NPC and its followers. We can therefore support Abegh's argument and sum it up that, the relationship between the NPC and UMBC epitomized the limited degree of cruelty and human savagery in the history of political intimidation aimed at quieting members of opposition all over Northern region. With this development, the only option that was left for the UMBC who were in the majority was to do everything possible to denounce the *Baja*-NPC and to listen only to the voice of Tarka. With these conditions on ground, the tension and seed for political thuggery in Tivland was sowed and was fast germinating within the eve of the independence election in 1959.

After the independence elections, the UMBC won all the seats in Tiv province. However, some UMBC elected officers in the quest for juicy offices began cross carpeting to the NPC. The cross carpeting of Tiv representatives at the Northern House of Assembly to the NPC began giving NPC the strength it required in Tivland. It is worthy to observe that, the desperation of the NPC in mobilizing and capturing votes in Tivland was so high that the party compelled the emirs and the Tor Tiv to use all at their disposal to achieve the task or be overthrown. NA councilors such as Lushakyya Anja, Atim Atedze were made party officials and the Tor Tiv Gondo Aluor and his deputy Bendega Ukpada became part of the party. The NA officials and the Tor Tiv were therefore mandated to deal with anybody that will prevent the NPC from winning elections in Tivland.

The UMBC on the other hand was still determined to continue its hold on the politics of Tivland in the midst of all odds. And so according to UMBC any Tiv man that was in NPC was referred to as *Baja*. *Baja* therefore become synonymous

with NPC. The word *Baja* therefore became a great weapon of the UMBC against the NPC. According to Justice A.B. Utsaha, *Baja* was an Ikyurav man who became a slave and later the chief slave in the stock of Chief Abuul Benga of Ukan. After slave trade was abolished and Abuul killed by the colonialist, *Baja* was released and asked to go. *Baja* refused this liberation and continued to stay around the Abuul Benga household. When the propaganda by UMBC for the liberation of Tivland from Hausa/Fulani NPC became heightened, Dominic Andim, a chieftain of UMBC brought the concept and story of *Baja* into the propaganda and argued that anybody that refused UMBC struggle for liberation was *Baja*. To this effect, any Tiv man that joined the NPC was therefore considered to be *Baja* and the punishment for a *baja* was contained in the song below;

Tyo yam moo
Baja Lu tso
Tyo yam cir nen baja
Lu tso, baja lutso
Alu se pev baja ihinga leghlegh
Se wa ishange isha sha mi
Se kpa se tese baja tahav
 This song is translated thus;

My people let the *baja* (NPC) just be, we shall soon punch the nose of *baja* (NPC) and put on a bid to show him our power.

The above shows clearly the tension that developed between the NPC and UMBC in Tivland. With this condition, the stage for brutal rivalry between the two political blocs became eminent and to execute this, each political party was to develop a viable youth group that will be capable to defend its own

political bloc in the ensuing violence. At this point, the Young Pioneers became the available strong and viable group to be used by the UMBC against the NPC brutality.

J.S. Tarka Young Pioneer and Political Thuggery in Tivland.

Oral narrations corroborates Makar (1994), Abeghe (2005) and Kanan (2004) views that, political thuggery in Tivland commenced with the brutal and coercive manner the NPC and its government and traditional apparatus were determined to capture and rule over Tivland. According to Makar (1994:225) the tactless, arrogant and sometimes stupid behaviour and action of some NPC supporters in the services of the Tiv NA created the occasion for violence and agents of violence. According to Abeghe (2005:68) after the UMBC won all the seven seats of Northern House Assembly in the 1959 elections in Tivland, the NPC feared that same feat will be repeated in the next elections. To avoid this defeat in the next election, the chiefs and orthodox NPC supporters in Tiv division had to use all available power at this disposal.

According to Barrister Nomishan a former secretary of the Young Pioneer, the first party that introduced thuggery, violence and brutality in Tivland was the NPC which used the Native Authority (NA), the courts, tax collectors and members of the Sadauna Brigade to molest Tiv people into submission to the NPC which majority of the Tiv people rejected.

Oral narration has it that, NPC brutality against UMBC members increased to the level that even wives of UMBC members were prevented from holding meetings and from patronizing markets. The camel's back was broken when on 13th August 1960, the Tyoor of Yandev, a staunch NPC supporter sent his police men to collect tax and the tax collectors were killed by members suspected to be UMBC. More police men were therefore sent into Tivland to

implement the NPC agenda. Since tension was already on ground, the youths in respond to police and traditional brutality gave birth to the *Nande-Nande* episode.

It is worthy to note here based on insights from the people interviewed that *Nande-Nande* was not a J.S. Tarka Young Pioneer project, but it was nurtured and fueled by the NPC agents. However members of the NPC were the worst hit as they were few in numbers and had more properties than members of the UMBC. It is worthy to say here clearly that, during the *Nande-Nande*, it was *soldier petali* that fought against the NPC on behalf of the masses. The source and name of *soldier petali* emerged from the nature and conduct of the NPC NA police. According to oral narrations, the NA police came in uniforms to harass, intimidate and brutalized the people, since the youths that decided to defend the masses had no uniforms, they argued that even with "*petali*" (the cheapest cloth for women at that time in Tivland), they were prepared to defend their community against NPC brutality. It is wont to point out clearly here that; *soldier petali* that fought the NPC during *Nande-Nande* was different from UMBC's Young Pioneers.

After the *Nande-Nande* episode and despite the reconciliation that followed, the build up to the 1964 General Elections brought in new tension between the two dominant political parties, UMBC and NPC. According to oral narrations, in the build up to 1964 elections, all the political parties in the country saw it that it was imperative to have and operate youth wings. To this, the Sardauna of Sokoto who was the leader of NPC had the Sardauna Brigade, NEPU had the *Rishen Samarin Sawaba* and UMBC had the Young Pioneer. The Young Pioneer was a recognized youth wing with registered members who paid their dues to the party and had the duty of mobilizing support for the party and defending the party. Oral narrations insist that, initially, the youth wings particularly

the Young Pioneer of the UMBC was not a military wing but it was just to defend the members of the party from the intimidation of the Sardauna Brigade. Nomishan argues and as corroborated by the information by Tyungu Akem that the name Young Pioneer for the UMBC youth wing was suggested by him Tyungu Akem. According to Tyungu Akem, the UMBC youths were educated and as such, they were desirous of developing a youth political ideology after the ideology of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana's Young Pioneer which was formed after Ghana's independence with the role of inculcating in the children of Ghana the feeling of pride for the country, respect for work, self discipline, love and desire to serve the country.

He argues that, this initial idea of forming what later became known popularly as the Tarka Young Pioneer soon changed. Many reasons were responsible for this change. One, the UMBC needed to prepare itself to defend its members from the brutal activities of the Sardauna Brigade and NPC government. Two, to provide support for their candidate(s) who were intimidated and harassed by the NPC and the traditional authorities. Babawale (2003:9) argues that, the NPC had recognized thugs that terrorized UMBC members in Tivland and enjoyed government protection. He pointed out that, the thugs that were hired by the ruling party—NPC were protected and were referred to as "bodyguards" or "party boys", or "party steward", while normal youths of the UMBC were dubbed "party thugs".

With this development the Tarka Young Pioneers had no choice but to also become a militant group. According to informants, the usage of Young Pioneers for political violence or as political thugs became inevitable following the activities of the NPC/NA after the *Nande-Nande* incidence. They argued that, after the *Nande-Nande*, the harassment and brutality in Tivland took a different and more worrisome perspective. One,

new taxes were introduced in UMBC dominated areas under a law known as—*Criminal Procedure Code* (collective punishment) law, Laws of Northern Nigeria. This law provided for the collective punishment of a whole household in a case against one of their own. Again, normal tax "*Kpandegh*" before this law ranged from six to four pounds. But with this law, it was raised to 6 pounds.

The implementation of this tax according to people interviewed was as harsh as the law itself. People's livestock's were carted away, peoples house doors were removed in a provocative manner. People's wives were taken away from them. According to Utsaha, Tyoor Adaaku Tsuwa and Nyaregh Mela in their oral narrations, the law was so brutal that the Tiv of Jembagh, Jechira and part of Kwande where the *Nande-Nande* took place became slaves in their own land while supporters of NPC jubilated over the sufferings of members of the UMBC in these areas. Abeghe (2005:73) argues that this law brought about pathetic feeling of dehumanization, misery, depression and frustration which was further compounded with the arrest of some Tiv UMBC leaders such as J.S. Tarka, Labe Gbian, Zungwenen Iyorkyaa, Ugor Iyoo, Ayila Yough and Luga Iortyom who were charged with treason at a Jos High Court. Although they were later discharged and acquitted, it was seen by UMBC members as another attempt to humiliate and brutalize UMBC members and supporters.

With the discharge of Tarka and approaching the December 4, 1964 General Elections, UMBC needed to strategize so as to prevent their defeat from the powers of the NPC authorities, the Sardauna Brigade, the traditional rulers, the police and Native Authority. They were to also plan on not only to defend themselves but to also intimidate and chase away NPC members from Tivland and to eliminate the chiefs that were agents of brutality on their people and UMBC members.

We can deduce from the foregoing that, it was at this point that the thuggery in the young pioneer started emerging and gathering momentum. This momentum was giving a spark when Tarka and the entire UMBC leaders met at Agasha. Agasha was a small settlement in Kaambe district of Nongov and the home of UMBC strong man Chief Mbachiantim Manger. With Manger's popularity in the area, the safety of UMBC members during the meeting was guaranteed and the spread of the resolution of the meeting was with a thunder boat.

Although details of the meeting were not disclosed, one major manifestation of the meeting was the slogan "*I Jov Nyor Agasha*". Meaning, the masquerade has entered Agasha. The *jov* was to therefore fight the course of the UMBC who considered themselves weak in the presence of the chiefs, the NA police and the central power of the NPC. To look like *Jov*, the Young Pioneer disguised themselves with blue colours so that they would not be recognized. The task of the "*Jov*," (thugs) now was not to *Nande-Nande* like the "*soldier petal*" did, but to crush the head (*Atem ltyough*) of traditional chiefs, NA police and supporters of the NPC.

Adamu (1997:15) quotes the secretary of the Young Pioneer as arguing that;

At a point, we were treated like half humans. There was need for us to come out with full force using every available means at our disposal or be annihilated. The Sardauna Brigade, the NA police and NA judicial officers unleashed terror on us extorting money, seizing goods raping women, arresting, and intimidating people all in the name of tax collection... since they had all apparatus of government and traditional authority, we were left with no choice but to use the only weapon we had, which is violence to defend ourselves.

With this mindset, the UMBC *Jov* started its activities and the first victims were Tor Gbargbar Apinega of Tombo and Tor Kyekye Gbuushu of Mbera in Kunav on Feb. 11, 1964. With these killings, the "*Jov*" had announced its arrival on the political landscape of Tivland with its *Atem Ityough* or *Atem* as it was commonly called. With valour, *atem* spread and covered the whole of Tivland except *Tar* Masev which was governed by Chief Aernyi and *Tar* Iharev which was governed by Mom Dandu.

In dealing with their victims, the Young Pioneer "*Jov*" developed different strategies. Abeghe (2005:908) argues that, the strategies adopted by "*jov*" were the most wicked, most cannibalous and barbaric a human being could practice on another human being. Some of these strategies included; the carving of sticks of about two and half feet long, at one end of which long nails were forced leaving the remaining half outside. These stick of nails were hammered on a victim(s) head and the body dragged and left on the road. Another method was to kill a victim(s) chop off his hands and legs and heap it on his chest. In fact gruesome killing in different and debasing methods were used by the "*jov*" or "*Azov*" (plural of *Jov*) Young Pioneers to deal with the opponents.

Apart from killings, other strategies such as wrist watch treatment; this is when the victim had his wrist cult round in the same way a watch is won on the wrist. The Ape style or love making style where scorpions were put in a bottle and the man was forced to make love with them. The Young Pioneers thus terrorized Tivland with their terror masters like Tondo Agede from Mbatlav and Aunde Jande from Tombo amongst others.

It is worthy to note that the destruction by the Young Pioneer "*Jov*" on the economic and socio-political setting of the Tiv was devastating. It did not only destroyed the few existing infrastructure in the area but it also prevented the

NPC controlled central government from developing the area. It also affected Tiv position in the political development of Tivland as the Tiv were ostracized from national politics with all its implication.

Baver Dzeremo and the Political Dynamics in Tarka Local Government

Hon. Baver Dzeremo just as J.S. Tarka was from Mbachohul clan of Mbakor in the present Tarka Local Government of Benue state. Tarka local government was created in 1996 by the Gen. Sani Abacha regime in honour of the late minority crusader, J.S. Tarka. Dr. Emmanuel Alagh was made the first caretaker chairman of the local government since elections were not conducted. With elections in 1998, Hon. Emmanuel Iortyer became the first elected chairman. However his regime was truncated with the death of Gen. Sani Abacha.

Although Hon. Iortyer had wished and appealed to be considered so he could complete his tenure in the new dispensation, his plea was turned down as the people insisted on rotating the chairmanship from Mbalahan where he hails from to Mbachohul. Apart from this reason, the people argued that George Akume, a retired permanent secretary from Mbalahan had emerged as the governorship candidate of the PDP which was more favoured to win elections in the state, so another Mbalahan man cannot be given the chairmanship ticket.

With these calculations, Baver Dzeremo, a sound lecturer at the College of Basic Studies, Makurdi and a social critic became favoured by both the zoning arrangement and the popular will of the people. Dzeremo therefore was elected as the second executive chairman of Tarka Local government in 1999 and George Akume the third elected executive governor of Benue State.

Although Baver Dzeremo was very popular amongst his people for his developmental strides, his state and national influence as state ALGON (Association of Local Government Chairmen in Nigeria) chairman and that of the Local Governments and United Cities in Africa, his desire for re-election in 2003 became the challenge of political stability in the local government hence the level of political thuggery that took place in the area.

It is good to point out at this juncture the major reasons that resulted to the political violence and the subsequent use of this in the politics of Tarka Local Government under Hon. Baver Dzeremo. Firstly, it was argued that based on the one term agreement, Hon. Dzeremo from Mbachohul was supposed to give way for somebody from Mbalahan. Secondly, the PDP which was the ruling party at both the Local government and the state insisted that since George Akume from Mbalahan was re-contesting as governor, an Mbachohul man was to continue as the local government chairman. Thirdly, that since Akume had had a smooth working relationship with Dzeremo, it was only rational for them to continue so as to attract development to the area. Fourthly, it was also argued by Dzeremo's supporters that since Akume had permitted some Chairmen from other local governments to re-contest, Dzeremo's case should not be an exception.

The above sentiments together with the incumbent factor of George Akume, the PDP became highly inclined to allowing Dzeremo to re-contest for elections. According to oral narration, this did not go down well with Samuel Atsuku who was eyeing the seat and his political faction which was led by Aondover Adeguhar. Consequently, Atsuku and his team decamped to the opposition UNCP with all vehemence and desire to use all means available at their disposal to unseat Baver Dzeremo.

Baver Dzeremo's Strikers and Political Thuggery in Tarka Local Government

All the key informants interviewed agreed on two basic origins of the Strikers. According to them, the Strikers were a soccer team that later became a party organ. They argue that Strikers was a football team in Wanune, Tarka local government sponsored by prominent sons of the area including Baver Dzeremo. The support the team enjoyed in the area was overwhelming as they usually brought glory and honour to the area. To this, many young men of the area either became players or supporters of the team.

With the return to civil rule, the PDP in the area formed a youth wing under the leadership of Hon. Roy Ashirga and Baver Dzeremo. This youth wing was named after the football team which was popular in order to attract the young people into the youth wing of the PDP. According to Roy Ashirga in an interview, the main purpose of the youth wing was to defend their own faction of the PDP from those outside their faction.

Strikers or *Strike Force* (as it was sometimes called) was therefore purely a PDP thug group for and against the PDP family in Tarka local government. Informants from both faction agreed that, at its formative stage, even though it was controlled by one faction of the PDP, the Strikers never attacked the opposition faction but only made sure peace prevailed anytime there was a PDP occasion.

According to the informants, the political violence in Tarka during this period was in two phases. The first phase was intra-party (PDP vs PDP) and the second phase was inter-party (PDP vs UNCP). In the first phase, PDP members loyal to Samuel Atsuku who felt cheated in the primaries became violent and on Wannune market day they began beating the PDP members loyal to Baver Dzeremo and destroying their properties.

According to Alex Akighir, Atsuku's deputy chairmanship candidate, their main intention of resulting to violence was to put pressure on George Akume to change the candidature of Baver Dzeremo. To him, they believed that Akume as governor from Tarka would not wish his local government to be engulfed in crisis, as such he will move against Dzeremo and allow Atsuku to have his way. Despite this crisis, both Akume and Baver remained unshaken and Dzeremo remained the candidate of the PDP in the local government election.

It is worthy to state here that, this development had two implications on the politics of Tarka local government. One, the Atsuku faction led by him (Atsuku) and Aondoaver Adegubar decamped to the UNCP and formed their youth wing led by Adzua Anyor *A.K.A.* Orwariwari. Atsuku thus became the chairmanship candidate of the UNCP with Hon. Alex A. Akighir as his deputy. According to Orwariwari in an interview, they (UNCP) youths had gathered so much support from the community that they were ready to "smoke" the PDP out of Tarka despite the state might of the PDP.

Two, the Strikers now became the youth wing of the PDP and was led by Terngu Tsugh with late Chon Ityough as his assistant. According to Tsugh in an interview, their primary aim was to prevent the molestation and intimidation of their members by the UNCP youths bearing in mind previous actions of the UNCP youths. He argued that with the support from Dzeremo and Akume and the anger of the people whose properties' were destroyed by the UNCP youths without provocation, they had mobilized enough logistics and human support to face the UNCP youths.

With this mobilization from the two groups, a spark was only needed for the second phase of violence in Tarka LGA to commence. The spark to ignite this violence according to informants happened when on 2/03/2003, the UNCP youths

had a rally at the residence of Hon. Atsuku and on sensing that Bayer was in town seated at choice beer parlour at Dzongo, the UNCP moved in group chanting war songs against Dzeremo and heading to where Dzeremo was seated. Dzeremo was therefore hurried into a vehicle and taken to Gboko. When the UNCP noticed that Dzeremo had disappeared, they became angered and started burning down houses. This started with the burning down of Bayer Dzeremo's hotel—*Adam Kende* and followed by homes of Hon. Tsokar who was Dzeremo's deputy, Hon. Aposu the transition chairman at that time and Hon. Dzer Ikegh who was PDP party chairman in the area amongst many others.

With this development, the Strikers had no choice than to *strike* hence the full fledged violence in the LGA. Since the Strikers were in the majority and had government support, it was they who instead "*smoked*" the UNCP and its youth wing out of Tarka and on the election day, Hon. Bayer Dzeremo had a smooth ride back to the local government executive office.

Young Pioneer and strikers: Some Comparative Notes
Doing a comparative study of these two youths groups that became thuggery groups is problematic. This is because the nature of their evolution, modus operandi and the political conditions during their operational period are different. In fact, apart from the method of brutality especially punishment, these two groups had different orientations. It is worthy to note here that, just as Tarka came into active politics and was considered as the savior of Tiv nation, Bayer Dzeremo also came into Tarka politics with all ovations taking into account his previous contributions to the development of his area. Another similarity is that just as Tarka's personal ambition became his major undoing, Dzeremo's popularity also started waning when his personal ambition to continue in power and to create a political empire for himself took over his character.

With these similar traits of the main actors, we can now attempt a comparative of the two youth groups and their activities bearing in mind that their actions were deeply influenced by the main political actors of the time. It is worthy to note that, there were sharp differences in the evolution and modus operandi of the two groups. While the Young Pioneer was a recognized structure and a youth wing of the UMBC at the regional level with registered members who paid their dues, the Strikers were a youth wing without party recognized structures and registered membership. It was only a group created and kept by politicians desirous of protecting their political power bloc.

Secondly, while the young pioneer was created to oppose and defend UMBC members against the brutal actions of NPC and its agents, the Strikers were formed first of all to defend a factional group within the PDP and were later used against other PDP members that defected to the UNCP. Thirdly, while the Young Pioneer was seen as an agent that prevented the NPC from taking over Tivland to institute Islam and also helped

were only used to help in defending the mandate and political structures of Bayer Dzeremo.

Despite these differences, these two groups had similarities in the area of their operation as earlier mentioned. For instance, the practice of killing their victims through hanging of the stones on their neck and throwing them into the river was adopted by the two groups. The practice of giving victims the wrist watch treatment earlier mentioned, amongst other painful strategies were perpetrated by the two groups. Again, the practice of burning down the houses of victims was carried out by both groups as well as the destruction of other valuables of the victims.

Finally, it is pertinent to argue here that, irrespective of the evolution story of these groups, their devastating thuggery

activities led to high political violence in Tivland with negative consequences on the political development. In fact, it is pertinent to argue that, Tivland and Tarka local government in particular has not been able to rise above rudimental process of political and economic development as a result of these crises.

Implication of Political Thuggery of Young Pioneer and Strikers on Political Development in Tivland.

There is no gain talking about the numerous implication of political thuggery on the nature of political development in Tivland and Tarka local government in particular. However the following implication can be deduced for easy understanding.

- 1) The backward nature of Tivland during the UMBC period was exacerbated by the destructions carried out by the Young Pioneer. As Ayati (2005:25) argued, the NPC which controlled the Northern political structures refused to develop Tivland except they joined the NPC. Tiv refusal to do this made it obvious that Idomaland which had embraced the NPC would enjoy the development over Tivland. With this condition the destructive activities of the Young Pioneers destroyed the few facilities that were available. The fear of building and providing structures which could be destroyed during politics has contributed to prevent people from investing in the area. The consequence that, poverty and lack of basic amenities has continued to be a trade mark in Tivland.
- 2) Another implication is that it has delinked the people from the governance process and as such politics has failed to attract development in the area. For instance despite Tarka, Akume and Dzeremo's personal political fortunes at local and national levels, Tarka local

government and by extension Tivland has not benefited from their political pedigree.

- 3) It is also worthy to note that as a result of the activities of the thugs who are usually provided with arms and are fortified with charms, criminal activities are heightened thereby creating tension in the polity. This tension is usually exacerbated on the fear that they can again be used by their financiers hence the fear by perceived enemies to participate in politics. The implication of this is that it creates room for mediocres to become major political actors hence weak representation and poor governance.

Conclusion

From the above, we can conclude that political thuggery emerged in Tivland and Tiv politics from two main sources. One, from the desire of the North to continuously dominate the minorities especially the Tiv that had posed the greatest resistance to political domination and exclusion. Two, the new political elites that took over power among the minorities and wanted to create their political empires. One character the two sources possess is that they all resisted opposition and promoted cult ideology that made them the alpha and omega. This character has been passed to today's political elite. The consequence of this is that, political thuggery has now become

in terms of the destruction of lives, property and democratic principles.

To solve the issues of political thuggery in Tivland so as to prevent destruction of lives and property and to consolidate democracy in Tivland, this chapter call for value re-orientation by the political elite. This will enable them to know that politics is aimed at inclusion and not exclusion. It will also make them to know that politics is to provide for the people and as such,

they should learn to be accountable and prudent in the management of societal resources for the betterment of all and sundry.

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Interviews

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