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J. P. CLARK-BEKEDEREMO – THE WEEPING POET

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ABSTRACT The life and poetry of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo is the focus of this paper. I examined the pain and anguish of the poet over the civil war in Nigeria as expressed in his poems. I found that, despite some apparent weaknesses in the poems, the poet succeeds in projecting his sadness at the carnage and wastage experienced by the nation during that historical period. I conclude that these poems also constitute a warning to the Nigerian people, that they should be committed to restoring the national community so as not to repeat the devastating political failures of the past, especially in the context of the Niger Delta crisis within the Nigerian body politic.

Key Words: Clark-Bekederemo; Nigeria; Politics; Poems; War.

INTRODUCTION

J. P. Clark-Bekederemo is a poet, playwright, and a strong defender and upholder of his traditional heritage. The history and career of this Nigerian author show an attachment to the essential nature of his people.

J. P. Clark-Bekederemo has given to Nigeria a heritage that cannot be ignored in that it has closely mirrored the history of his nation. He has also tried to show, in the process, that the polity could be improved. In Abiola Irele’s introduction to Collected Poems and Plays (1991: xxxix), he observed that Clark-Bekederemo’s “career runs parallel to his country’s history”.

However, the most striking aspect of the history of his career is that, at every point, his background and associations have elicited an overflow of powerful feelings, which he felt compelled to express in poetry. This is in spite of the fact that he considered his experiences “too atrophied for pen or scribe” (line 15, “Agbor Dancer”, The Poems). His meta-anthology, The Poems: 1958-1998, published in 2002, best illustrates this tendency as it presents in one volume the span of his poetic career over a period of four decades.

In this respect, he seems to fit into Nwoga’s (1979) conception of the poet as having an “all-embracing receptiveness to the world”. By this, Nwoga suggests that the poet has the ability to borrow from the world through the expression of the impact of his surroundings on his own life. This particular “all-embracing” receptiveness emerges in A Reed in the Tide and Casualties. He has conveyed deep feelings in a profound manner, thus captivating the senses. In these poems, Clark-Bekederemo has enabled his readers to understand his perspective on his environment. His involvement in numerous activities within his community is made apparent to his readers.

My motivation for examining Clark-Bekederemo’s works, especially his col-
lection of poems and war memoirs, *Casualties*, lies in its relevance to the Nigerian experience. The Niger Delta, the poet’s home, poses an increasingly troubling problem to the current leadership of Nigeria. The importance of wise and delicate handling of the affairs of the delta to the continued existence of Nigeria is not in doubt. However, it is a historical fact that the peace of the region has been shattered on several occasions. Nevertheless, it may be hoped that the Nigerian nation can be rescued from a series of governmental failures. Tensions are currently high in the Niger Delta region (cf. Mba, 2003; Osakwe, 2005).

Despite this situation, the need to remember that Nigerians are one people has been the heart’s cry of this Nigerian author over the years. Can there be any excuse for the continued oppression and exploitation of a section of the Nigerian populace by an economic elite? The answer is a resounding “No” from all patriotic Nigerians of good conscience. This constitutes one important reason why it is necessary to look again at Clark-Bekederemo’s poems, and especially those that address the consequences for the nation of the indiscretions of its leaders in the 1960s.

The applicability of these poems, written in the 1960s, to the situation of Nigeria at the dawn of the twenty-first century is uncanny. Clark-Bekederemo’s role here mirrors that of the biblical Jeremiah who warned his nation, even though his warnings were not heeded. Nonetheless, we may hope that going back to his text may awake the conscience of his nation, saving it from self-annihilation.

Interestingly, in the introductory note to his personal meta-anthology of *The Poems: 1958-1998*, Clark-Bekederemo gave the impression that the pain he felt then, during the Nigerian Civil War, is now a dulled pain. He avers:

> This time, the feeling is not so much that of undergoing surgery in my own hands and without any anaesthetics as one of accepting to live with a condition that is now stable and in fact quite comfortable (2002: ix).

Obviously, his compatriots may not agree with his postulation that the condition of the nation is now stable and comfortable. One may, however, see his adjectival choices of “stable” and “comfortable” as a product of the maturity that comes from aging gracefully, rather than in relation to a perspective on the Niger Delta issue that sees it as comfortable and stable. His next sentence reads: “…the prospect of being collected and laid in state is no longer distant” (p. ix). This mellowing attitude can be seen in the subtlety with which he referred to the unhappy state of the Niger Delta environment in his collection within the meta-anthology, *A Lot from Paradise (1994-98)*. Such poems as “Delta Enterprise” and “The Emissaries” from the anthology have very few lines that explicitly focus on the controversial issue of the Niger Delta. Our poet seems to feel he has paid his dues and can therefore begin to look forward to the next phase of the cycle of life. Nevertheless, his vibrant voice remains strong in his vociferous warnings of Nigeria’s potential self-obliteration.
THE POET AND HIS ART

Elimimian (1989: vii) noted that assessments of the value of Clark-Bekederemo's poetry have been inconsistent. For example, some critics have described *Casualties* in harsh terms. M.J.C. Echeruo has described *Casualties* as “a disaster” and “sheer journalism” while Kalu Uka called it “rubbish” (Nwoga, 1979: 39). However, it should be noted that the poet, through his artistic voice, was presenting his perspective and interpretation of the events of that period of Nigerian history, a period the poems attempt to chronicle.

It seems that poems are, on one level, essentially reflexive of the artist’s worldview, in that they constitute perspectives on themes, subjects and events. In affirmation of this perspective, Dyson and Cox, in the introduction to *The Practical Criticism of Poetry* (1965), observed that the subject of a poem comes straight from the poet’s experiences of life, linking the poet with other poets and readers whose experiences in any way touch his or her own.

Based on this argument, one may surmise that a swamp dweller reading Clark-Bekederemo’s *Poems* is likely to feel a sense of affinity with the work. In the same way, the heart of a slum dweller reading “Night Rain” will, in all probability, be touched by the situation described there. Of course, this sense of personal connection makes poetry relevant beyond the boundaries of its immediate context, meaning that the importance of Clark-Bekederemo’s works extend beyond the Niger Delta. After all, a shack is a shack, wherever it may be located; it is a symbol of poverty.

What are the feelings of average Nigerians who experienced the Civil War? They would probably share with Clark-Bekederemo feelings of anxiety, unhappiness, loss, and desolation in relation to the death and destruction consequent to the bloody fratricidal war of thirty months.

And already
They are a cache certified fit
For hurling at the ogre
They all see in the dark

Night falls over us...

“A Photograph in *The Observer,*” *Casualties* (p. 34)

The poem ends on a note of despair, indicating that darkness has already engulfed the land.

Others may feel his sense of joy at the death of those he perceived to be the destroyers of the country.

Boxes were brought by night…
... As gifts to the people…
... Open the boxes was the clamour…

“The Burden in Boxes,” *Casualties* (p. 6.)
“The Casualties” makes clear that everyone was affected in one way or another by the war, but his anger was directed at the people who caused and perpetuated the war:

The casualties are many, and a good number well
Outside the scenes of ravage and wreck;
They are emissaries of rift
So smug in smoke-filled rooms they haunt abroad,
They do not see the funeral piles
At home eating up the forests. “The Casualties,” Casualties (p. 37)

These same people are also the ones who

... started
A fire and now cannot put it out. “The Casualties,” Casualties (p. 37)

They are also those that drew the people into this conflict, without the people’s willingness.

... Thousands
Are burning that had no say in the matter.

“The Casualties,” Casualties (p. 37)

All these examples express the different emotional reactions of the poet to his experiences and his assessments of the situation in his country. These feelings, he appeared to believe, were shared by some if not all of his compatriots. In his Preface to Notes on Casualties, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo said that he was reacting to events happening in the Nigerian polity in his poems; as he noted, he was, “Reacting to all the events as I have done in these poems…” (Casualties, p. 54).

In reality, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo also seemed to be living out his life in his poems. His reactions to situations around him, his keen observation of his environment, and his own personal experiences are keenly evoked in his poetry. Having said so much about his art and their effects on his readers and critics, it is important to now take a brief look at the personal history of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo.

THE POET AND PERSON

Johnson Pepper Clark was born on April 6, 1935 at Kiagbodo, Warri Province, in the now defunct Western Region of Nigeria to Chief Clark Fuludu Bekederemo and Poro, his wife. Between 1940 and 1953, he received his primary and secondary education, after which he continued his studies at University College, Ibadan (UCI) in 1955.
There, as a student, he started his writing career. He was the editor of the Students’ Union journal, *The Beacon*. He became the founding editor of the UCI poetry journal, *The Horn*, in which his early poems first appeared. This venture was undertaken with the support of his teacher, Martin Banham, who provided both moral and financial support for starting the journal (Stevenson, 1979: 210; Elimimian, 1989: 1). Some of his contemporaries in his student days included Christopher Okigbo, Emmanuel Ifejuana, Abiola Irele, and a number of other Nigerian writers of repute, who were also contributors to the journal. With some of these people, he formed friendships that endured beyond the campus gates, as shown in his later poems.

In 1960, he graduated with honors from the Department of English. In 1962, his first collection of poems, *Poems*, was published by Mbari Publications, Ibadan. In 1965, he published *A Reed in the Tide*, followed by *Casualties* in 1970. In the 1980s, *State of the Union* (1985) made its debut, while *Mandela and other poems* was published in 1988. *A Lot from Paradise* was his gift to the literary world for the 1990s. The backdrop of his birthplace, his school’s locale, his close relationship with his grandmother, his friends and his nation all had a profound effect on Clark-Bekederemo’s works. In addition to his poetry, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo is also a renowned playwright.

**THE WEEPING POET**

This study is essentially limited to the state of Nigeria between 1960 and 1970, and its impact on the poet and on his relationships with others during this period. In this respect, I point to the way his poems warn the nation against a repetition of war, especially given the challenge the volatile Niger Delta region presents to the Nigerian nation at this historical moment. It cannot be denied that J. P. Clark’s swampy delta birthplace always finds its way into his poetry. He has also noted details of other places he has visited in many of his poems.

Thus, we see the rustic beauty of the city of Ibadan vividly described in “Ibadan”, the dirtiness of Calcutta in “Calcutta”, and his diverse reactions to the United States of America in his poems about his experiences and observations during his sojourn there in *America, their America*. However, as stated earlier, this study focuses on an examination of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo in mourning, as presented in *Casualties*.

**CASUALTIES**

*Casualties* is a collection of 28 poems. It is divided into two parts. The first part is essentially a narrative about the Nigeria of 1960-1968, focusing on the years 1966-1968. The poems in this collection include: “Song”, “Skulls and Cups”, “Vulture’s Choice”, “The

I can look the sun in the face
But the friends I have lost
I dare not look at any. (p. 3)

As this poem shows, he was saddened and despairing because the war had created an insurmountable rift in relation to his friends. This could be attributed to their being on different sides, divided by war. This poem can be seen as a sign of a final parting of ways, which the second poem “Skulls and Cups” celebrates. The former association between the lively young group that included J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, Christopher Okigbo, Emmanuel Ifejuana, and Sam Agbam has been destroyed by the war. This is the sad reality the poet has to live with. Even though Clark-Bekederemo tried to depict this sadness with a certain lightness, this lightness poignantly underlines his internal anguish at seeing his friends’ lives wasted, as in the image of lifeless cups.

However, the greatest sorrow of the poet, over and above his pain over the loss of his friends, involves the general loss of a sense of community among the Nigerian people. The mindless killings and bloodshed among a people who once called one another brothers provokes a cry of pain in the eighteenth poem, “Dirge”:

O let us light the funeral pile
But let us not be the faggots. (p. 28)

Indeed, it is a cry that was not heeded because the violence escalated instead of abating, and corpses began to ‘eat up’ the forest as the piles of the dead grew. There was also another insidious factor that turned everyone in the land into casualties. Clark-Bekederemo expressed this sad transformation in the line
“we are characters now other than before/ The war began” (p. 38: lines 36-37). Indeed, this war “becomes universal in the fragmentation of family fellowship, and understanding, even of the self” (Wren, 1984: 152). J. P. Clark writes:

We fall,  
All casualties of the war,  
Because we cannot hear each other speak  
Because eyes have ceased to see the face from the crowd. (p. 38)

From these lines, it can be seen that the tragedy of Casualties and that of the period in general lies in the chilly separation of brother from brother and the irrevocable permanence of death.  
This fact is further demonstrated in the two poems: “The Beast” and “Death of a Weaverbird”. “The Beast” concerns the war and what happens in war:

And blood calcifies into boulders  
For brother to hurl against brother (p. 31)

Christopher Okigbo offers an example of this general sense of dissolution. He was a brother, a friend, and a poet. The separation brought about by the war could have been overcome, as reconciliation would have been possible after its end; however, this was not to be as he died in active service on the Biafran side:

Shot,  
At Akwebe  
A place not even on the map  
Made available by Shell-BP  
A Weaverbird, (p. 30)

Casualties did not merely record the events of 1966-68; it was not “sheer journalism”, as described by Echeruo. Casualties expresses the heartfelt grief of a patriot at the state of his nation. J. P. Clark-Bekederemo has been described as a nationalistic Nigerian. This could have come about because of his parents (grandmother, Urhobo, father’s line Ijaw) or his marriage (wife, Yoruba), (Wren, 1984: 20). Taking his background into consideration, his feelings and attitudes to Nigeria’s crises become understandable.  
His concern about social malaise, concern that goes beyond his preoccupation with war, is apparent in “The Lagos-Ibadan Road before Shagamu”. This poem examines the state of Nigerian roads and the risks of travelling on them. The overloaded passenger bus being driven by a marijuana-intoxicated man is a widespread occurrence in the Nigerian public transport system. The loss in economic and human terms cannot be quantified. Just as in “The Casualties”, the driver, Ashiru, escaped unhurt after driving the “50-odd” passengers to their death. This is comparable to “those who started/A fire and cannot now put it
out.” (p. 37: lines 11-12) or those responsible for the thousands who “Are burning that had no say in the matter” (p. 37: line 13). Those who caused the problem are usually the least affected by the negative consequences; ordinary Nigerians are the victims of the inordinate ambition of a few power hungry individuals (cf. Abike Dabiri, a Nigerian parliamentarian, on her expression of concern about the way Nigerian youths are used by power hungry politicians for political thuggery on NTA Network News of 24 April, 2007).

The image of the bus groaning up the hill before rushing down into the pit offers a metaphor for the nation, overburdened and dragged along, a nation that is then allowed to rush headlong into the ditch of war. As expected, lives were lost: young men, old men, women, children, infants – dead and forgotten – while those who masterminded the events smugly live on in the “smoke-filled rooms they haunt abroad” (p. 37: line 20), and at home. This could be likened to the unnecessary loss of life among ordinary Nigerians, including police, in the wake of the political violence that followed the April 2007 polls in Nigeria. The violence stemmed from Nigerians’ perception that the electoral process had been manipulated by desperate powerbrokers who were bent on thwarting the will and the desire of the populace for change. These powerbrokers gained from the process while the ordinary people lost once again. One cannot help agreeing with Clark-Bekederemo’s insightful observation that those who cause problems are usually the least affected by the end results. The lawlessness exhibited in Port Harcourt three months after the ‘elections’ in 2007 offers a recent example. The bloodbath in Okene, Kogi State is another saddening reality of the political legacy of Nigeria in the wake of the 2007 polls.

At this point, the technical and structural patterns of the poems are of interest. J. P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poems have been accused of being “forced and synthetic” (Darthorne, 1974/75: 195). This observation may have some basis, as some of his poems actually show a break in rhythm in an attempt to create a rhyme scheme. This tendency to try to force a rhyme pattern in an African poem suggests an attempt to mimic European traditions, and artificially impose them on African poetry. The contention here is that this detracts from his work rather than enhancing it. Wole Soyinka’s effortless way of bringing words together is an example of poetry that exhibits confidence through a mastery of the English language. His manner of rounding off the poem “Death in the Dawn” demonstrates this:

But such another Wraith! Brother,
Silenced in the startled hug of
Your invention – is this mocked grimace
This closed contortion – I? (Soyinka, 1967: 65)

A naturalness enhancing the expression of ideas appears to be lacking in some of Clark-Bekederemo’s works.

Nonetheless, if the poems are seen in the context of the above points, the way in which Clark-Bekederemo brings to life ordinary phenomena, and his
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attention to detail, becomes extraordinary and meaningful. In “Night Rain” for example, he makes the reader feel as if he or she is actually present in the shack, experiencing the wet night with the narrator as he makes the dark, wet night alive to our imagination. He includes the state of the room, the mother’s habitual movements, the touch of the water, the poverty-stricken nature of their abode, the effect of the rain on the whole land, and the price the night workers like the bat and the owl have to pay.

In “Vulture’s Choice”, he has enumerated details to achieve a climactic effect. He presents a step-by-step description of what led to the 1966 coup, ordered in such a way that the reader feels that there was no other choice for the coup executors than to strike. “Season of Omens”, on the other hand, enumerates the details of why the choice became necessary through his use of repetition for emphasis:

Then came the five hunters (p. 11)

repeated ten times for effect. And finally,

Then struck the five hunters (p. 12)

culminating in a kind of crescendo that marks a climax in relation to all the preceding details, building up to the activities that occurred on the night of the January 15, 1966 coup. Of course, the five hunters refer to the five majors who executed the coup. The refrain “the five hunters” captures the imagination and presses home the centrality of the actors to the events. This technique was also employed by the poet in “A Photograph in The Observer”. He made use of the echoing voice, repeating

Night falls over them
our times in the course of the poem. Finally, for the fifth time, in the last line,

Night falls over us... (p.34)

is used to convey the darkness that the war has brought to the people of Nigeria.

J. P. Clark-Bekederemo expresses a profound private grief of untold loss and public unhappiness. He has despaired over his nation, its losses, and the wounds that have remained raw for so long. He reflected on these years later in his collection State of the Union (Wren, 1984: 15).

In the poem “Here Nothing Works” (State of the Union), Clark-Bekederemo expresses his frustration at the entity called Nigeria, so beloved but, apparently, so disabled:

What is it in ourselves or in our soil
That things which connect so well elsewhere...
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the poems of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo in general, and Casualties in particular, whatever their weaknesses, have opened the eyes of many to deeply shared feelings. As observed by Egudu, cited in Elimimian (1989: vii), Clark-Bekederemok's "interest is in the problems of human beings everywhere".

Clark-Bekederemo's text mediates an empathetic understanding of the poor and the battered, implying that all are affected:

... Do not tremble then
But turn, brothers, turn upon your side
Of the loosening mats
To where the others lie
So let us roll over on our backs
And again roll to the beat
Of drumming over all the land
And under its ample soothing hand
Joined to that of the sea
We will settle to a sleep of the
... Innocent and the free.

"Night Rain," West African Verse (p. 60)

It should be noted that the ending of the poem projects the idea of hope and peace as an antidote to despair on the part of individuals and the nation. Interestingly, this reveals an analogous link to the biblical Jeremiah who, after declaring society's shortcomings, also announced hope for a better tomorrow.

The poet, through his effective use of language, does not only cry for Nigeria's sorrowful history but warns the nation to avoid a repeat performance of the nightmare of the 1960s and 70s; he suggests that Nigeria's politics do not have to lead to self-destruction.

These poems remain relevant today, as the war was needless, the losses senseless and avoidable, and Nigerians' continued suspicious attitudes towards one another unwarranted. The poet is still at his duty post. The warnings of the sage still ring. But will the nation listen?

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J. P. Clark-Bekederemo – The Weeping Poet


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CONTESTED TERRAIN: ECONOMIC MIGRATION, ISLAMIC SHARIA LAW AND ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN NIGRIA

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ABSTRACT The paper contends that ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are affected by migration, and by the political context of belief in the country. This type of conflict emerges where ethnic/geographical and religious distinctions coincide. These distinctions in Nigeria’s pluralistic society have been heightened by economic or labor migration, especially by Christian Southerners moving to the core Muslim areas in the North. This scenario has been the primary cause of recurring inter-ethnic conflict throughout the history of Nigeria’s nationhood. This precarious situation has worsened recently, with the promulgation of Sharia law in the North. This new move takes Sharia away from its constitutional and historical domain in customary law in the North, and places it in the criminal/civil law domain. Although this move seems motivated by the political dynamism of contemporary Nigeria, and by politicians’ quest for popularity, experience so far shows that it is the harbinger of future ethno-religious conflict in the country. Also, the recent Sharia law, apart from its political undertones, is a potent tool for restricting economic migration. Therefore, the state should rise above rhetoric and impressive but unenforced strategies of national integration, and mediate to enforce the secularity of the Nigerian nation.

Key Words: Sharia; Conflict; Secularity; Politics; Migration.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, ethno-religious conflict, which is a form of urban violence, has been reported in most major towns in Northern Nigeria, and even in the Southwestern town of Lagos. These conflicts, according to Ajayi (2002: 8), have included the Ife-Modakeke crisis in the Southwest, the religious-cum-ethnic crisis in Kaduna and Kano, and the Tiv Jukun conflicts in Benue State, all of which were accompanied by a needless loss of human life and destruction of material possessions. These conflicts feed on the religious and ethnic distinctions between populations in the North and the South of the country. This ethnic division coincides with both religious and geographical divisions. The Southerners are mostly Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Efik, and predominantly Christian, while the Northerners are predominantly Hausa-Fulani and Muslims. In the words of Awofeso (1987: 18), “History had completed its conspiracy on Nigeria by bequeathing two world religions on the country: Christianity in the south, Islam in the north.” However, these conflicts do not arise out of nothing: they develop in the context of an urban environment, in which migration and the pull of urbanization bring people from diverse socio-cultural and religious backgrounds to the same place, thus placing them in contest/competition for scarce resources in the society.
In the North of Nigeria, a new democratic backdrop and a tendency for ethnic irredentism have given rise to a new form of religious law. The use of Islamic Sharia law as a political tool, in the present dispensation, was foreshadowed by previous events in the country. In his insightful contribution to the subject, Noltshungu (1983) saw Sharia as a tool that would always be unearthed and used by politicians who were eager to achieve power, or were unsure of their political footing in the North. According to Noltshungu, no one should rule out entirely the possibility of political elites or aspirants to power using Sharia either to gain support or as a response to provocative opposition or controversy.

However, the history of ethno-religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria seems to convey the impression that these conflicts are used to limit internal migration. In other words, these conflicts are usually between the indigenes and the migrants, and in such conflicts migrants or stranger-elements tend to lose their lives and property. This mind-set has not been erased by the nascent Sharia law in Northern Nigeria, with its inherent implications for urban ethno-religious conflict. As a result, this paper attempts to trace the linkage between internal economic migration and urban ethno-religious conflict in the context of Sharia law in Nigeria.

BACKGROUND TO THE SHARIA LAW IN NIGERIA

On March 23, 2000, an unfortunate man named Baba Bello Karegarka Jangedi had one hand amputated in Zamfara State, Northern Nigeria, for stealing a cow, and thus became the first victim of Sharia in an otherwise democratic society. The advent of Sharia in the Northern part of Nigeria marks, perhaps, the attainment of a long-held political and religious desire. Hence, the romance between Sharia Islamic principles and politics nowadays in Northern Nigeria should not be considered entirely novel. At the behest of the pre-dan Fodio Jihadists, the Islamic religion entered Nigeria around the 11th century, in Kanem Bornu, and by the 14th century it had spread into Hausa land. Islam was, from the outset, a state religion, because the rulers of the time had agreed to lead their peoples according to its tenets. However, even more significant was the fact that the Islamic way of life was perpetuated in Nigeria through a system of conquest. In other words, those people who were conquered militarily had little choice but to accept the assumed superior way of life of the conquerors. This was made particularly manifest in the jihad reformation that was led by Sheikh Usman dan Fodio, who successfully launched the Jihad between 1804 and 1890 and who had, by the late 1810s, finally succeeded in establishing a Muslim administrative system, or caliphate. The caliphate was a centralized politico-religious system based essentially on the Sharia, Hadith and Sunna. The centralized stretch of the caliphate, its unquestionable religious authority and the apparent willingness of the people to obey it, made the Hausa-Fulani area a success story in the context of the indirect rule system of the British.
According to Kukah (1993), colonialism eventually put paid to the Islamic state building project initiated by dan Fodio. The defeat of the powerful Hausa-Fulani caliphate by the British derailed progress towards an Islamic Sharia state. However, the coming of colonialism did not totally eradicate Sharia fever among the Islamic faithful in the North. As a result, the post-colonial socio-political life of Nigeria has been dogged by the so-called Sharia question, which revolves around the compatibility of the pure Islamic faith with a non-Sharia socio-political environment. In other words, can Muslims live their faith to the fullest in the context of a non-Sharia setting?

However, the Sharia issue in Nigeria should also be seen as having important historical antecedents. In fact, it has been argued that the basis of the Jihad led by Usman dan Fodio was the establishment of an Islamic state anchored on Sharia principles (Kukah, 1993). In this sense, the Sharia project was, from its beginning, aimed ultimately at building a state in which politics and governance would be determined by the strict rules of the Islamic religion. Therefore, it is not surprising that, at the core of Sharia revivalism, lay the determination to make it impossible for the faithful to live under un-Islamic powers.

This understanding may have informed the willing reception of Sharia law by most Northerners because, in a sense, it signified the coming of age of a politically independent Northern Nigeria. Hence, while the building of an Islamic nation-state in Nigeria may still seem far-fetched, the crucial foundations are being laid by the promulgation of the new Sharia law in most Northern states, by means of a process that began in 1999.

Sharia courts have existed since the beginning of the caliphate in Northern Nigeria. These courts made use of the Koran in both oath taking, or swearing to tell the truth, by litigants, and in the passing of judgment by the Sharia judge, or Alkali. In 1900, the British colonial masters acknowledged that the Sharia court was on the same level as the customary courts. In other words, it was accepted that Sharia performed the normal roles of the customary courts in those areas of the North predominantly occupied by Muslims. The Sharia court was, however, accepted by the British on reasonable grounds. In the first place, Sharia courts predated the arrival of the British, and were both widespread and accepted in the Hausa-Fulani enclaves. Second, in accepting the Sharia, the British tried to rid it of any repugnant punishment practices. Therefore the British stated the following:

These courts are to administer native law and custom prevailing in the area of jurisdiction and might award any type of punishment recognized thereby except mutilation, torture or any other which is repugnant to natural justice and humanity. (Keay & Richardson, 1966: 22)

From this humble beginning the Sharia court eventually grew to include a Sharia Court of Appeal, which was first established in Kaduna, in 1960. However, fundamental adherents of Islam who favor Sharia law are often inclined to argue that, by religious implication, the Sharia should not employ an appellate system whereby cases are referred from a lower to a higher court. In fact,
this was understood in some quarters to mean that Sharia law was being made compliant with the penal codes of Western society. In spite of this, the Sharia appellate system has been retained since the 1960s, in an obvious bid to modernize Sharia law, and to make it as just as possible.

The foregoing outlines the essential nature of the Sharia legal system in Nigeria prior to the recent imposition of a blanket Sharia law. In addition, the 1979 constitution recognized the Sharia court and its appellate system, but restricted it to the areas of customary and native law, which are also the concerns of the customary courts. In spite of this, the 1970s saw Northern politicians undertake the renaissance of the Sharia quest. According to Udoidem (1997), the Sharia controversy that occurred during the 1976 constituent assembly deliberations changed the nature of religious conflicts in Nigeria. In his view, “Unlike in the civil war, where religion was hiding under politics, under the sharia, politics was now hiding under religion” (Udoidem, 1997: 162). However, the recent imposition of Sharia law in the North can be considered extremely radical, for two reasons. First, it covers the whole gamut from customary civil law to criminal law, which hitherto had been the preserve of the normal courts. Second, the new system of Sharia allows forms of punishment that should be considered repugnant to natural justice and humanity. In this case, the law allows torture, mutilation and severance of limbs, death by stoning, flogging, etc. This is a fundamental departure from the 1900 spirit that gave recognition to the law.

However, even more profound and disturbing in this new wave of Islamic Sharia law is the Alkali area courts’ history of protecting the privileged, and of entrenching the long years of feudal inequality in the North. These conservative courts constituted the foundation of Sharia enforcement; they have been accused of representing anything but justice, and of serving the interests of the privileged classes to the detriment of the poor, all in the name of God. Kukah (1993) captured well the inadequacies of these area courts:

Due to official inertia and unwillingness to effect fundamental structural changes in the light of new social and political realities, what is clear is that these courts have therefore come to be feared as their powers have only been bolstered as the sons of some of these judges and traditional rulers have risen to prominence and therefore have only sought to consolidate the base of their privileges … The refusal of certain members of the ruling classes who benefit directly and preside over these institutions to face the realities of the corruption … has infested these courts that are run in the name of God. (1993: 130-131)

The import of the above views can be fully understood only by appreciating that, by their very nature, these courts are not based on any form of strict separation of powers between the judiciary and executive. In fact, this would be asking a great deal in the Northern feudal oligarchies, where the Emir, or traditional ruler, is essentially the embodiment of both the sacred and the secular. These courts are, by implication, very far removed from the masses, and
they may, in fact, be serving the needs of the elites who run them. Hence, the resurgence of Sharia in Northern Nigeria, especially at the behest of politicians, may be an instance of the age-old ploy of using religion to control the political consciousness, and the aspirations, of the people. Sharia was first introduced in the Northern Nigeria state of Zamfara on October 27, 1999 (Eneje, 2001). Incidentally, this state has not so far witnessed any religious crisis following the introduction of Sharia, unlike other states, such as Kaduna, where Sharia has been used to foment crisis. The situation in Zamfara can probably be explained by the low number of migrants in the state, and by the absence of the pre-introduction tension that was generated in some other states, in which the introduction of Sharia may have been largely a political gimmick.

ECONOMIC MIGRATION AND URBAN ETHNIC RELIGIOUS CONFLICT: ECONOMIC PULL VERSUS SOCIAL PUSH

Migration from one geographic zone to another within a particular nation, whether for a short period or for long domicile, is a fact of modern life. Indeed, scholars (Held, 1995; Ohmae, 1995) are wont to argue that globalization has, as it were, obliterated, or made almost meaningless, the boundaries between different nations. One would expect this diminishment of a sense of boundaries to be even greater within the internal confines or territory of a given nation. As a matter of fact, modern states are proud of having no restrictive internal boundaries. In other words, citizens are free to move from any one zone of the country to another, without any form of hindrance or control, as happens in international movement. By the same token, citizens are free to live in any part of the country, and are guaranteed full protection from molestation, and from encroachment on their basic human rights, as long as they remain law-abiding.

In Nigeria, the above scenario is adequately covered by the constitution and by the rhetoric of office-holders. However, the stark reality is very different. Thus, internal migration in Nigeria is subject to both primordial and religious considerations, which effectively set limits on such movement.

Economic migration, or the movement of people from one geographic zone of Nigeria to another in search of better economic opportunities, has a number of fundamental characteristics. In this case, migration is mostly from the South of the country to the North. Even though people from the North also migrate to the South, such migration involves a relatively small percentage of people and is mostly transient and seasonal in nature: for example, the movement of the nomadic Fulanis to the South of Nigeria in search of greener pastures, or a market for cattle. This said, a number of Northerners are located in major towns in the South, such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Umuahia, Aba and Benin. However, this number pales into insignificance when compared to the number of people from the South to be found in such Northern towns as Kano, Kaduna, Katsina and Maiduguri.

Even among the Southerners, however, the majority of migrants to the North
are the Igbo-speaking people of Nigeria, from the Eastern region. Businessmen and itinerant merchants from this area of Nigeria constitute over 80% of the migrant population in the North. They present a picture of a highly mobile and restless people, whom Igbokwe (1996) saw as basically driven by the population density of the Eastern region. Hence, the only way to lessen the pressure of population, and to create new economic niches, is by migration to areas of lower population density. However, the lure of the Northern cities for these migrants cannot be entirely explained by the simple logic of population pressure or congestion. Equally germane is the remarkable reputation these Northern towns have established, over time, as centers of commerce. Kano, for instance, in addition to being one of the centers of the initial urbanization in Nigeria, has a business and commercial pedigree dating back to its prominence in Trans-Saharan trade. According to Zakaria (1997), the lure of Kano as a lucrative economic center has long attracted migrants to the city. This attraction, and the commercial myth, is not limited to Kano alone, but includes other major towns in the North, such as Kaduna, Katsina, Maiduguri and Jos, each of which boasts a very high stranger or migrant population.

It is also interesting that these migrants are not really economic neophytes, or those who are basically at the margins of economic life in the North. In the case of the Igbo, Zakaria (1997) has argued that they have made remarkable strides in business in Kano, and are in control of the extensive auto-parts and building materials businesses in the town.

The point is, then, that economic migration, which threatens the economic space of the indigenous population, tends naturally to draw their ire. The prosperity of migrant workers is contrary to the dominant notion of labor migrants as those who provide cheap labor for the economic growth initiatives of the host society. In this context, migrants are ideally located in marginal economic pursuits, and in those areas of work in which the indigenes feel it is loathsome to become involved. In other words, migrants are expected to occupy the unviable economic positions, and to serve as a pool of cheap labor to be utilized to boost the economic base of the host society.\(^{(2)}\)

Therefore, whenever the economic position of migrants changes from that which is expected, i.e., when the migrants become prosperous, a cause of conflict is triggered. In the case of Nigeria, the shaky foundation of nationalism, and the mutual distrust of the various ethnic groups, worsen an already bad situation.

**MIGRATION, SHARIA LAW AND URBAN ETHNIC CONFLICT**

Undoubtedly, urban ethnic violence can be related to migration, which results mainly from the need for economic benefits. In Nigeria, there is a widespread pattern of internal economic migration across the country. However, even within the internal boundaries of a state, migration for economic purposes invariably results in the coming together of heterogeneous social groups. Such heterogene-
ity is often made more severe by religious differences, and by primordial political contests, as in the case of Nigeria. In fact, scholars have identified the old colonial urban centers, which are the end points of rural migration, as bastions of contemporary ethnicity and the conflict surrounding it (Nnoli, 1978; Udoh, 1998).

Ethno-religious bickering was at the forefront of conflict between migrants and indigenes in the North of Nigeria decades before the advent of the new form of Sharia. In this sense, conflict on the basis of ethnic or religious differences has been a regular feature of most Northern urban areas. However, the introduction of the Sharia in the present political dispensation, and its politicization, has not only heightened this conflict but has also added more venom to it. In this case, the coincidence of religious fundamentalism and political interests has led to a gulf appearing with respect to interaction between different groups. Even more poignant is the fact that the present Sharia religious fervor, while serving the piety of adherents, has ironically boosted the political base and clout of the politicians who championed it, largely for political reasons. (3)

Equally, it would be unhistorical for anyone to disregard the economic motives behind ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria. As Anugwom and Oji (2004) have reported, the 1932 rift in Jos, Northern Nigeria, between the Igbo and Hausa ethnic groups, which almost snowballed into violent conflict, was propelled by competition between the two groups over skilled and unskilled job openings in the colonial civil service, as well as by petty trading interests in the region. Cohen (1971) also reported a 1934 conflict between the Hausa and Yoruba communities over the control and determination of the price of kola-nut, a highly priced commodity in the local market.

We would do well to understand that, although all forms of migration imply some economic exchange, most forms of labor or economic migration represent cases of economic opportunism. In this sense, such migrants and strangers do not confine themselves to obscure jobs or to the filthy areas of the urban environment, but readily take charge to become a major force in the economic sector of the host society. Thus, in reality, a thin line separates economic migration from economic opportunism. Regarding economic opportunism, migration or movement is not necessarily undertaken because of a dearth of jobs or economic openings in the migrant’s home; it may arise from the desire to seek greener pastures, to achieve prosperity, and to reap the perceived abundance of the new society. Therefore, migrants, or stranger-elements, often compete for available jobs and economic space with the local population. Against the background of a Nigerian nation-state pockmarked by ethnic politics and clannish affections, this may be interpreted as a situation in which migrants exploit the benevolence of the hosts in order to attain economic benefits.

From an economic point of view, the adoption of blanket Sharia law has radicalized many things in the North. This process of radicalization has centered mostly on the economic and business pursuits of strangers. In most of the North nowadays, the sale of alcohol, and the operation of hotels and other businesses seen as against the principles or spirit of the new law, have been
officially banned. Apart from a radical limitation of the choice of business open
to the migrants, economic pursuit now takes place strictly according to Sharia
tenets.

The massive destruction and looting of the property and economic goods of
migrants in present day ethno-religious conflicts in the North have given the
problem an economic tinge. Thus, those conflicts that provide opportunities to
undermine the economic stake of non-indigenes may be driven by displeasure
with the economic prosperity or the aggressive business posture of the stranger-
elements. In this sense, ethno-religious conflict becomes the expression of the
economic disenchantment of the indigenous elements of the society. Conflict
then becomes a disguised form of struggle for economic space between differ-
ent groups in the urban environment. Indeed, a better appreciation of the above
economic logic can be attained by understanding the antecedent social forces
driving Sharia in Nigeria. One major impetus to the introduction of Sharia doc-
trine in Nigeria came from the formation of the Izala Movement.\(^{(4)}\) This soci-
ety was formed in the mid-1970s and has as its basic aim the practice of Islam
according to Sharia, the purification of Islam, the abolition of innovations in
Islam (\textit{ibid’}a) and the practice of Islam strictly in accordance with the precepts
of the Koran and \textit{Sunna} (Udoidem, 1997). The Izala group, which criticized the
earlier \textit{Jijanniyya’s} innovations, such as folding the arms while performing \textit{salat}
(\textit{kablu}) and sitting by a white cloth while doing \textit{salat}\(^{(5)}\) (Udoidem, 1997: 163),
was highly instrumental in spreading the Sharia doctrine of pure and unadul-
terated, and often fundamental, Islam. It also saw the onset of the mobiliza-
tion of civil society groups in the Northern part of Nigeria, for the enthronement
of Sharia.

Following on the heels of the Izala, the 1980s saw the phenomenal emer-
gence in Northern Nigeria of wide-ranging religious disturbances powered by
subaltern forces, and known as the Maitatsine riots. These began in 1980, in
Kano state. The Maitatsine riots, perhaps more than any other event, showed
the economic rationale of the religious disturbances that occurred under the
guise of Sharia. In the first place, the riots were undertaken by an urban subal-
tern populace, or \textit{takawas}, who also saw Sharia as a subterfuge for economic
revival.\(^{(6)}\) In this case, the Maitatsine movement, which was launched in Kano
in 1980 by Alhaji Muhammadu Marwa, was not only a religious uprising but
also, to an equal extent, a socio-economic uprising by an oppressed and poor
section of the indigenous population.

The massive destruction of economic goods and of the businesses of
migrants, in addition to the loss of life that this form of ethno-religious con-

clict entails, lends credence to an economic motive behind the violence in the
North. After all, especially mapped out for destruction are those areas of busi-

ess in which the migrants have a virtual monopoly. Even some of the advoca-
tes of, and sympathizers with, the Sharia are equally cognizant of its eco-

demic motive.\(^{(7)}\) In fact, the introduction of the Sharia in Zamfara state, for
instance, has been ascribed to the governor’s\(^{(8)}\) concern for the poor and the less
privileged (Emeje, 2001). Therefore the Sharia and its associated conflicts may
be seen as beyond religion and politics and, instead, as a guided reaction of the autochthons against the increasing economic presence of the allochthons in the North. It is on this basis that the Sharia (when guided by a covert socio-economic agenda) militates against inter-group harmony, and creates the objective conditions for unending bickering in the urban milieu, where people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds interact. The threat that Sharia law poses for people from places other than the North, and for migrants, is that a fundamental application of the Sharia principle would render the state powerless to guarantee the protection of the rights of non-believers. A crucial cornerstone of the Sharia is the acceptance (by the faithful) of its superiority to the state. In the Islamic political system, the state is inferior to the Sharia. However, even beyond this, there is the fact that the Sharia itself lays down the general norms and functions of the state as well as those of all the public institutions of the state (see, Kukah, 1993).

This understanding of the Sharia gives rise to three scenarios for urban conflict in the North of the country. In the first, a good understanding of the Sharia law leads the migrant to believe that the state is powerless to protect him or his basic rights. Therefore, utilizing primordial ethnic linkages, migrants become engaged in the process of building a strong solidarity against any likely menace from the indigenes, or the Islamic faithful.

In the second instance, the faithful recognize the supremacy of the Sharia and the apparent irrelevance of the secular authority, and may be driven towards a religious Jihad that is aimed, ultimately, at enthroning a national Islamic state. However, its immediate target is the significant number of un-Islamized migrant ‘infidels’ within the geographic boundaries of Islamized Northern Nigeria.

Third, the state (within the region, as represented by the governor) adopts an indifferent attitude to the plight of the migrants, while riding the crest of Sharia-propelled popularity. The local politicians are convinced of strong support, and use the Sharia as bargaining chips for resources at the center.

However, a clear appreciation of the above three scenarios, and of how they have given rise to increased levels of ethnic conflict in the urban areas of the North, where people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds reside, can only be achieved against an understanding of the nature of the Nigerian state, and its inherent ethnic problem. Nigeria can be seen as a state that is divided by historical and political antecedents into North and the South. The North, or what was formerly called the Northern protectorate, had a different colonial administration to the Southern protectorate, until the historic amalgamation by Lord Lugard in 1914. However, prior to this amalgamation, the two zones had lived separate social, religious and political lives. In the North, the Islamic religion was dominant, and the Emirs held the reins of authority. The Jihad had almost succeeded in creating a monolithic North, as a result of the Fulani’s defeat of the other, smaller Northern Kingdoms, and of the Hausa city-states. The colonial powers encountered a well-consolidated political arrangement, and found indirect rule irresistible. In the North, the indirect rule system proved effective. The South, however, had a different socio-religious history. With the excep-
tions of the powerful Yoruba Kingdoms and the Benin Kingdom, the South was a domain of tiny kingdoms and liberal acephalous societies. This made indirect rule difficult to apply throughout the South. The unification of the North and the South in 1914 did nothing to erase the fundamental differences between the people.

Religious differences have reinforced this divide. Thus, the North is predominantly Hausa-Fulani and Muslim, while the South is peopled by at least four major ethnic groups, and a large number of minority groups. In addition, Christianity is the dominant religion of the South. However, even beyond these socio-political and religious differences, the prospects for harmonious inter-group relationships have been undermined by the politicization of these primordial differences.

As a result, the political scene in Nigeria, from the immediate pre-independence period to the present, has been shaped and reshaped by ethnicity (Anugwom, 2000). In this situation, the ethnic factor has been used as a veritable tool in the contest for scarce resources - political, economic and social - in the country.

A number of scholars have seen the ethnic problem as related to the inability of the state to deliver the rule of law (Uroh, 1998; Idowu, 1999). The state in Nigeria has, ironically, weakened the moral and political basis of solidarity across groups, and has thus reinforced the divisive character of ethnicity. The failure of the political class to rise above primordial loyalties, and to engender positive forms of nationalism, has set the scene for unending strife between the different groups in the country. These differences, and the strife they cause, become even worse where existing social distinctions are further sharpened by religious fundamentalism, as in the case of Sharia law in Northern Nigeria. It is, therefore, only against the background, briefly outline above, that one can appreciate the resurgence of urban ethnic conflicts in Nigeria since the introduction of Sharia law in 1999.

Sharia, and the social conflict and economic repercussions for non-indigenes it brings, are best typified in what Odey (2000) aptly called the Kaduna mayhem. The Kaduna religious inferno of February 21, 2000 was sparked off by a dispute over the introduction of Sharia law to the state. It might be helpful to describe the Kaduna incident in the words of Odey (2000), who has provided one of the best accounts of that riot.

On Sunday, February 20, 2000, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Kaduna advised Christians to come out en masse the following day to stage a peaceful demonstration against what the Christians in the state perceived as the wrongful use of the State machinery to impose sharia on the multi-religious, multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan city of Kaduna—all in contradiction with the secularity of the Nigerian state. Prior to the demonstration, CAN made concerted efforts to obtain a permit from the same police that granted a permit to the Muslims. But the request was turned down. That was the last straw that irrevocably pinned Kaduna, the sprawling cos-
mopolitan city of the North, to the bloody walls of religious Armageddon on February 21, 2000.
The Christians who did not see any reason why they should be denied the privilege given to their Muslim counterparts in a country that guarantees freedom of religion and peaceful demonstration went ahead and embarked on their own demonstration on Monday, February 21, 2000. While the Muslim youths demanded the introduction of the sharia law and threatened to pull down the heavens if it was not introduced, the Christians, on the other hand, carried anti-sharia placards and chanted anti-sharia slogans as they marched peacefully through some major streets in Kaduna to the Government House where they presented a letter in which they stated their own position to the Deputy Governor of the state, Stephen Shekari. They were on their way back from the Government House when an unsuspected crowd of armed Muslim marauders descended on them. By the time the world knew about what was happening, Kaduna had been thrown into one of the most violent religious riots it has witnessed in its long history of religious violence. (Odey, 2000: 99-100)

POLITICS, SHARIA AND ETHNIC CONFLICT

Recently, ethno-religious conflicts have become a more or less common feature of the socio-political landscape of Nigeria (Osaghae, 1994; Otite, 1990; Anugwom 2000; etc.). This unending strife has fed on the politics of primordialism and clientelism, which have both been constant elements in the politics of the country. This sort of politicking, which works to the detriment of development, was well captured by Joseph (1987) in his idea of prebendalism, which he considers the bane of democracy in Nigeria.

Nigeria, then, can be seen largely as a modern state in which primordial and clannish loyalties hold sway. Therefore people see their allegiance and commitment to their ethnic or social group of origin as paramount, and superior to national allegiance. This problem is by no means peculiar to Nigeria. Indeed, it is quite common in Africa. The problem has been traced to the fact that African states did not discard the characteristics of ethnic kingdoms before they were granted independence. Indeed, Jackson (1990) saw the ethnic problem over most of Africa as linked, from the outset, to the fragile nature of African states. For Jackson, these states were merely ‘quasi-states’, and thus structurally unable to meet the myriad challenges of nationhood.

However, at this point it may be more important to ask whether African states are irredeemably primordial, i.e., whether their ‘quasi-state’ origin is, in fact, unchangeable. Idowu (1999) addressed this concern by arguing that, in the case of Nigeria, the inability of the leadership to deliver the rule of law without pandering to ethnic and sectional interests rekindles endless primordial loyalties among the groups of a plural society.

Be that as it may, Adegbesan (1987) has argued that religion cannot really be
considered a new factor in Nigerian politics. In a similar vein, in Nigeria, religion can be seen, more often than not, as intertwined with the fates of aspiring national politicians. It is in this sense that it becomes an inevitable instrument in the hands of the power brokers of the country (Kurfi, 1983). Given this reality, religion has come to be a close second to ethnicity in mobilizing people in Nigerian politics. It is little wonder that, most of the time, ethnicity and religion are inseparable in conflict situations in Nigeria. Even more to the point is the fact that both ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria have political underpinnings (Igbo & Anugwom, 2002; Udoidem, 1997).

All this means that religion has acquired a more than primordial significance in contemporary Nigeria. Thus, religion, like ethnicity, has an clear instrumental value in today’s Nigeria. In this sense, religion is a veritable avenue to political power in Nigeria. In a Nigerian state in which resources are not allocated via free market mechanisms or on the basis of social justice, political power becomes the route to both the manipulation of resources and their biased allocation. In this type of situation, politicians invariably allocate resources on the basis of loyalty and support. Additionally, in this context, the politics of clientelism and patronage emerge and, here again, the politicians use this system to expropriate an unfair proportion of the national resources.

Starting from the venerated Sarduana, Ahmadu Bello, the elite Northern leaders and politicians have always faced a dilemma in their attempt to achieve a balance between the demands of modern statehood and the propagation of Islam. In fact, the Sarduana, while ostensibly opening up the Northern region to Christian influence, also found it politically expedient to champion the Islamization of the Christian areas of the North (Crampton, 1975; Paden, 1986). This dilemma is still very much in evidence amongst the present crop of Northern elites and politicians. In other words, although these elites recognize the need to promote a modern North in which liberty and freedom of belief reign, they also, and invariably, want to keep religious faith as a part of their politics. After all, the impression that one is a staunch believer in, and promoter of, Islam guarantees more votes than the impression that one is a firm believer in liberty, and an advocate of freedom of worship.

Hence, the Sharia issue has become a very powerful political tool. It may serve to assuage the feelings of the people about living under an un-Islamic state but, contrary to the admonitions of Usman dan Fodio, it is without doubt a political platform of some importance for the new crop of politicians from the North, who have so far used the Sharia to prop up their dwindling support, and to turn attention away from the glaring material poverty in most of Nigeria. In this sense, the Sharia euphoria, and the renewed legitimacy it has given politicians in the North, may have served the purpose of directing attention away from the failure of democracy in Nigeria, and from the inability of the politicians to have any radical impact on the social life of the people.

Against this background, in some quarters, the emergence of the Sharia law has been perceived as more a politically motivated action than a call to holy living. On the basis of the above view, it thus seems logical to see the Sharia
issue as the basis of the North’s desire to build a coherent political bloc, with religion as the basis of mobilization. In other words, Sharia becomes the basis of social and political unity, offering the North the possibility of recapturing the political leadership of the country, which was only recently relinquished to the South, in a political office-sharing formula devised by the political class.

Therefore, apart from representing the desire of the Northern political elites to recapture power, the Sharia may also be seen as an expression of dissatisfaction with the political situation in the country. No matter how it is rationalized, Sharia law represents a very big challenge to a supposedly secular state. Sylvester Odion-Akhaine, a well known Nigerian civil rights crusader, has an interesting perspective on the Sharia issue and the mayhem it will probably bring in its wake, when he likened it to, “Stirring up a hornet’s nest after all we have gone through in the last one and half decades of authoritarian continuum. I have traversed the globe looking for the gains of sharia. I am yet to see where sharia has taken anyone to the moon or made anyone perform heart surgery. In Afghanistan, it is Stone Age atavism” (Tell Magazine, 2000: 50). From this perspective, Sharia, rather than representing a religious aim, is more of a political instrument to divert attention away from the critical job of nation building.

SHARIA AT THE STREET LEVEL: ORDINARY PEOPLE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The introduction of Sharia has had a mixed impact on the lives of the ordinary people in the street, especially in its influence on socio-economic life. Thus, although many underprivileged and often homeless youths have seen it as providing an opportunity to hit back at the economically better-off migrants, other more respectable and economically engaged citizens see it as purely an article of faith. In fact, according to a recent empirical investigation, the citizens of Kano (a state in the North) saw the large-scale migration of outsiders to the North of Nigeria, and the business acumen of many of these migrants, as ‘un-Islamic,’ and as factors in urban violence. They also saw the government’s performance of its mediating role as inadequate (Obasi & Anugwom, 2002).

The above findings are, to a certain extent, supported by my own personal interviews (April to July 2005) with migrants and indigenes in Kano and Kaduna (two states in the North of Nigeria). Although they saw the role of Sharia as likely to engender conflict, since it underlines religious differences, the majority of the interviewees believed that the migration of people from different ethnic and socio-religious backgrounds into urban areas populated by people of different primordial/religious affinity created a setting for conflict. They supported this claim by giving instances of recent ethno-social conflicts across the country: for example, the frequent clashes between the Hausa/Fulani Muslims and Igbo/Yoruba in Kano, the Kaduna Sharia crises between the Muslims and the Igbo Christians, and the Lagos and Shagamu crises between the militant Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) and pockets of Hausa/Fulani Youths and traders. They took the view that these conflicts would have been less intense,
or might even not have occurred at all, in the absence of ethnic and religious differences. In spite of the above, however, the fact is that there is no statistical relationship between economic prosperity and urban violence, although the economic factor is still a strong intermediate variable, even in Sharia-induced ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria. Even so, Obasi and Anugwom (2002) isolated religious and ethnic factors as the most important causes of urban violence in Kano.

One of my respondents, a lecturer at the Federal College of Education, Kano, was of the opinion that, in as much as one can see the work of politics in most of the contemporary violence in the North, the instigators of such violence deploy religion to mobilize unemployed and vagrant youths (yandabas), and induce them to perpetrate acts of violence. This stratagem has worked consistently because, according to my respondent, religion is the most potent tool in inducing a Muslim to fight. That is why the Sharia issue has led to conflict in some parts of the North.

However, and in addition to the above, further probing of the respondents revealed an even more interesting relationship between Sharia (religion) and conflict. While migrants (non-Northerners) feel that it is their non-Islamic religious beliefs (Christianity) that attract the antagonism of their hosts, the indigenes claim that they are mostly repelled by the business mentality of the migrants and, to some extent, by the culture (as expressed in social habits and dress codes) of these migrants. The palpable tension that has characterized the relationship between the two groups over time has been exacerbated by the introduction of Sharia, which, while it refocuses Islamic religion, excludes non-adherents, and prescribes some behaviors, while proscribing any behavior considered anti-Sharia.

For the migrants, the above features are exacerbated by regular attacks on the businesses of migrants that occur in any religious uprising in the North. According to some migrants who spoke with me, the relation of conflict to indigene discomfort with the business progress of migrants is not a direct one, but rather selective in nature. They pointed out that, even when they destroy the businesses of migrants, the indigenes are, more often than not, selective. Mostly they damage hotels, liquor stores and places of worship. The Muslim population in the North of Nigeria considers all these anti-Sharia, or an affront to Sharia.

Yet, in spite of the above, a good number of indigenes see the problem as lying in the politicization of Sharia, and in the role of both the federal and state governments in abetting urban violence, not only in the North but also in other parts of the country. Hence, both sets of respondents complained about the government’s slow-to-act attitude to ethno-religious conflicts between indigenes and migrants in the North, and they argued that this predated the formal introduction of Sharia. This suggests that the powers that be usually gain some political mileage from divisive conflict of all kinds, including those that are Sharia-inspired.
Economic Migration, Islamic Sharia Law and Ethno-religious Conflict in Nigeria

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SHARIA RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

Immediately after the civil war, in 1970, the political economy of religious conflict showed its true colors when the defeat of the secessionist Eastern region was seen as an achievement of Allah’s will, and of the political and economic dominance of the Northerners. In fact, this thinking, which is based on a belief that the righteous are justified in taking over the economic resources of the infidels, has more or less underlined contemporary Sharia conflicts.

However, the economic basis of religious riots in the North of Nigeria generally preceded the introduction of Sharia, but the Sharia, given the nature of its tenets, reinforced this attitude. In fact, in all the religious riots in the North, churches and businesses have usually been targeted, which shows the source of the displeasure of the indigenous groups. For instance, on February 27, 1984, Islamic religious fanatics struck in Jimeta, Adamawa state (then Gongola state), causing massive destruction to property and great loss of life. It is instructive that, while 30,000 people were rendered homeless, more than 170,000 were displaced from their businesses, and the multi-million Naira modern market in Yola was completely burnt down (Odey, 2000).

Thus, pre-Sharia religious riots in the North always targeted the businesses and the economic activities of outsiders. However, Sharia legitimizes such acts, as Sharia doctrine sees involvement in businesses like hotels and the sale of alcoholic beverages as anti-Islamic and, thus, unacceptable in a Sharia enclave. In other words, as Odey (2000: 12) argues, “People turn religion into a cloak under which cover they hope to achieve the selfish aims which they cannot achieve through fair and healthy competition.” Therefore, a good way to understand the economic basis or objectives of religious conflicts is to examine the nature of the destruction that occurs in such mayhem. A crucial element in the philosophy of the Maitatsine religious movement, which was active in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s, and led to the killing of some Northerners, was the claim that rich Muslims were unbelievers (Udoidem, 1997), and that rich outsiders were only profiting from their infidelity, as it were. Given this standpoint, the first Maitatsine riot in Kano, in 1980, apart from being one of the bloodiest ever, also involved massive destruction and looting of the businesses of non-indigenes, and even of those of Muslims of other sects, who were seen as the purveyors of infidelity. Following the 1980 riots, the short-lived 1982 riots, again in Kano, targeted churches in particular. In these riots, many churches in Kano were set on fire by irate Muslim youth. This riot was the first open and violent religious conflict between Christians and Muslims, and it was probably fuelled by the laying of a foundation for a Christian church near a mosque in Kano (Udoidem, 1997). By the time the riot was over, eight churches in the non-indigene area of the town, Zabon-Gari, had been burnt down (Committee Report, 1982).

Any rebuttal of the economic basis of Sharia would amount to a confession of ignorance of its nature and of the history in Nigeria. The movement towards
economic Sharia started with the initiation of Nigeria into the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), on January 8, 1986, during the reign of Ibrahim Babangida. There is no denying that Islam involves a way of life in which economic pursuits are dictated by religious beliefs. Hence, Nigeria’s membership of the OIC, which is basically a religious body, was soon followed by Nigeria’s subscription to a shareholding in the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), under the same Babangida. According to Odey (2000), membership of the IDB is restricted to countries that are members of the OIC, and that are willing to implement Islamic economic and financial principles. As he also noted, “Among other things, the aims of the IDB are to promote the sharia law in member states and to foster the aims of the OIC” (Odey, 2000: 32). Thus, the Sharia, contrary to popular belief, is not economically neutral.

THE NIGERIAN STATE AND THE NOTION OF SECULARITY

The secularity of Nigeria must really be understood against the nature of pre-independent Nigeria, and the fears of domination that threatened the merger of the different ethnic groups into a united nation-state. In the pre-independence era, Nigeria’s multi-ethnic nature was the source of bickering and primordial politicking. The political equation at that time pitted the three major ethnic groups - Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo - against each other, almost to the exclusion of the minority groups. Eventually, the obvious marginalization of the ethnic minorities led to the establishment of the popular Willinck’s Commission, the aim of which was to look into the fears of the minorities. The Commission rejected the secession of the minorities, but recommended measures for integrating them into the mainstream of Nigerian politics. The whole notion of secularity was therefore a large wedge intended to prevent the domination of any group by another or others. Even the major ethnic groups enjoyed very little harmony. The distrust and suspicion underlying inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria later deteriorated into 30 months of civil war.

Thus the secular state concept, which recognizes no state religion or belief system, and thus guarantees freedom of belief, was seen as appropriate in the effort to cement the cracks in Nigeria’s weak federation. The guiding policy of Nigeria’s unity, as clearly seen by the founding fathers, and even by the colonialists, was to be the recognition of basic differences, but the consolidation of similarities.

All the same, many politicians, especially from the core North, are averse to any reference to Nigeria as a secular state. This is because they believe the use of the term ‘secular’ may be understood to mean irreligiousity. Hence, in the debates on the Sharia issue, before the promulgation of the 1979 constitution, many politicians proposed that Nigeria should be called a ‘multi-religious state’. However, in a Nigerian nation pockmarked by primordial or ethnic loyalties and mutually distrustful inter-group relationships, others (especially those outside the North) viewed this suggestion as a ploy that would eventually make Nigeria an
Islamic state. Apparently, this sentiment was a direct response to the view, in some quarters in the North, that the use of the description ‘secular state’ might eventually permit an anti-Islamic leader to impose restrictions on Islam.

In his assessment of the debates and seminars organized in the North on the Sharia question in 1977, prior to the promulgation of the 1979 constitution, Kukah (1993: 120) took the view that, “Perhaps the developments and other behind-the-scene moves by the various interest groups led Alhaji Balarabe Musa, the former governor of Kaduna State, to come to the conclusion that the northern ruling class purposely set out to use the Sharia debate to gain political advantage in the politics of the second republic.” Eventually, the voting in the presidential election of 1979 was substantially influenced by the perception, sponsored by radical Northern elites, that one of the candidates from the North was a scion of the Jihadist dan Fodio, and would thus protect the religious and other interests of the North. In a sense, the North has consistently used the Sharia issue as a political trump card. This has always manifested itself whenever the North’s political ascendancy in the country has been threatened.

This sort of threat was prominent in the 1979 and 1983 elections, in which the imposing popularity of Obafemi Awolowo was considered a major threat to the likely emergence of Shehu Shagari as the victor, and in which the grand alliance between Awolowo’s Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and Azikiwe’s Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) (which, incidentally, did not materialize) presented a formidable threat to Shagari’s second term in office. In the current dispensation, the emergence of Olusegun Obasanjo, from the South, as the President of Nigeria, has more than threatened Northern political superiority in Nigeria. Hence, the Sharia may have been deployed as a political weapon to destabilize the government and, more importantly, to mobilize the North towards a common political agenda anchored in a subconscious religious aversion to un-Islamic governments. However, beyond the apparent political altruism, there was the desire of the Northern political class to use the Sharia in garnering support, and thus acceptance, as champions of the faith, and defenders of the people against domination by others. This plot has worked very well so far.

In an ironic sense, the successful political foray of the late M. K. O. Abiola into the Northern heartland, which eventually gave him victory over the Northern candidate, Bashir Tofa, in the annulled June 12, 1993 elections, can be traced to his promotion of the Sharia cause. Abiola was at the forefront of the abortive moves to extend Sharia law to the South after 1979. It stands to reason that Abiola was perceived by the Northerners as a religious kindred spirit who, while serving the purpose of the overdue shift of power to the South, would surely protect the interests of the North.

Reviewing the heated Sharia controversy in the Second Republic in Nigeria, Usman (1987) argued that the Sharia debate in the 1977/78 Constituent Assembly marked the introduction of religion into the politics of the country. This may be correct, to the extent that it was the first time that the Sharia question was clearly seen as a probable hindrance to the emergence of a national democracy, but even so it sounds ahistorical. In the first place, the history of
Europe, and of the world generally, shows an interwoven relationship between religion and politics. Even today, religion is a potent force in the politics of England, Ireland and in some countries of the Middle East and Asia. In Nigeria, the acceptance of the British into the caliphate, even after the defeat of the Hausa-Fulani, took place on the understanding that colonialism would not pose any form of hindrance to Islam. Even though this unwritten agreement was not entirely kept by the British, neither was it totally disregarded. As a result, religion has always been a very important factor in politics in Northern Nigeria. Thus, what occurred before the 1979 constitution was enacted was merely an attempt to take this practice beyond its conventional boundaries.

However, the significant impact of religion on national life in any given state can be influenced by the nature of the state, and by its response to matters of religion. In Nigeria, the overwhelming influence of religion in national life can be traced, in part, to the inability of successive Nigerian governments to live up to the ideals of a real and modern secular state. Therefore it has been argued that;

Despite the claim that Nigeria is a secular state, the government is still involved in matters either over which religious bodies also make claims or those in which the government’s involvement is unsatisfactory to the religious bodies. Examples of such areas are education, health, legal Year Ceremonies, the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), and Pilgrims Welfare Board, building places of worship and the teaching of religion in schools, to mention a few. (Williams, 1997: 190)

The involvement of a secular state in guiding religious affairs is not entirely inappropriate if that involvement is based squarely on fairness, equity and clear national interest. While the involvement of the government in some religious affairs may exhibit some of the above qualities, many interventions are, in fact, products of political expediency, as defined by the interests of the leadership. Therefore, political expediency, in this case, should be seen as the need to woo the electorate, and to achieve victory on the platform of religion. This is, as the Sharia warns, “A recipe for disaster and a prelude to the secession of the North since two parallel legal systems cannot conveniently operate within the same sovereign state at the same time. It is a time bomb that will explode when it will and then tear the geographical entity called Nigeria into shreds” (Odey, 2000: 98).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Sharia in the North of Nigeria appealed greatly to the mass of indigenous urban youth who were desperate for socio-economic relief. In this sense, Sharia provided a form of relief from socio-economic hardship by nullifying existing economic niches, and creating some sort of economic level playing field. Thus,
Odey (2000: 107) argued that, “Yerima is telling his hungry, poor illiterate and jobless people that they must seek first the Sharia law and every good thing on earth would be theirs.” Thus, in popular imagery, the economic promises of sharia often translated literally into the expulsion of outsiders and non-Muslims from their economic niches.

Therefore, as I have argued thus far, the ethno-religious conflicts in the North of Nigeria have been exacerbated by the new Sharia law regime in that region. However, even beyond the issue of belief, is the fact that the religious rhetoric of Sharia has been used to undermine the economic positions of the outsiders who are the victims of these conflicts in the major urban centers in the North. Sharia has also offered an irresistible political weapon to those politicians who exploit the belief system of the people for political benefits.

However, the political nature of the Nigerian state itself is crucial to understanding the role of economic migration in ethno-religious conflicts. In a society where primordial loyalty, clientelism, patronage and divide-and-rule tactics are seen as roads to a political Eldorado, the political class can easily exploit major differences between groups for political benefit. Even though ethnicity and its associated strife also increase during periods of military rule, as the recent past history of Nigeria shows (Anugwom, 2001; Elaigwu, 1993; Udoidem, 1997), democracy readily allows articulation of needs on the basis of ethnicity. This has been shown manifestly in the second Republic in Nigeria (1979-1983), in which the Sharia question, and the religious antecedents or roots of the presidential candidates, were crucial electoral issues.

In relation to the above situation, the role of the state is very important, both in terms of the equitable and meaningful delivery of services, and in the impartial mediation of conflicts between various groups in a multi-ethnic society. Hence, a state that fails in its expected role in such a society establishes the foundation for unending strife between groups. In Nigeria, this scenario is made worse by the existence of a political class that sees the socio-cultural differences between groups as a useful political weapon.

The above also implies that a state that renders itself irrelevant to the minimum aspirations of its citizens invariably leaves them little choice than to revert to primordial links in seeking alternatives to the failed state. It is little wonder that the late 1980s and 1990s, which saw a proliferation of failed states in Africa, also bred a groundswell of ethnic conflicts and wars of attrition in various parts of the continent.

In recognition of the fact that the state has a major role to play in mediating inter-group conflicts, the Nigerian state has adopted a number of strategies to deal with the hydra-headed nature of the problem. The most popular of these strategies is the quota system, or the federal character principle, which allocates political and bureaucratic offices among the constituent units/states of the federation on the basis of a pre-determined sharing formula, and the new rotation policy worked out by the politicians of the nascent fourth Republic. However, it seems that the political will of the state to push this through is more important in dealing with this problem than impressive-sounding strategies.
that are regularly abused by state office holders. In this sense, there is a need to re-emphasize, through concerted government action, the secularity of the Nigerian state, especially at those points where this secularity is weak. Even the making of allowances for the unfettered growth of Islam (if this is what Sharia means) should be conducted against a backdrop of recognition for the multi-ethnic nature of the federation and the freedom of worship of all citizens, as well as the rights of citizens to establish their domicile in any part of the federation without hindrance or molestation. It is only when these conditions are met that a purely religious Sharia system, with no hidden political or economic agenda, will be able to emerge as a guiding principle for the faithful in Northern Nigeria.

NOTES

(1) In fact, the above logic has been used to support the higher population of Nigerians recorded as living in the North rather than the South in different population censuses. Even in the most recently released population figures (2006), the higher population of the North has been justified on the basis of Islamic religion, which does not allow family planning, and on the high level of migration from the South to the North (Tell Magazine, January 29, 2007: 15-19).

(2) In a recent empirical study on migration, ethnicity and urban violence in Northern Nigeria, it was discovered that over 70% of the respondents in a survey saw the business mentality of migrants as creating antagonism in the indigenes (Obasi & Anugwom, 2002). The study also revealed the indigenes’ revulsion at the business ethics of migrants, although not necessarily at their economic progress.

(3) The chief proponent of Sharia in Nigeria’s current democratic republic, Alhaji Ahmad Sani Yerima, having completed the constitutionally allowed two terms as governor, was one of the presidential aspirants in the 2007 presidential elections.

(4) Society for the removal of innovations from practice of Islam.

(5) Formal prayers in the mosque.

(6) In fact, Paul Lubeck (1986), in an interesting analysis, sees the emergence of the Maitatsine movement as a product of the failure of Kano state to erect a semi-industrial capitalist base. This failure, and the collapse of the moral base upon which the traditional Islamic society existed, created the conditions for the emergence of Maitatsine elements.

(7) In appraising the Sharia in the Northern Nigeria state of Zamfara, one sympathizer suggested that, “The government has taken great advantage of the new religious direction not only to cultivate spiritual purity but to mobilize the people of the state for social, political and economic development” (Emeje, 2001).

(8) Alhaji Ahmad Sani Yerima.

(9) Major ethnic groups in this area include the Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw and Efik.

(10) Kaduna is a historical city and state. It was the headquarters of the Northern Region in the pre-colonial and immediate post-colonial first republic. Kaduna is also seen as the political capital of the North, and is renowned for the heavy presence of military institutions, and what is regarded as the Nigerian army’s largest armory.

(11) Actually, it has been argued that, “They saw the defeat of the east as the achievement of Allah’s will and therefore the oil fields in the east as the war booty which they had a
divine mandate to appropriate” (Udoidem, 1997: 159).

(12) Other religious disturbances, such as the April 20, 1991, riot in Bauchi state, the October 14, 1991, Kano riot, which claimed over 1,000 lives, the June 17, 1996, Kaduna riots, to mention a few, showed this pattern of selective destruction, which targets the businesses of non-indigenes, and especially business concerns seen as unIslamic.

(13) The Maitatsine movement was the precursor of the current Islamic Sharia doctrine. The Maitatsine sect consisted of fundamentalists who were against all tools of modernity, such as TV, radio, cars, and even reading any book other than the Koran. Its rejection of Islamic innovations, and its quest for purity of Islam, laid the groundwork for the Sharia agitation in Nigeria’s fourth republic democracy.

(14) Other riots include the Bulukutu October 26, 1982, Maitatsine riot, the Jimeta Yola February 27, 1984, Maitatsine riot, and the April 29, 1985, Gombe Maitatsine riot, which was the last riot directly traceable to the Maitatsine sect. However, the riot in Jimeta town in 1984 clearly illustrates the utilization of religious conflict as tool of expression by the subaltern component of society, and also the strategic planning involved in such conflicts. In this riot, the sect was led by one Bagobiri, a barber from Sokoto state, while a cobbler was in charge of the ambush group (Udoidem, 1997: 170). Other post-Maitatsine religious conflicts in contemporary Nigeria include the Illorin Disturbances (March 1986), the Usman Dan Fodio University Religious Crisis (May 3, 1986), the University of Ibadan Religious Crisis (May 5, 1986), the Kaduna religious crisis (March 6, 1987), the Zuru religious crisis (May 1988), the Ahmadu Bello University religious crisis (June 1988), the Bauchi riot (April 20–22, 1991), the Kano riot (October 11, 1991), the Katsina riot (October 1991) the Zangon-Kataf Uprising (May 1992), etc.

(15) Odey (2000: 107) vividly illustrated the promise of economic salvation offered by Sharia, as follows: “It is lucrative engagement for the decrepit army of hungry street urchins known as the almajiris; it is education for the illiterate; it is work for the jobless; it is wealth for the poor.”

(16) In this regard, it has been argued that, “As far as the implementation of the Sharia law by the Northern states contrary to the constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria and in defiance of the ruling of the National Council of States following the Kaduna religious inferno are concerned, the Federal Government has become a toothless bulldog” (Odey, 2000: 11).

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LABOR USE IN SMALLHOLDER AGRICULTURE IN MALAWI: SIX VILLAGE CASE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT Based on village surveys in diverse regions of Malawi, this paper explores the features of labor use in smallholder agricultural production in Malawi. Labor contracts found in the study villages were interrelated with the high risks in agricultural production and the problem of food deficit, and provided a means for risk sharing for the employers and food security for the laborers. In addition, the relations between the users and providers of casual labor were interwoven into the wealth differences among households. The low productivity of maize among the households whose members engaged in task-contracted casual labor was not caused by the low levels of family labor input. Analysis of labor use by female-headed households revealed that the female household heads, with their children, spent more days on farm work than did the members of male-headed households in order to cope with the lack of labor. The lower income of female heads of households forced them to rely more on agricultural wage income than their male counterparts.

Key Words: Malawi; Labor; Female-headed households; Livelihoods; Agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

Labor is a key asset for smallholder households in rural Malawi. The quality and quantity of labor available to the household in terms of numbers, educational level, skills, and health constitute the human capital that becomes the basis for constructing household livelihood strategies. In the context of Malawi’s smallholder production where farm mechanization is virtually nonexistent and all farm work is done manually, having access to necessary labor for agricultural production directly affects the levels of household farm income. In addition to working on a household’s own farm, labor may also be deployed in off-farm economic activities, thus providing additional income to the household.

This paper explores the features of labor use in smallholder agricultural production in Malawi. Based on village surveys in diverse regions of Malawi, it first examines the types of labor used in agricultural production and their allocation to different farm tasks and crops. The paper also highlights the major characteristics of labor contracts that were used by households to obtain necessary labor. Patterns of engagements in agricultural wage labor by the household members are examined as well. It further explores the characteristics of labor use by female-headed households. The analytical approach adopted in this study is based on the framework of sustainable rural livelihoods (Carney, 1998; Ellis, 2000; Ellis & Freeman, 2005; Scoones, 1998; Scoones & Wolmer, 2002). In the
context and framework of the livelihood studies, the paper analyzes labor in terms of assets (family labor), access (sources of labor and labor contracts), and economic activity (engagement in agricultural wage labor).

The literature on labor use in rural Malawi has tended to focus on *ganyu*. *Ganyu* is a range of short-term casual labor contracts that are widely practiced in the country. Based on ethnographic research in central Malawi, Englund (1999) interpreted *ganyu* not as individualized contracts but outcomes of socially embedded relationships. On the other hand, Whiteside (2000) emphasized both the importance of *ganyu* as the major source of income for poor households and its potential conundrum, as the need to engage in *ganyu* to obtain an immediate income may conflict with own-farm production. From different perspectives, Bezner Kerr (2005) and Bryceson (2006) both argued that *ganyu* represented the intensifying inequalities and conflicts between haves and have-nots in rural Malawi.

This paper furthers the literature in two ways. First, it examines both the short-term labor contracts (such as *ganyu*) and the long-term ones such as the seasonal labor contract. The characteristics of seasonal labor contracts (which are hitherto under-researched) markedly differ from those of *ganyu* and show important implications for risks and uncertainties in smallholder production. Second, the patterns of labor deployment between male- and female-headed households are explored, and the differences between the two are found linked to income, demography and farm data. My overall aim is to broaden the scope of existing studies by examining all types of labor that are used in smallholder production, and by highlighting important gender differences in labor use.

FIELDWORK METHODS AND STUDY LOCATIONS

I. Fieldwork Methods

Fieldwork for this study was carried out in six villages in various parts of Malawi (Fig. 1): Kachamba (Mchinji District), Belo (Mangochi District), Horo (Phalombe District), Bongololo (Rumphi District), Mulawa (Mzimba District), and Mbila (Kasungu District). Care was taken to choose villages that represented several socioeconomic characteristics, such as location, the predominant ethnic group, the degree of population pressure on the land, variations in access to non-farm activities, and the proximity or remoteness from trading centers (Table 1). The aim of this selection procedure was both to include various socioeconomic situations in which smallholder production was taking place, and to find similarities and differences in labor use in various areas of rural Malawi. No claim is made, therefore, that the results of this study represent national patterns in the statistical sense. Another criterion for selection was smallholder tobacco production. This is because one aim of my broader study was to assess the role of tobacco production in overall livelihood strategies of smallholder farmers (Takane, in press).
The six villages are located in the same agro-ecological zone of medium altitude (760-1,300 meters), with an annual rainfall of about 800 to 1,200 millimeters. No village was selected from the lower altitude zones of Lower Shire Valley, or lakeshore areas of Lake Malawi, where farming systems considerably differed from those in the medium altitude zone. The medium altitude zone of Malawi is characterized by unreliable patterns of rainfall and degraded soils caused by increasing population pressure on the land. These have led to a low risk approach to smallholder agriculture in the study villages.

Fieldwork in Kachamba and Belo was undertaken between August and October 2004, and data were obtained for the 2003/2004 agricultural season (October to September), when agricultural production was normal. In the remain-
ing four villages, data were collected between May and September 2005 for the 2004/05 agricultural season, when a severe crop failure occurred due to erratic rain. A structured questionnaire was used in the survey that the author conducted, recorded, and reviewed. In addition, farms operated by sample households were measured using global positioning systems to obtain accurate sizes of the plots. The total sample size for all villages was 186 households.

In all study villages, farmers gave priority to the production of maize, the staple food. All sampled households grew maize, and it is estimated that 64% of total area farmed was allocated to maize production in the study villages. This echoes the result of the nationwide Integrated Household Surveys (Government of Malawi, 2005: 95), which found that 97% of the households in Malawi grew maize. The second-most important crop in the study villages in terms of allocated area was tobacco, which was estimated to occupy about 19% of total area farmed. The percentage of tobacco-growing households in the six villages was 59%. The figure is higher than the 21% obtained in the nationwide Integrated Household Surveys (Government of Malawi, 2005: 106) because I purposefully selected the tobacco-growing villages for the case studies in the present study.

Average farm size of sampled households varied greatly (Table 1). For example, households in Belo on average farmed 1.76 hectares, while those in Horo farmed only 0.58 hectare. The difference stems from the unique history of each village and the resultant degree of population pressure on land (Takane, 2008). The average for all sampled households was 1.03 hectares.

II. Characteristics of Each Study Village

The first study site, Kachamba, is a matrilineal Chewa village under the Traditional Authority (TA) Mavwere in the Central Region. Kachamba occupies an area about 6 kilometers from the Lilongwe-Mchinji road. The main crops cultivated in Kachamba were maize, groundnuts, and tobacco. Maize is by far the most important crop, but most farmers cultivated groundnuts for both sale and consumption. Due to land scarcity in the area, land was not laid fallow and was used every year. Women headed nine households. The percentage of female-headed households in Kachamba was 29%.

The second village studied, Belo, is located under the TA Mponda in the Southern Region. In contrast to the general scarcity of land in other study villages, land was still readily available in Belo at the time of the survey. The average farm size per household in Belo is the largest among the six villages, reflecting the relative abundance of land in the village. The remote location of the village delayed the inflow of population into the Belo area, and most residents at the time of the survey were first-generation migrants. They were still in the process of expanding farms on the allocated land, and the subdivision of land through gifting and inheritance to the next generation (as was observed in other study villages) was yet to occur. The community was made up of indigenous Yao residents and migrants from various parts of southern Malawi. Most
of the migrants began arriving in the area during the 1980s, opening new farms on previously uncultivated land. Among the main crops produced in the village were maize, tobacco, chilies, groundnuts, and cassava. The percentage of female-headed households was 18% (21 households).

The third study location, Horo, is a matrilineal Lomwe village under the TA Mkhumba in the Southern Region. Horo lies about 20 kilometers from Mozambique. A dirt road, often impassable by an ordinary car, links Horo to the major city of Blantyre, 70 kilometers away. A small-scale weekly market, where food crops and tobacco are traded, takes place twice a week in a nearby village. The percentage of female-headed households in Horo was 46% (36 households), which was the highest among the study villages. Maize was cultivated by all households, but also intercropped with minor crops such as pigeon peas, sorghum, millet, and sunflowers. This type of intercropping was common in many areas of southern Malawi, but was less common in my study sites in central and northern Malawi. Due to the scarcity of land in the area, fields were not laid fallow.

The fourth village studied, Bongololo, is under the TA Chikulamayembe in Northern Region. The distance from the village to the regional capital, Mzuzu, is 78 kilometers. Fertilizers are available in the adjacent town of Bolero, but some farmers buy them at the district capital, Rumphi (16 kilometers from the village), where the prices are lower than in Bolero. Almost all of the Bolero inhabitants were patrilineal Tumbuka. The percentage of female-headed households was 26% (18 households). The crops produced in Bongololo were maize, tobacco, groundnuts, cassava, soybeans, sweet potatoes, and millet. Tobacco was cultivated by 63 households (91%), among which 15 households were headed by women. The ratio of tobacco farmers in Bongololo was the highest among the six study villages. Another notable feature of the village was the availability of non-farm income opportunities. Because of the proximity to Bolero (where there were shops, a permanent market, and government offices), there was a wide range of non-farm income opportunities such as trading, carpentry, and wage employment. A very popular non-farm economic activity in the village was the brewing and sale of traditional beer (mostly done by women), in which 18 households (26%) were engaged.

The fifth study site, Mulawa, is a patrilineal Ngoni village under the TA Mzukuzuku in the Northern Region. Mulawa lies 20 kilometers away from the major road that links the capital, Lilongwe, to the northern regional capital of Mzuzu. The percentage of female-headed households was 34% (10 households). Tobacco was grown by 20 households (69%), among them four headed by women. An important feature of the farming system in Mulawa was that many households (69%) owned wetland gardens (dimba). Among the crops grown on dimba land were maize, Irish potatoes, tomatoes, onions, and local vegetables. Dimba-grown maize was harvested a few months earlier than the maize on ordinary farms. This eased food shortages experienced by households during the “hunger season” of January and February. Other crops on dimba land were harvested mainly between July and September, generating cash income
and improving the diet of the households. Widely practiced *dimba* cultivation in Mulawa thus led both to higher income and better food security for many households.

The sixth study site was Mbila, five kilometers north of the district capital, Kasungu, in the Central Region. The majority of residents were matrilineal Chewa, but patrilineal Ngoni and Tumbuka also lived in the village. Villagers cultivated maize, groundnuts, soybeans, cassava, sweet potatoes, and tobacco. Tobacco was grown by 36 households (47%), among which five were female-headed households. As in Bongololo, the proximity of Mbila to a major town enabled villagers to engage in a wide range of non-farm economic activities. Such activities included trading, beer brewing, making bricks and stones used in construction, and wage employment in companies and government offices.

**LABOR USE IN AGRICULTURE**

Most of the farm work in rural Malawi is done during the rainy season between November and March. The types of labor used in agricultural production can be broadly classified into two categories: family labor and hired labor. Of these, family labor was the main source of labor in the villages studied. As Table 2 shows, family labor accounted for 74% of total labor used in tobacco production and 88% of that in maize production.

The importance of family labor in farm work and the lack of mechanization in agricultural production imply that the availability of family labor is a prerequisite for a household to increase farm size. However, the increase in farm size using abundant family labor is possible only under the condition that land is readily available for the expansion of a family’s farm. This is not always the case in most of rural Malawi today, because increasing population pressure on the land has considerably reduced the scope of farm expansion onto uncultivated land. Among the six study villages, the correlation coefficients between household farm size and the number of household members whose age was 15 years old or over were positive and statistically significant (at the one percent level) in Kachamba, Belo, and Bongololo. In the case of Belo, unopened land was still readily available, and there remained the possibility for farm expansion by using abundant family labor. In the cases of Kachamba and Bongololo, however, unopened land was hardly available. In the two villages, it was the existence of vernacular land markets that enabled some households to expand the size of their farm by obtaining additional land through purchase or rent (Takane, 2008). These characteristics unique to each village opened some scope for farm expansion for labor abundant households.

Apart from family labor available within the household, labor exchanges among relatives that involved other households were also practiced. In most cases such labor exchange was used for farm tasks that required much labor at a given time, such as the harvesting of maize. However, the contribution of exchanged labor to a family’s overall labor input was low (less than 10%). In
Labor Use in Smallholder Agriculture in Malawi

Table 2 exchanged labor is included in the category of family labor. When a household has insufficient family labor to complete the farm tasks, hired labor is used. In the study villages, there were two types of farm tasks in which hired labor was most commonly used (Table 2). One was the farm tasks that required physical strength, such as land preparation and weeding. For these tasks, hired labor was frequently sought both by wealthy households that had enough capital to pay for the labor and by labor-deficient households (such as households headed by a female or elderly person) who could not fulfill these strength-demanding tasks. Another type was the farm tasks that required much labor. Examples of such tasks included tobacco grading, the topping of tobacco plants, and the harvesting of maize and tobacco.

TYPES OF HIRED LABOR

The types of hired labor used in the study villages were seasonal labor and task-contracted casual labor. The following section examines some characteristics of these two labor contracts.

I. Seasonal Labor

In seasonal labor contracts, laborers are employed for several months in the rainy season. In most cases in the study villages the seasonal laborers came from other areas, and no kin-relation was found between the employer and laborer. The contracts were only for one season, and the laborers left the village after their contracts expired and rarely returned to the same employer in the next season. In the study villages, 10% of the sample households employed seasonal labor (Table 3). Many of the employers were wealthy farmers and all of them grew tobacco. Seasonal laborers were used for a specific crop, usually tobacco, as well as for any farm task, depending on the agreement made between the employer and laborer. In any case, the employer made all decisions on farm management, and the work of the laborers was closely monitored and supervised.
The seasonal laborers received their payments both in cash and in kind. Payment in cash was made at the end of the contract after harvest, but the amount to be paid had been agreed upon at the beginning of the contract. Wages in kind were paid in the form of daily food. Employers provided the seasonal laborers with cooked foods, maize, or cash to buy food. When maize or cash was to be provided, laborers received them in advance on a weekly or monthly basis. Some employers also provided housing to the laborers. Payments in kind guaranteed the basic survival of the laborers in the food-lean period of November-March during which many households faced food deficit.

The seasonal labor contract described above can be regarded as a form of fixed-wage contract in which an employer pays a laborer a fixed amount of wage that was agreed upon in advance. In a fixed-wage contract, in theory, the employer bears the risks of production failure and decline in the produce price. In the study villages, however, I found many cases where contracts were amended so as to enable employers to share the risks with the laborers, as the following cases illustrates.

Case Studies: Seasonal Labor Contracts

1. JB in Mbila employed two seasonal laborers between September and June for his 1.6-hectare farm of tobacco, maize and groundnuts. The laborers performed any farm task that JB ordered. The employer, JB, provided the laborers with daily food and housing during the period, and paid MK 4,000 to each of them at the end of the contact. The amount of cash paid was determined by JB after he received money for the tobacco harvest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Use of and Engagement in Agricultural Wage Labor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kachamba (n=31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of agricultural wage labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-contracted casual labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in task contracted casual labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male-headed households**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-headed households**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Including wage labor on estates.
- Percent of cases to the total number of male/female-headed households in each village.

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(2) EM was using a seasonal laborer between November and April and provided the laborer with food and housing in Mbila. EM and the laborer had agreed in advance that MK 12,000 would be paid to the laborer after EM received money from his tobacco sales. However, due to the erratic rain and low tobacco price that year, the cash that EM received for his tobacco was much less than what he had expected. EM renegotiated the agreement with the laborer, and paid him MK 4,000.

(3) Between September and June, AB in Mbila employed a seasonal laborer to whom AB provided 60 kilograms of maize and MK 175 every month to cover the cost of food. In addition, AB and the laborer had agreed in advance that the laborer would receive a lump sum cash payment, and that the amount to be paid would vary according to the level of tobacco production. Following this agreement, AB paid MK 3,000 to the laborer after the tobacco harvest.

(4) LG in Bongololo employed two seasonal laborers for nine months from September. LG divided his 1.2 hectare tobacco farm into two parts and had each laborer do all the farm tasks on each part of the farm. He paid each laborer 260 kilograms of maize in advance, and agreed that MK 24,000 would be paid at the end of the contract. However, the lack of rain in the 2004/05 season considerably reduced the yield, and he consequently paid only MK 12,000 to one laborer and MK 10,000 to another. LG himself suffered a large deficit that year because of the reduced tobacco production.

In the four cases above, the amount of payment in cash at the end of the contract was reduced after a bad harvest or renegotiated according to the production level. This arrangement is similar to that of a share contract in the sense that the employer and laborer share the risk of production. In a typical share contract practiced elsewhere in the developing countries, both employer and laborer receive less income when the production level is low, thus sharing the production risk. Therefore, the seasonal labor contracts practiced in the study villages can be regarded as a form of fixed-wage contract that contains a risk sharing characteristic of share contracts.

This characteristic of some seasonal labor contracts provides merits to both the employer and laborer in the context of rural Malawi. For employers it provides a means of risk sharing in a highly uncertain condition of agricultural production. Relying totally on rain-fed agriculture, smallholder farmers occasionally face production failure due to unfavorable weather. For example, the national production of maize in 2005 was less than 1.3 million tons due to unfavorable weather, while that in 2007 reached 3.4 million tons. Similarly, from 2000 to 2005 national production of burley tobacco fluctuated between 103-151 thousand tons. Moreover, the price of agricultural produce fluctuates widely, adding another risk towards a fall in income for the producers, as is shown in the tobacco price trends in Table 4. Under these situations, the risk sharing arrangement with laborers in a seasonal labor contract can help ameliorate the income shock faced by the employers.
Reduced cash payment in a bad harvest year is clearly a demerit for laborers. In some cases, employers unilaterally imposed a reduction in cash payment, contrary to the agreement made in the beginning of the season. This stems from the unequal power relation between the employer and laborer, and represents a clear disadvantage for the latter. On the other hand, the seasonal labor contract can merit the laborers as it guarantees food security for them during the lean period with payments in kind. The guaranteed provision of food during this season is crucial to many poor households in rural Malawi that exhaust their maize stock during the rainy season (Table 5), and otherwise have to look for opportunities for casual labor in order to buy food. Seasonal laborers are in a better position, because their contracts guarantee the opportunity for income smoothing (Morduch, 1995) through the arrangement of payments in kind by the employer. Thus, the unique characteristics of seasonal labor contracts provide the employer with a means for risk sharing and the laborer with a means of income smoothing.

II. Task-contracted Casual Labor

Task-contracted casual labor (ganyu) was widely used for various farm tasks in the study villages. In this contract, wages were paid upon completion of a
specific task, such as weeding. The rewards varied depending on the types of work and the ages of the laborers. There were some distinct difference between task-contracted casual labor and seasonal labor. First, the duration of work in task-contracted casual labor was much shorter, typically less than a week but occasionally a few weeks, than that of seasonal labor. Second, laborers were recruited from within the village or nearby villages. Third, the percentage of sample households using task-contracted casual labor (46%) was much higher than that using seasonal labor (10%). User households included both wealthy households that had enough cash to pay for laborers and poor households that had insufficient family labor to complete farm tasks by themselves. Thus, both the poor and wealthy households utilize the task-contracted casual labor for different purposes. On the other hand, engaging in task-contracted casual labor was mostly confined to poorer households. This is because the poorer households had to supplement their low own-farm income by engaging in agricultural wage labor. The total engagement rate among the sample households was 44 percent.

In task-contracted casual labor contracts, laborers were paid in cash or in kind (usually maize or cooked food) or both. In both tobacco and maize production the majority of payments involved cash, but there were sizable cases of payment in kind (mainly maize) for the casual labor employed for maize production. In fact, some households with maize surplus used task-contracted casual labor extensively for farm work in the production and paid the laborers with maize. A wealthy farmer with two hectares of farm land in Kachamba, for example, used task-contracted casual labor for his maize and groundnut farms for 65 man-days and paid the laborers 37 pails (about 740 kilograms) of maize. As the season of high demand for task-contracted casual labor (October to March) coincides with the time when poorer households exhaust their maize stocks, these labor arrangements provide an important opportunity for households short of maize to survive during the lean period. However, when production failure affects most of the households in a given area, demand for task-contracted casual labor and its wage-level would considerably decrease because of the general lack of working capital among the farmers. Therefore, the task-contract casual labor is an unreliable income source for the poorer segment of the rural population.

As Englund (1999) and Devereux (1999) rightly argued, task-contracted casual labor is neither an arrangement of wealth-sharing nor an informal transfer between the rich and the poor. Rewards are paid as returns on the labor provided on the basis of a commercial exchange. On the other hand, it is also true that villagers share the feeling of moral obligation whereby wealthy farmers should provide other villagers with opportunities to engage in task-contracted casual labor. Thus, the labor arrangement conveys the image of both an economic contract and a social obligation (Whiteside, 2000: 4-5; Ellis et al., 2003: 1509; Bryceson, 2006: 178).

Some literature has suggested that the engagement of poor households in task-contracted casual labor (ganyu) may result in food insecurity. For example,
Whiteside (2000) pointed out that the need to engage in task-contracted casual labor to obtain an immediate supply of food may mean less labor input for own-farms in a less timely manner during this critical farming period, which may result in a smaller harvest, and can lock some households into a vicious cycle of food insecurity. For this reason, Devereux suggested that task-contracted casual labor can be an erosive survival strategy when farmers neglect their own farming activities (Devereux 1999: 12).

The data obtained in the six study villages suggest the need to distinguish between the *amount* and *timing* of labor input when we examine the potential competition between task-contracted casual labor and own-farm production. It is true that the households who engaged in task-contracted casual labor produced less maize per hectare than those who did not, as Table 6 shows. However, the correlation coefficients between maize production per hectare and labor input per hectare in five villages (except in Belo(9)) were statistically insignificant. This implies that the higher productivity of maize was not caused by increased labor input. The difference in maize productivity between the two types of households, observed in the six villages, seemed to be the result of the level of fertilizer use (Table 6). In addition, the labor input for own-farm maize plots among households providing task-contracted casual labor was not less than that of other households. This implies that engaging in task-contract casual labor does not reduce the labor input on one’s own farm land. On the other hand, there is the possibility that the *timing* of labor input for one’s own farm could influence the production level. For example, an employment in weeding at the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement/non-engagement in task-contracted casual labor</th>
<th>Kachamba</th>
<th>Belo</th>
<th>Horo</th>
<th>Bongololo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged Did not engage</td>
<td>Engaged Did not engage</td>
<td>Engaged Did not engage</td>
<td>Engaged Did not engage</td>
<td>Engaged Did not engage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of households</td>
<td>14 17 16 14 16 16 10 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize production (kg/ha)</td>
<td>872 1,234 483 487 156 423 1,189 1,641</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor input on maize farming (man days/ha)</td>
<td>209 198 194 124 245 174 176 161</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlation coefficient between maize production per hectare and labor input per hectare</td>
<td>0.246 0.440* 0.206 -0.121</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertilizer input (kg/ha)**</td>
<td>40 90 10 17 54 108 88 72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement/non-engagement in task-contracted casual labor</th>
<th>Mulawa</th>
<th>Mbila</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged Did not engage</td>
<td>Engaged Did not engage</td>
<td>Engaged Did not engage</td>
<td>Engaged Did not engage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of households</td>
<td>7 21 18 14 81 105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize production (kg/ha)</td>
<td>696 1,531 575 895 622 1,015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor input on maize farming (man days/ha)</td>
<td>193 178 223 157 206 162</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlation coefficient between maize production per hectare and labor input per hectare</td>
<td>0.051 0.205 N.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertilizer input (kg/ha)**</td>
<td>67 139 84 128 48 84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the 5% level.
** Total application irrespective of types of fertilizer.
employer’s farm for a long period of task-contracted labor may delay the timing of weeding on one’s own farm, resulting in less optimal production output (Whiteside, 2000). The present study lacks the data to examine this possibility.

FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

This section provides a comparative analysis of labor use between male- and female-headed households. Because of the absence of husbands, female-headed households had fewer economically-active household members and were in a disadvantageous position relative to their male-headed counterparts in deploying family labor for own-farm production. An analysis of female-headed households sheds some light on the important correlations between labor endowments, agricultural production and household livelihood strategies.

As can be seen in Table 7, comparison between male- and female-headed households shows some important differences. First, female-headed households were more likely to engage in agricultural wage labor than male-headed households. Fifty-seven percent of the sampled female-headed household engaged in task-contracted casual labor while only 37% of their male-headed counterparts did. The difference stemmed from the fact that the average household income of female-headed households was relatively low, forcing them to seek other means of income sources.

Table 7. Comparison of Male- and Female-headed Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male-headed households</th>
<th>Female-headed households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of samples</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income per AEU</td>
<td>8,927</td>
<td>7,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own-farm income per hectare</td>
<td>8,420*</td>
<td>4,093*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency ratio</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of household members 15 years old or older</td>
<td>2.5***</td>
<td>1.8***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landholding (ha)</td>
<td>1.098***</td>
<td>0.614***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of livestock owned (Kwacha)</td>
<td>14,673</td>
<td>7,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of education (household heads)</td>
<td>5.5***</td>
<td>3.8***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm areas (ha, including rented land)</td>
<td>1.201***</td>
<td>0.664***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize production per hectare (kg/ha)</td>
<td>1,048***</td>
<td>626***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertilizer use for maize farming (kg/ha)</td>
<td>100**</td>
<td>59**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of households growing tobacco</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures for Kachamba and Belo were converted to 2004/05 prices using rural CPI.
Adult Equivalent Unit (AEU) : male 15 years or older = 1; female 15 years or older = 0.8; male or female 14 years or under = 0.5.
Exchange rates in 2005 were between 115 and 121 Malawi kwacha (MK) per US dollar.
*indicates 10% significance level, **indicates 5% significance level, and ***indicates 1% significance level with t-test.
Dependency ratio = (number of household members below 14 years old and over 64 years old)/ (number of household members between 15 - 64 years old)
Average landholding excludes unopened land.
Second, male- and female-headed households showed different performance in agricultural production. Across the six villages, the farm size of male-headed households was significantly larger than that of female-headed households. Better endowments of land and labor in the male-headed households may explain the difference in farm sizes. In addition, maize production per hectare by the female-headed households was less than that by male-headed households. This may be explained by the low level of fertilizer use among the female-headed households who have less income to purchase expensive farm inputs such as fertilizer than their male counterparts.

Tobacco production is more likely to be taken up by male-headed households than their female counterparts (Table 7). This is because tobacco production requires more labor and working capital than other crops. As the female-headed households had less family labor and income, they faced more barriers to entering tobacco production than their male counterparts. In addition, women tended to avoid growing labor-intensive crops such as tobacco because they face difficulties in combining productive and domestic work while few economically active household members are available (Chipande, 1987).

The amount of family labor put into own-farm production per hectare did not show a significant difference between male- and female-headed households (Table 8). Therefore, the observed difference in productivity of maize between the two types of households does not seem to be caused by the difference in the level of labor inputs. As Table 8 indicates, the labor input of the household heads in female-headed households was 41% higher than that in male-headed households. In addition, female-headed households were more likely to use their children’s labor for farm work, and the labor input of children was higher in female-headed households than in male-headed households. Thus female-headed households coped with the problem of insufficient family labor by increasing the work days of the household head and the children.

The availability of grown children’s labor is particularly important for own-farm production in female-headed households. As discussed, the number of fam-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household head</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Offspring</th>
<th>Sibling</th>
<th>Relatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male-headed households</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of total labor input</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-headed households</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of total labor input</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8. Labor Input on Maize Farm per Hectare, by Source of Labor and Type of Household**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household head</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Hired labor</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Average size of maize farm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male-headed households</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of total labor input</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-headed households</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of total labor input</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Children under 15 years old are counted as 0.5 man days/ha.
ily members available for labor affects the scope for farm expansion. Moreover, labor contribution from siblings and relatives was limited (Table 8), as farmers preferred working individually with their families to maximize their own production and profits (Davison, 1995). Under these circumstances, the availability of the grown children’s labor in the household contributed to the expansion of farm size, as the following case illustrates.

Case: AB was a 44-year-old *de facto* female head of household in Belo whose husband was living with another woman and made no financial or labor contribution to AB’s household. She lived with nine children, among whom four were between 15 and 25 years old. With this abundant family labor, she was able to expand her farm plots to 5.42 hectares, the largest among the sample households. The land for new plots was readily available, as she had been allocated a large tract of land in 1984 by her father who had been a village head. The abundant family labor enabled her to carry out all farm tasks without using hired labor.

However, most female-headed households with grown children cannot expand their farms. In the above case, the abundance of uncultivated land in Belo and AB’s privileged familial ties enabled her to expand the operations of her farm by opening new plots on the unopened portions of her allotted land. This land-abundant situation is not applicable to most rural areas in Malawi where increasing land-scarcity problems have left little uncultivated land. Instead, where household farm size is limited because of land scarcity, a large number of children in a household can result in less own-farm production per capita. In the future, it may also lead to a further subdivision of already small land to share among the children. Thus an increased number of grown children in female-headed households can contribute to farm expansion in a relatively land-abundant situation, but not in a land-scarce situation.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the labor use and labor contracts observed in smallholder agricultural production in Malawi. Despite the diverse socio-economic conditions of six study villages, the paper found some important similarities in labor use in agriculture. It revealed that the characteristics of labor contracts were interrelated with the high risk of agricultural production and the probability of food deficit during the lean season. This interrelation was examined in the case studies of seasonal labor contracts that provided a means of risk sharing for the employers and food security for the laborers. The paper also examined some features of task-contracted casual labor and highlighted the fact that the relations between user and provider of casual labor were interwoven into the wealth differences among the households. Analysis of labor use by female-headed households has revealed that the female household heads and their children spent more days on farm work than did the members of male-headed
households in order to cope with the disadvantage in family labor, and that the
low income of female-headed households forced them to rely more on agricul-
tural wage income than their male-headed counterparts. In addition, the paper
has suggested that the low agricultural productivity among the households
engaged in task-contracted casual labor and female-headed households may not
be explained by the level of family labor inputs alone, and factors such as the
paucity in working capital to purchase inputs play an important role in deter-
mining the levels of productivity.

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NOTES

(1) *Dimba* refers to the dry-season gardens established in wetlands (called *dambo*) or in
streambeds where water is available throughout the year. *Dimba* cultivation was also
practiced in other villages studied, but on a much smaller scale both in number and
acreage.

(2) “Vernacular land markets” are commoditized transfers of land within the framework of
customary tenure. See Chimhowu and Woodhouse (2006) for further discussion.

(3) During the fieldwork, detailed income data (both for farm income and off-own-farm
income) were collected for all sampled households. Based on the data, income quartiles
were obtained by ranking all sampled households in each village studied according to
income per adult equivalent unit and dividing them into four equal groups. Distinction
between wealthy and poor households was made according to the income quartiles. For
the income disparities among the sampled households, see Takane (2007).

(4) The exchange rate during the survey periods fluctuated between 115-121 Malawi kwaw-
cha (MK) per US $1.

(5) These figures were obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security.

(6) Burley tobacco is mostly grown by smallholders in Malawi. Production figures were
obtained from the Tobacco Control Commission.

(7) One may argue that the risk sharing arrangement is not embedded in the seasonal la-
bor contract but is sought on an *ad hoc* basis after the production failure occurred. My
conclusion is that the risk sharing arrangement is embedded in the contracts at least in
some cases because there are cases in which employers and laborers agreed that pay-
ment in cash is determined *ex post*, as were the cases for (1) and (3).

(8) Since *ganyu* refers to all kinds of piecework, including nonagricultural work, I do not
use the word *ganyu* in this section in order to highlight the distinction between agricul-
tural wage labor and nonagricultural wage labor.

(9) One possible explanation for the statistically significant correlation coefficient in the
case of Belo is that many households in the village have to establish new farms on un-
opened land which requires much labor, and the newly established farms produce better
harvests due to good soil conditions.
REFERENCES


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