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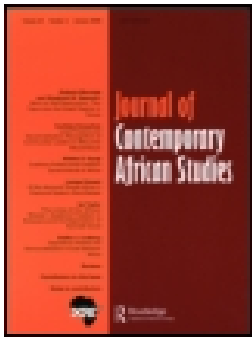
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## From neighbours to deadly enemies: excavating landscapes of territoriality and ethnic violence in Jos, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Jos, a central Nigerian city engulfed by deadly violence in September 2001, offers a unique case study for exploring what happens when a modern metropolis lacks the institutional capacity to regulate its competing groups, and latent rivalries ignite into widespread, systematic brutality. Emerging from combined political and cultural dynamics radically different from those of better-known examples, such as Jerusalem and Belfast, Jos provides fresh insights into the roles of group concentration and conflict framing in engendering territoriality and violence in the city. As this paper shows, Jos' colonial history in tin mining, waves of migration, and an urban policy of sociospatial differentiation have shaped and intersected with the contemporary politics of ethnicity to foster explosive relations between Christians and Muslims. Building on literature and primary data from interviews and discussions with surviving residents, the paper explicates how group geography and conflict became so entangled, leading to the so-called 'Jos crisis'.

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Some of the boys were my neighbours. They set the house on fire but I remained hidden inside and watched as they used big sticks and machetes on four people. Three of the people they killed were my family.<sup>1</sup>

This is just one among many stories of neighbours preying on neighbours during the violent conflict that engulfed a central Nigerian city in September 2001. A decade later, when this resident of Jos was telling me how his three siblings were murdered and his home set ablaze by people he knew well, burn scars from the incident were still visible on his face and arms. Overnight, it seemed, neighbourhoods that were once scenes of convivial coexistence became fierce battlegrounds of ethnic cleansing between Christians and Muslims. The crux of the conflict is the dispute over indigeneity. On one side are three ethnolinguistic groups indigenous to Jos – Afizere, Anaguta and Berom – who are consequently considered indigenes; on the other are the Hausa, who are more recent arrivals to the Jos Plateau than the indigenes but who established themselves in urban Jos before other groups.<sup>2</sup> Although the conflict is about indigeneity and ownership of the

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city, the violence took on a religious colouration. Residents were maimed and killed, not because they were indigenes or Hausa, but because they were Christian or Muslim. As a result, members of other ethnic nationalities not belonging to the indigeneity imbroglio also became entangled in the violence. By the end of the six-day clashes known as the 'Jos crisis', more than 1000 people were killed and countless homes, businesses, schools and religious centres destroyed (HRW 2001, 2). Since then the city has witnessed intermittent large-scale violence, but none has been as perplexing as that initial instance in 2001 when neighbours became deadly enemies.

The eruption seemed antithetical to the peaceful disposition associated with Jos. While surrounding states like Kaduna, Bauchi, Gombe and Kano boiled in violent unrest through the 1980s and 1990s, the Plateau State's capital city was an oasis of calm, a safe haven where displaced persons sought refuge (Danfulani and Fwatshak 2002, 244). Peaceable relations among its diverse groups, along with scenic geography and a pleasant climate even earned the city the epithet 'Home of peace and tourism'. The sudden intense violence is one reason Jos presents an interesting case study. Most examples of urban conflict – Jerusalem and Belfast, among others – are protracted cases with long histories of religious or sectarian rivalry. Although Jos witnessed 1932's 'village revolts', 1945's 'potato riots' and 1966's so-called 'anti-Igbo pogroms', these were of a different nature than what befell the city in 2001 (Higazi 2007, 2). Exploring why violence along religious lines had hitherto eluded Jos brings fresh insights into some of the issues precipitating its turn from relatively peaceful to a violence-ridden city. Also, the case of Jos offers a unique frame through which to peer into the dynamics of conflict framing. Specifically, it presents an opportunity for scrutinising how a conflict around indigeneity is framed in religious terms.

The bulk of research on what caused dissonance in Jos tends towards a constructivist perspective, explaining identities and groups in terms of constructs created and recreated as a means to achieve political-cum-economic ends (Egwu 2004; Best 2007; Ostien 2009; Krause 2011). Several analysts pinpoint the strife in the once peaceful city and elsewhere in Nigeria to an intersection of factors that reveal politics as essentially being a series of struggles between individuals and groups over economic advantage (Osaghae and Suberu 2005; Bunte and Vinson 2016). The manipulative and mobilising role played by religion in the context of Nigeria's hyper-religiosity is also an important consideration (see Mwakwkwon 2001; Vinson 2017).

Insofar as historical, political, economic and religious frames provide crucial views on the Jos conflict, they do not account for what happened in 2001 in any specific sense. In other words, political, economic and religious factors fall short of explaining how Nigerians rationalised and realised the murder of some 1000 lifelong neighbours. Contestations around political positions – with ensuing economic implications between political heavyweights who double as ethnic champions – are almost synonymous with politics in Nigeria and the rest of Africa (Collier and Vicente 2014). The trend is too constant to explain the irregularity of ethnic violence. From Sokoto in Nigeria's far north to Bayelsa in the farthest south, ethnic diversity and political and resource-based rivalry bestride the entire country. Yet, violence of the scale under discussion prevails mainly in Plateau, Kaduna and, to a lesser extent, Taraba states.

This paper adds a spatial dimension to the puzzle. It shows how historical, political and economic factors as well as the socio-economic conditions of actors signposted in existing literature on Jos became interwoven. But beyond this, and perhaps more importantly, it

scrutinises the spatial characteristics of the city in terms of neighbourhoods and examines how the activities of ethnic and religious networks within them promoted a particular framing of the conflict that engendered territoriality and a renewed zeal for dominance. My aim is to illustrate how these processes led to the breakdown of order in 2001.

The remainder of the paper is organised into four sections. First, after a brief contextualisation of urban conflict and some methodological considerations, I discuss the emergence of group concentration in Jos as the impetus for constructing categories and territories. Here, I adopt a constructivist view on the formalisation of physical and symbolic boundaries in Jos. Second, I discuss indigeneity and the creation of Jos North LGA as pivotal to the development of antagonistic relations between the categories. Third, I show how the activities of ethnic associations in segregated neighbourhoods are a fallout of the creation of Jos North LGA. I also illustrate how these activities catalyse group solidarity, territoriality and confrontational relations at the neighbourhood level. Fourth, I look at how patterns of violence during the events reflect dominance-ownership. Finally, I make concluding remarks on ethnic groups, conflict framing, territoriality and collective violence in urban contexts, as well as suggest possible directions for further study.

### Contextualising ethnic conflict and violence

Adequately illustrating the argument of this paper means situating it within dominant debates on ethnic conflict in an urban context, two theoretical approaches of which are relevant for this paper. Post-Cold War literature on ethnic conflict falls into two main schools of thought, the primordialist and the constructivist, with their dividing line falling along conceptions of ethnicity. Primordialists interpret ethnicity in terms of native traditions, beliefs, kinship ties, common biological features and territory (Grosby 2005). Constructivists see ethnicity as a socially constructed phenomenon employed by political and opinion leaders to mobilise support for a range of causes (Hopf 1998; Cederman and Daase 2003). Reiterating the constructivist view, Chandra (2006) draws attention to how boundaries get reshaped and loyalties and group membership stay fluid.

Both analytical lenses are important for understanding remote and proximate causes of the Jos crisis. Discussing conflicts elsewhere in the world, Toft (2003) argues that a conflict's violence level can be determined by the indivisibility of territory among groups who hold territories as integral to their identity. Territory tied to identity becomes symbolically indivisible and groups fight to death to protect it. While this theory sheds light on why the indigenes fatally fought to assert dominance, it falls short of explaining why the Hausa were also willing to battle to their own deaths for rule over the same jurisdiction.

Although the pursuit of power played out at different levels, everyday members of the conflicting groups found fighting against perceived enemies apt in one setting, in particular: the neighbourhood. The outburst that overwhelmed the city manifested in a series of attacks and counterattacks by residents whose goal was exclusive dominance in their neighbourhoods or, in some cases, to extend dominance to new frontiers. However, many riot participants admitted their actions were only defensive. Some residents of Tina Junction, for example, insisted they only went out to defend their neighbourhood from incursion. Whatever the motivation for joining the unruly mobs who shot, stabbed, burned and pillaged, most people fought to prove, as one resident put it: 'This is our territory, not yours'.<sup>3</sup> Beyond the primordialist-constructivist debate, looking at

ethnic and religious organisations and their activities within neighbourhoods offers a unique window into the undercurrents of conflict framing, territoriality and collective violence. And it does so in a way that merely analysing the popular narratives of groups does not.

### **Methodological considerations**

For a more nuanced and context-sensitive analysis, I zoom in on micro- and meso-level group dynamics. Prevailing literature emphasises intergroup relations in exploring the function of group geography in conflict. This paper instead draws attention to intragroup dynamics at the neighbourhood level and, in so doing, brings to light salient factors seldom mentioned in large-grained analysis.

To develop the central argument, I use the notion of dominance-ownership, a concept I introduce to the discourse by way of this paper. I see this as an implicit assumption among many Jos residents that the group with greater numerical strength – and hence potential to dominate – ‘owns’ the neighbourhood. Over three years my interactions with residents suggest that this thinking is endemic to the residents of the following Jos neighbourhoods: Angwan Rukuba, Angwan Rogo, Rikkos, Kabong, Apata, Jenta, Tina Junction, Yan Shanu, Angwan Rimi, Dogon Dutse and Dutse Uku. The normativeness of this mind-set is also corroborated by discussions with groups in LGAs surrounding the city of Jos, including Barkin Ladi and Jos South, all settings for intermittent clashes in the last decade. Dominance-ownership supports the logic of territorialisation that is forwarded in this paper. It accounts for not only the seemingly sudden descent into violence, but also the pervasiveness with which it was unleashed, and the patterns it adopted. Apart from discussing dominance-ownership as the chief motivation for residents engaging in ethnic cleansing at the neighbourhood level, I also discuss the key function of ethnic associations and religious organisations in forging group solidarity and influencing collective action locally.

The paper draws from various data sources. Several studies have been conducted on Jos from anthropological and historical perspectives, and most recently by political scientists and sociologists. I supplement insights from this rich body of literature with archival materials and newspaper sources. I also introduce primary data from dozens of interviews and discussions I conducted in Jos, mainly between 2011 and 2013. Though these interactions were for other projects I was working on at the time, I find the datasets relevant, especially in terms of group positions and personal accounts of how the indigenes and the Hausa populations experienced the violence within their neighbourhoods. Further informing my research were discussions that I observed at intergroup mediation sessions, conferences and peace advocacy visits to affected neighbourhoods, involving hundreds of indigenes and Hausa participants. These events were organised by the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies at the University of Jos, NGOs, government agencies and other groups.

### **The emergence of group concentration and category construction**

Colonial policy guided the establishment of Jos as a new, booming tin mining hub. City planning in parts of northern Nigeria was based on the colonial ‘sabon gari’ model

where migrants were confined to a particular part of the city away from the indigenes.<sup>4</sup> This was the practice in Kano and Zaria (Home 1983). Although the 'sabon gari' model was not replicated in Jos, similar patterns of sociospatial segregation were implemented, as will be explained later.

Even before the dawn of colonial rule in northern Nigeria in the second half of the nineteenth century, the indigenes had been in touch with Hausa traders from the far north. In a small local tin mining industry at the foot of the Jos hills, some 25 kilometres north of the city centre, Hausa traders served as intermediaries between the indigenous miners and merchants from North Africa (Morrison 1977, 207; Freund 1982, 72). At the time, the jihadist forces of Usman dan Fodio, comprising Fulani and converted Hausa men, tried to invade Jos Plateau. In one of these attempts, combined indigenous forces retaliated heavily, causing major fatalities among the jihadists in the second half of the nineteenth century (Freund 1982). However, by 1905, diverse groups, including Hausa, Nupe, Kanuri and others from the provinces of Northern Nigeria came up the Jos Plateau at the behest of the British colonial administration, as labourers for the new Royal Niger Company (Morrison 1977).

Perhaps the most enduring effect tin mining had on the Jos Plateau, however, was demographic. Following the establishment of a tin mining industry, the Hausa, Kanuri, Nupe and several other groups from different parts of Northern Nigeria rushed to Jos for jobs, becoming the main workforce in the mining industry (Hodder 1959; Morrison 1977). Not all the migrants worked directly in the mines, many engaged in other economic activities. Because Hausa language was the main mode of communication among members of these diverse groups and they mostly shared the same religion, Islam, they were labelled Hausa. Following the introduction of the poll tax in 1907 (see Berger 2009), the indigenes joined the Hausa and other groups in the mines, albeit only seasonally since they still preferred subsisting on farming. Construction of the Bauchi Light Railway in 1914 and the Kafachan-Jos line in 1927 provided a direct link to the south, thus precipitating migrations from other parts of the country. For an idea of the scale of migrations into Jos at the time: the census conducted by the colonial administration in 1952 categorised 44% of the total population of Jos as 'strangers' – the colonial administration's label for migrants (Hodder 1959; Ostien 2012).

Colonial policy on residential units in Nigerian townships, especially in the north, sanctioned clear group boundaries (Fourchard 2009). Based on this residential pattern, Jos was divided into two major sections: Jos Township and Jos Native Town. The township was further split: one part for Europeans and the other for skilled migrants from Asia and other African countries. Jos Native Town was mainly for migrants from elsewhere in Nigeria. This is where Hausa, Yorubas, Igbos, Edo and other ethnic nationalities from outside Jos Plateau resided. What could be considered as a third section consists of the surrounding rural areas where the indigenes resided in their ancestral villages (Plotnicov 1971; Higazi 2007). Residence permits were issued to persons considered suitable to the township. Local authorities were mandated to evict from the township, after a three-day notice, anyone belonging to the indigenous community who could not show evidence of being engaged in a positive venture (Plotnicov 1971).

The segregated residential pattern formalised by the colonial administration had a number of effects. First, it reified ethnic boundaries by adding a sociospatial dimension. This, according to some scholars (Boal 2005; Weidmann and Salehyan 2013; Bhavnani



et al. 2014), means creating a sociospatial wedge that hinders prospects for cooperation and serves to reinforce mutual exclusivity. Second, it birthed parallel societies, which necessitated the construction of institutions that soon proved conflictive and transmuted into antagonisms for the future. Third, it set the tone for future discrimination between settler and indigene categories, which is the subject of the next section.

## The politics of indigeneity

Contention over who is and who is not an 'indigene' is common in Nigeria (see Ehrhardt 2017). Apart from being a citizen, every Nigerian is supposed to register as a certified member of a specific patrilocal community. Indigene certificates are issued by LGA authorities to differentiate between the indigenes – also referred to as 'sons of the soil' – and the migrants or settlers (Fourchard 2015). Although the practice has its roots in colonial policy, identification has assumed more importance in post-colonial Nigeria. Now a criterion for accessing certain socio-economic rights and privileges, the indigene certificate lets individuals benefit from scholarships, school admissions, employment quotas and tenured positions as heads of government ministries and agencies (HRW 2001; Ostien 2009). Individuals and groups resident in a state other than their states of indigeneity are considered settlers, thereby lacking such rights and privileges and often being subjected to other forms of everyday discrimination.

In Nigeria, different groups define indigeneity in frequently contradictory terms (Fourchard 2015). Some interpret its basis as an autochthonous or very old connection to an ancestral land. Others do not see it in that strict sense, believing indigeneity is an ascription earned by groups who are long settled in any part of the country and active in its development (Ostien 2009). This clash of views has sparked endless debates, notably in ethnically heterogeneous spaces like Jos.

Hausa populations argue that they are indigenes of Jos North by virtue of their long stay and contribution to its growth. Since establishment of the tin mining industry on the Jos Plateau a century ago, they have inhabited certain neighbourhoods. To them, ownership of these areas is beyond contention since even the colonial administration labelled them Hausa settlements and they were successively headed by Hausa chiefs. Based on the predominance of Hausa in these neighbourhoods located in old Hausa settlements, some Hausa representatives contend that when their ancestors came from Hausa land, much of what is Jos today was unoccupied territory. By this, they argue, they are the city's rightful owners (Best 2007).

The debates about who is and who is not an indigene are common all over Nigeria, but they have not translated into large-scale destruction in most cases. It thus appears that the indigene-settler contentions of Jos could not have resulted in clashes without an overlapping variable. In the next section, I posit that the 1991 creation of Jos North LGA and the embargo placed on the issuing of indigene certificates to members of the Hausa community in 1999 are crucial landmarks in the transition from calm to chaos.

## Creating Jos North LGA and the territorialisation of neighbourhoods

The creation of Jos North LGA added a strong territorial dimension to the indigene-settler conflict in Jos. As this subsection will show, it consolidated the dominance-ownership



notion across the city's neighbourhoods. Between 1985 and 1991, Nigeria's General Ibrahim Babangida-led government created 11 new states and 297 LGAs across the federation. One of the newly created LGAs was Jos North. Carved from the former Jos LGA, the new LGA covered 291 square kilometres, including the central city of Jos where the former Jos LGA headquarters, the ultramodern Main Market, the University of Jos and other infrastructural hallmarks were all located. Apart from being the official capital city, it was considered Plateau State's economic nerve centre.

Jos North LGA was created amidst controversy. The Justice Bola Ajibola Commission of Inquiry investigating civil disturbances in Jos documents the contentious correspondence that transpired prior to its establishment. First, a group of indigenes known as the Berom Elders Council wrote to General Babangida, then serving as Nigeria's head of state. Their letter requested the creation of a Jos Metropolitan LGA from Jos LGA and recommended that the new LGA cover the central city of Jos, Vwang, Kuru, Du, Gyel and Gwong, all districts in Jos LGA. The areas and boundaries suggested for the new Jos Metropolitan LGA were no different from the old Jos LGA. This seems to have been part of the indigenes' spatial politics for maintaining their status quo. The Hausa community also wrote a letter requesting the creation of a new LGA, specifically a Jos North LGA that would mainly comprise the city centre of Jos. On 30 September 1991, the Babangida administration announced the formal creation of Jos North LGA, with boundaries exactly where the Hausa community had suggested.

The aggrieved Berom Elders Council pushed the administration to reconsider the boundaries, but their efforts yielded no meaningful response. The Du Elders Council complained that the newly created Jos North's south-eastern boundary bisected Du district, leaving one half in Jos North and the other in Jos South. A general feeling among the indigenes was that the LGA was fashioned by Babangida, himself a Muslim, to favour the Hausa population in Jos and to further the political cause of the seemingly hegemonic Muslim north in Plateau State and the rest of the Middle Belt. Jos North's creation crucially changed the demographic status of groups in the city. It had far-reaching implications for ownership claims, too. The Hausa arguably became the majority in Jos North. With politics being a game of numbers, the group became a major contender to gain the LGA chair. The new boundaries rendered many indigenes, particularly Berom and some Afizere, the indigenes specifically of Jos South LGA. This curtailed their active participation in the politics of Jos North LGA and weakened their claims to the city.

Effects of the evolving demography did not take long to manifest. In the first election conducted in the LGA following its creation, a Hausa man, Sama'ila Mohammed, emerged as chairman of the local government council. The indigenes took this as justification of their fears – and a major blow (Ostien 2009). From then on, they adopted a stiffer stance, fighting any government decision that appeared to favour the Hausa. They staunchly protested and successfully influenced the reversal of two appointments that favoured members of the Hausa community in 1994 and 1998 (HRW 2001). In both cases, the protests elicited Hausa counter-protests, which turned into low-scale violence (Best 2007). These initial fracas were, at best, skirmishes that resulted in few deaths and limited property destruction. Nevertheless, boundaries between indigene-dominated and Hausa-dominated neighbourhoods began to sharpen and take on new meaning. For instance, a Muslim resident told me that in the 1980s and early 1990s, he was not so conscious of the boundary between his

neighbourhood and Christian-dominated neighbourhoods. Jos North LGA's creation marked the dawn of territorialisation, characterised by an acute awareness of which group is in charge and, by implication, 'owns' the neighbourhood.<sup>5</sup> Different factors contributed to the entrenching of the dominance-ownership notion but, as the next section shows, the neighbourhoods' ethnic associations, religious organisations and other coalitions were paramount.

Some eight years after the creation of Jos North LGA came another important development. The country's return to democratic governance in 1999 suddenly resurrected many latent issues. In Plateau State, the controversy around indigene certificates had never disappeared, but during military rule, the mostly Muslim governors of Plateau State had prevailed on successive chairmen of Jos North to issue them to Hausa community members (Ostien 2009). However, this issuance came to a halt with the swearing-in of Plateau State governor Joshua Dariye, a Christian Mushere from Bokkos LGA, and Jos North chairman Frank Bagudu Tardy, a Christian Anaguta indigene, now late. This move implied the exclusion of Hausa from the rights and privileges that came with being a certified indigene. The embargo on certificates remains a major source of frustration among the Hausa. Moreover, it significantly contributed to the tension that followed appointing a Hausa as coordinator for the Jos North LGA branch of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) a few months before violence engulfed the city (CJCDA 2013).

### **Ethnic associations, religious organisations and segregated neighbourhoods**

Ethnic associations, religious organisations and other coalitions and networks all contributed to the territorialisation of Jos' neighbourhoods. Before delving into how these mechanisms played out in Jos, it is useful to note that organisations have historically used territory as a strategy for asserting control over resources and people (Sack 1983). In Jos, and elsewhere, ethnicity is an organising principle for territoriality and mobilising for conflict. When there is insufficient institutional capacity to regulate competing ethnic groups or urban managers prioritise particularistic interests, the activities of these ethnic associations can often deteriorate into violent confrontations. First, most ethnic and religious organisations in Jos locate their secretariats in neighbourhoods predominated by their members. This has several implications. The strategic siting of operational bases sends a strong psychological message promoting group solidarity. It creates a feeling of homogeneity that pervades interactions at the neighbourhood level and shapes relations within and across sociospatial boundaries.

In addition, communicating between ethnic associations and co-ethnics is cost-effective when organisations have a strong neighbourhood base in the form of an office. Unhindered, frequent interaction can pass between the association and residents. For example, the Jasawa Development Association (JDA) is a powerful mobiliser for Hausa populations along Bauchi Road and other adjacent neighbourhoods around Abba na Shehu electoral ward, where its secretariat is located in the centre of one of the largest conglomerations of Hausa neighbourhoods in Jos. Similarly, the secretariat of the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) sits in a Hausa enclave, facilitating communication with the majority Hausa residents. The office of Jamma'ati Izalatil Bid'ah Wa'iqamatis Sunna (JIBWIS) is also situated in a

part of Dogon Karfe neighbourhood with high concentrations of Hausa populations and where Hausa gather for activities.

Various ethnic associations representing indigenes are equally active at the neighbourhood level. For instance, the Afizere Cultural and Community Development Association (ACDA) is a large umbrella organisation for all members of the Afizere ethnic group. Fond of hosting well-attended festivals, ACDA has under its wings various small associations, including youth and women's groups. Its secretariat is located in Lamingo, a large settlement dominated by the Afizere. Another ethnic association is the Berom Education and Cultural Organisation (BECO). With headquarters at the palace of the Gbong Gwom, BECO is an effective rallying point for Berom indigenes. BECO also hosts festivities for raising Berom socio-cultural consciousness.

How these organisations influence collective action can be understood through Olzak's (1983, 356) conception of ethnic solidarity as 'the conscious identification with a given ethnic population' coupled with 'maintenance of strong ethnic interaction networks and institutions that socialize new members and reinforce social ties'. In this context, the construction and reification of group identities and boundaries is facilitated through close, frequent interaction between ethnic associations and the co-ethnics they represent.

The years following Jos North LGA's creation witnessed an upsurge in activities by ethnic and religious organisations at the neighbourhood level, including meetings, socio-cultural festivities and awareness-raising via literature distribution and rallies. To say these groups were comatose prior to this would be inaccurate. BECO, for instance, was active long before 1991. However, the new LGA and the socio-political developments it spurred swelled these organisations' activities. The question of identity vis-à-vis indigeneity took centre stage and group relations became increasingly tense, culminating in periodic skirmishes, in 1994, 1997 and 1998.

Through the years, groups, such as JDA, became active in mobilising support for Hausa candidates at the polls. The effort paid off when one won the chairmanship elections in 1992. Hausa electoral success shook the indigenes. In response, associations like BECO, ACDA and ADA intensified mobilisation along ethno-religious boundaries at different levels, especially the neighbourhood. What followed was a proliferation of associations and other coalitions that actually worked to build group solidarity by emphasising ethnic differences in the city (Adetula 2005).

It is relevant to note, too, how tribal associations align their interests with those of religious organisations. For example, the JDA argues that its members are discriminated against not only because of their Hausa ethnicity, but because they are Muslim (CJCDA 2013). Similarly, while the Plateau Indigenous Development Association Network (PIDAN) accuses the JDA of turning an ethnic issue into a religious one (PIDAN 2010), members of indigene representation groups such as BECO, ACDA and ADA have labelled the violence in Jos as part of a jihad orchestrated by Muslims from northern Nigeria.<sup>6</sup> This is how ethnic networks such as JDA and BECO could manage to become co-strugglers with religious bodies such as, respectively, JNI and CAN. Framing the conflict in religious terms is a highly effective strategy not only for its power to evoke intense emotion, but also because it gathers a huge support base. This framing has attracted both sympathy and animosity for the groups in Jos from well beyond the city and resulted in the violence spreading to other parts of Plateau State.

Several commissions of enquiry have noted how these organisations' chauvinistic disposition was demonstrated in the impassioned correspondence that preceded the outbreak of violence in September 2001. The communications were both intragroup and intergroup. While co-ethnics were charged to stand up, fight for their rights and defend their territories, threats were also launched across ethnic divides and neighbourhoods.<sup>7</sup> The Justice Niki Tobi Commission of Inquiry accused some of these groups and their members of striking the match that set the city ablaze (PSG 2002).

Also crucial are neighbourhood organisations. These voluntary groups with diverse agendas, formed for the collective good of residents, meet periodically to discuss sanitation, security, weddings and burials involving any of their members. In segregated neighbourhoods, the associations serve as very strong mediums of group solidarity and mobilisation. Discussions in different neighbourhoods, including Angwan Rukuba, Tina Junction and Yan Trailer, reveal that when the violence broke out, most of these neighbourhood-based associations suspended discussions on other issues to focus on their members' security and safety. Instead of once-weekly meetings, some neighbourhoods held up to three gatherings a week to assess the situation and discuss how to fortify defence against possible threats. Such meetings occurred in practically all neighbourhoods across the city.<sup>8</sup>

A number of ad hoc arrangements such as neighbourhood security committees and elder fora became particularly visible at times of tension in the city. Members of these groups often comprised highly influential neighbourhood residents who were connected to or were themselves top officials with direct links to the government. Their connections could be used to campaign for the deployment of agents to secure the neighbourhood. These individuals might also deliver urgent updates on political aspects of a conflict and keep residents informed on new developments and government plans.

Such ad hoc committees are crucial in shaping how the neighbourhood sees and responds to a conflict. Since they have direct links to, or are themselves part of, decision-making institutions, their opinions are generally respected. Inasmuch as they generally check the excesses of the youth, some group members might have political agendas that do not necessarily further the interest of peaceful coexistence. Muslim and Christian women and youth groups in Dadin Kowa, Angwan Rukuba and Rikkos denounced the role some elders played in persuading youth to participate in riots. Strong feelings pervaded that these elders only sought to achieve personal gains and were capable of fuelling violence if that was what their personal advancement required (see Obateru 2002).

The reverse holds true, too. Elders have transcended categorical constraints to form coalitions against violence. For instance, in neighbourhoods like Dadin Kowa and Rantya federal and state low-cost housing areas, elder fora worked across ethno-religious divides to talk youth groups and neighbourhood vigilantes out of violence (Krause 2017). These neighbourhoods are the few places that the intermittent brutality witnessed in Jos since 2001 has never penetrated.<sup>9</sup> This shows the influence held by these ad hoc groups, but also illustrates how much of the Jos crisis cannot be dismissed as irresponsible acts by unemployed, idle youth, as some literature suggests (Abdullahi and Saka 2007).

## **Dominance-ownership and patterns of violence**

The city of Jos exploded into violent clashes on the afternoon of 7 September 2001. But in the weeks leading up, as would become clear, a chief objective of the two fighting sides

was to assert territorial dominance. This was crystallised when Mukhtar Mohammed, a Hausa, was appointed coordinator of the Jos North chapter of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). Printed campaign materials by alleged representatives of both the Hausa and the indigenes claimed they owned the city and would prove it by physically eliminating the other group. The Justice Niki Tobi Commission of Inquiry on Civil Disturbances in Jos reported that this literature flooded the city some weeks before the outbreak of violence (PSG 2002). As already described in the explication of dominance-ownership, there is an implicit belief that the more territories a group dominates, the stronger its claim on 'ownership' of the city.

The violence was widespread. Slums and rundown neighbourhoods in the city centre were worst hit (Krause 2011, 32). It is important to note that this is precisely the predicament of segregated and territorialised neighbourhoods, which trace their emergence to the colonial policy on residential patterns. At the northern fringe of the city around the University of Jos, stick-wielding students clashed with groups armed with guns and machetes from the Muslim-dominated neighbourhoods of Angwan Rogo and Angwan Rimi, allegedly trying to invade the university premises. Further, in Angwan Rogo, many Christians, including university students and staff, were killed and their property looted and destroyed. Some motorists caught in the crossfire along Bauchi Road were hacked and burnt in their vehicles (HRW 2001). At Congo- Russia junction, clashes resulted in several deaths, along with burnt vehicles, homes and worship centres. Deeper into the Muslim settlements of Gangare and Dilimi, Igbo motor parts dealers were caught in the whirlwind of violence. Mostly Christian, some lost their lives and others their shops to looters. There are, however, also tales of how Muslims helped some of the motor parts dealers to safety.<sup>10</sup>

While this transpired in Muslim-dominated parts of the city, killings and destruction of a similar scale happened where Christians formed the majority. One such scene was Angwan Rukuba neighbourhood, a slum north-east of the city. Many Muslims were killed in their homes and several others burnt in their vehicles. Farther south on Bauchi Ring Road, homes were sacked, their occupants stabbed or shot dead. Major clashes happened between residents of Dutse Uku and Tina Junction.

To the west of the city centre, Christian mobs, mostly of Igbo extraction, who were angered by rumours of attacks against their co-ethnics in Dilimi, were said to fight any Muslim in sight. Major clashes took place near Fatima Catholic Church, around Ali Kazaure, a relatively mixed neighbourhood, serving as a buffer between the largely Christian Apata and the Muslim-dominated Ali Kazaure. Just as in Hausa-dominated neighbourhoods, some Christians helped their Muslim neighbours to safety.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from ethnic cleansing, the use of religious inscriptions at strategic points in the neighbourhood offered evidence that groups were motivated by a need to demonstrate ownership of territories. To this day, several handwritten signs announce 'Sharia line' on the major road that runs through Muslim-dominated neighbourhoods such as Angwan Rogo and Angwan Rimi. These signs declare them Muslim territory, out of bounds for non-Muslims. Similarly, inscriptions of 'New Jerusalem' are a common sight in neighbourhoods dominated by Christians (Danfulani and Fwatshak 2002, 253; Trovalla, Adetula, and Trovalla 2014, 67).

Territorialisation was thus instrumental to the destruction that befell Jos. Where they constituted the majority, either group tried to chase away, if not kill, members of the minority 'other'. Their intention was not only to assert dominance, but also to prove they were the

city's rightful owners. Last (2008, 6) notes the tendency for groups in Nigeria to use violence as a means for asserting dominance. Muslims were attacked and their properties looted and destroyed in areas dominated by the Christians such as Angwan Rukuba, Kabong and Apata. Similarly, Christians were attacked and their property destroyed in Muslim-dominated areas such as Angwan Rogo, Angwan Rimi, Rikkos and Ali Kazaure (HRW 2001).

Fragile peace has returned to Jos, thanks to the presence of a military taskforce and the activities of civilian peacebuilding networks. However, the city is still reeling beneath the shock and unpleasant outcomes of large scale violence.<sup>12</sup> Reports suggest a strong presence of armed networks and increased levels of crime, drug abuse and insecurity across the city's neighbourhoods.<sup>13</sup> Jos' landscape is balkanised into ethnically homogenous strongholds interspersed by pockets of mixed areas characterised by ethnic differentiation, mutual suspicion and fear. Moreover, urban clashes in Jos have sparked riots and militia violence in the rural areas around Jos and southern Plateau (Higazi 2008, 2011). At the time of writing, Irigwe villages – four kilometres southwest of Jos – were still mourning dozens of deaths from a new wave of militia attacks.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper illustrated how the quest to assert dominance at the neighbourhood level turned convivial neighbours into deadly enemies in Jos, the capital city of central Nigeria's Plateau State. Using a multi-layered theoretical approach, I explained the emergence of group concentration, the construction of the discriminatory categories of indigene and settler and their meanings for group relations in an urban environment. Considered, too, was how the creation of Jos North LGA ignited renewed attachment to territories, especially in segregated neighbourhoods, and how this, along with the embargo on the issuance of indigene certificates to members of the Hausa community, spiralled into violence in September 2001. At the centre of all this, is the crucial role of ethnic associations and religious organisations.

While the indigenes invoked autochthonous and ancestral attachment to patrilocal villages to back their claims of ownership over Jos, the Hausa always argued their existing dominance in particular neighbourhoods to support ownership claims. Many members of both groups fought and died. Based on this, it appears, primordial attachment is not the only factor that can account for people fighting to death over territories, as prevailing literature on the subject suggests. As far as the Jos case is concerned, the Hausa, a migrant group with no primordial attachment to the city, has shown just as much zeal as the indigenes in fighting for dominance.

I conclude that more than primordial factors, constructed categories and the meaning ascribed to place – neighbourhoods in this context – underlie groups resorting to violence. By this logic, being an 'indigene' is a mere status to be attained or a category to strive to be part of through a group's control of decision-making institutions, such as the local government council of Jos North LGA. In turn, appropriate public support is needed to be elected or appointed to these state institutions, which decide who is and who is not an 'indigene'. That support must be mobilised at the neighbourhood level. It is thus apparent how segregated neighbourhoods in Jos, with their roots in a segregationist colonial policy on city planning, became the locale for conflict framing, mobilisation, solidary-building and fighting out the perceived enemy.



These urban patches morphed into fields for engaging in combat, where dominance was equated with ownership, and ownership at the neighbourhood level was used to amplify the clamour for indigene status. This mechanism reiterates the dominance-ownership notion. Apart from motivation, segregated neighbourhoods also provide opportunity for ethnic associations, religious organisations and other configurations to mobilise support for, coordinate and engage in conflict. Spatial proximity offers cost-effective, unhindered communication channels between these associations and residents. They are exploited through various fora that emphasise ethnic cleavages and set the mood for conflict.

The primary goal of this paper was to draw attention to the complex, often contradictory assumptions of primordial and constructivist perspectives on ethnic conflict, especially around territory. There is scarce consensus on the specific function of group geography in ethnic conflict. Attempting to add value to this discourse, I zoomed in on the activities of ethnic associations and religious organisations at the neighbourhood level. Of notable consequence, the paper posited that in order to understand why groups settle for a particular identity category as the basis for mobilisation, the groups' internal dynamics must be uncovered and teased apart. In the Jos scenario, for example, religion easily becomes the mobilisation tool of choice – favoured over a number of other options – because of its overarching nature and capacity to transcend a number of salient intragroup cleavages. The indigenes have internal political differences, but once gathered under the banner of religion, their scuffles tend to lose relevance and a seemingly united front across Berom, Afizere and Anaguta is forged. Similarly, the Hausa and the Fulani do not agree on some issues, but a religious framing of the conflict automatically places them on the same side. Furthermore, this paper holds that besides evoking emotion, religion offers the opportunity to gather a wider support base than the confines of tribal boundaries would ever foresee.

The paper is far from conclusive. Instead, it aims to whet the appetite for more research, addressing the issues mostly in a broad sense. There is need for further study on how groups are constructed within spatial contexts, the meanings attached to these places and how the meanings in turn influence both intragroup and intergroup behaviour in the framework of group conflict. Specifically, there is need to understand more systematically the politics of ethnic networks in segregated and mixed neighbourhoods in divided cities like Jos. Viable inroads for exploring ethnic violence include a closer look at how neighbourhoods transform from mundane residential areas to sites of atrocious violence. In doing this, focus will be on the emergence and development of armed networks in different neighbourhood settings. In this spirit, a comparative study of intragroup dynamics represented in segregated neighbourhoods and their counterparts in mixed neighbourhoods would be invaluable.

## Notes

1. Interview with 47 year old male resident of Yan Trailer, 15 November 2011.
2. In the context of Jos, 'the Hausa' constitutes more of a social category than an ethnic group. Besides the Hausa speakers who originate from the Hausa states of northern Nigeria, the category includes other ethnic nationalities (e.g. Fulani, Nupe, Kanuri) who have adopted Hausa language and culture and have intermarried for generations.



3. Interview with 37-year old resident of Filin Ball – Nasarawa Gwong, 8 December 2010.
4. ‘Sabon gari’ is a Hausa term that means ‘new town’. The colonial administration created so-called ‘new towns’ –settlements for migrants away from indigenes – all over northern Nigeria.
5. Interview with 49-year-old resident of Rikkos neighbourhood, Jos, 8 December 2011.
6. Discussions with indigenes at several fora between 2012 and 2014.
7. Discussions with indigenes and Hausa groups from different neighbourhoods at Dadin Kowa Youth Centre, Jos, 30 May 2012.
8. Discussions in Rikkos and Tina Junction neighbourhoods, Jos, 8–9 December 2011.
9. Discussions in Dadin Kowa, Rantya and federal and state low-cost housing neighbourhoods, 30–31 May 2012.
10. Discussions with a group of former students from the University of Jos in Tina Junction, 5 August 2013.
11. Interview with 32-year-old resident of Rikkos, 8 December 2011.
12. The drug crisis in Jos and the legacy of the ethno-religious violence, *The Guardian*, 23 December 2016 (accessed at <https://guardian.ng/politics/the-drugs-crisis-in-jos-and-the-legacy-of-the-ethno-religious-violence/> on 26 October 2017).
13. The growing wings of ‘Yan-Daba’ in Jos, *Daily Trust*, 22 January 2016 (accessed at <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/feature/the-growing-wings-of-yan-daba-in-jos/130279.html> on 5 October, 2017).
14. Over 29 killed in fresh Plateau attack, *Vanguard*, 16 October 2017 (accessed at <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/10/breaking-29-killed-fresh-plateau-attack/> on 6 November 2017).

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