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**ISBN:**

## ABSTRACT

- Plateau State is currently the main site of ethnic and religious violence in northern Nigeria. The past decade has seen recurrent crises across the state, in urban and rural areas.
- The dominant discourses in the conflicts refer to political exclusion on the basis of ethnicity and religion, on the Muslim side, and fears of religious and cultural domination, among Plateau Christians.
- A key issue in the conflicts in Plateau State is the relationship between the state and different sections of the citizenry.
- The 2011 elections will be a critical moment both for Nigeria and Plateau State. In the interests of peace in Jos and its environs, there needs to be greater political discussion and co-operation between Hausa and Plateau 'indigene' political leaders.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Nigeria

## Foreword

The recurrent crisis in and around Jos has cost many lives and the root causes have yet to be addressed. Government reports have tried to explain the complicated situation, assess the number of deaths and come up with policy recommendations. It seems as if the presence of the military has somewhat calmed down the situation, but the conflict has neither been solved nor has it been channelled into peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms.

In fact, there seems to be a lack of clarity on what the conflict causes are. Some call it a religious conflict, others see land interests at play, others believe that the distinction between indigenes and settlers and their implications lie at the heart of the conflict. This lack of clarity further complicates the search for policy solutions.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a private German non-profit organization committed to the values of social democracy. While we operate worldwide, we are working since Nigeria in 1976, and today entertain offices in Abuja and Lagos. Our main working lines are: supporting democracy and civil society, strengthening the Nigerian labour movement and supporting the debate on Nigeria in international relations.

Part of our mission is to supply analysis on timely subjects to strengthen a critical public assessment of pressing policy issues. We have therefore initiated the “FES Discussino Paper” series, which tackles timely and policy-relevant subjects. The first paper dealt with “Anti-Corruption Policies in Nigeria under Obasanjo and Yar’Adua”. I am glad to now present the second paper on the Jos crisis. Dr. Adam Higazi is an internationally recognized expert on the history of conflicts in Plateau state. We believe his sober and analytical view can add value to the discussion on Jos, and support the design of policy-solutions. I particularly recommend this publication to all policy-makers, civil society activists and media representatives interested in the subject.

Thomas Mättig

Resident Representative, FES Nigeria

December 2010

## 1. Introduction

Plateau State is currently the main site of ethnic and religious violence in northern Nigeria. The past decade has seen recurrent crises across the state, in urban and rural areas. Thousands of lives have been lost in these violent conflicts, there has been extensive damage to property, and the development prospects of the state have been set back. The violence has mainly been along religious lines, between Muslims and Christians, but ethnicity also has a central role in the conflicts and there are considerable political interests at stake. Jos, the state capital and a major northern city with a population of some one million inhabitants, is the epicentre of much of the insecurity in Plateau State and has been the site of some of the worst of the violence. Episodes of mass killing and destruction have occurred in Jos in 2001, 2002, 2008 and 2010. The violence has also affected other parts of the high plateau, in rural areas outside of Jos – particularly in 2001-2 and 2010, when hundreds of people were killed in villages, in their fields, or while tending cattle. There have been massacres in the old mining settlements on the plateau, notably in 2001 and 2010. In rural areas there has also been widespread violence between Berom farmers and Fulani pastoralists. This is generally framed as a conflict over land, but contrary to media reports, many of those involved tend not to think the conflict is about a struggle for grazing land or farmland. In some areas valuable dry-season farmland has changed hands, with Hausa and Fulani farmers being forced off the land (Blench, 2004). But much of the violence appears to be politically inspired and xenophobic rather than arising out of competition for land – as the killings in the old mining settlements suggest.

The violence in Plateau State began after two decades of increasing collective violence in other parts of northern Nigeria, the worst of which occurred in Kano, Kaduna and Bauchi States. Plateau State was largely peaceful during this period, 1980-2000. In fact, the first episode of mass violence in Jos since the anti-Igbo pogroms in 1966 occurred in 2001 (see Danfulani & Fwatshak, 2002; Higazi, 2007). This discussion paper explores why the peace in Jos was broken, when the city was previously known for its relative harmony and cosmopolitan outlook. Furthermore, why has communal violence not only occurred in metropolitan Jos but in rural areas and provincial towns in Plateau State too? The urban-rural dynamics and the specificities of urban and rural areas need to be understood, but also contingent factors like the policies, dispositions, and

ideologies of particular state and local governments, religious groups, and ethnic leaders. In general, the timing and extent of the violence is related to the political shifts that occurred after the transition from military to civilian rule in Nigeria in 1999 and the impact this had on inter-group relations in Plateau State. The various interventions by the state and federal governments and the army and police have failed to prevent the violence, and there has been a lack of serious political dialogue to try and resolve it. As a consequence of a decade of intermittent violence, sophisticated weapons are now widely available in Plateau State and this does not bode well for the security of the population. One of the features of the violence in 2010 was the increased use of guns compared to previous riots in Jos. Military and mobile police checkpoints on the roads are sites at which bribes are taken from motorists and do not, it seems, significantly affect the flow of arms.

### *Geographical and Historical outline*

Plateau State is one of the thirty-six constituent states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and according to the 2006 census has a population of 3.1 million people. It is a majority Christian state within northern Nigeria. Northern Nigeria as a whole has a majority Muslim population but there are also large numbers of Christians living there, both in the far north (all of the main cities have Christian areas, mainly in 'new' neighbourhoods – established during the colonial period – called *Sabon Garis*) and in the middle-belt, which is mainly Christian but still considered part of the north. Plateau State is located in the north-central zone and forms part of the middle-belt, a geopolitical idea which demographically consists mainly of national minorities – most of them now Christian – within the old Northern Region. Plateau State takes its name from the high plateau which dominates the state's topography. The social development of plateau peoples and the historical position of the Plateau in relation to the rest of what is now northern Nigeria are somewhat distinctive, partly due to the terrain and the tremendous ethno-linguistic diversity of the area.<sup>1</sup> There are dozens of languages spoken in Plateau State, marking it

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<sup>1</sup> The languages spoken in Plateau State fall into the Benue-Congo and Chadic phyla. There are estimated to be about 40 Plateau languages in the Benue-Congo phylum. For details, see the work of Roger Blench (2009), 'Recent research on the Plateau languages of Central Nigeria', available on the internet at: <http://www.rogerblench.info/Language%20data/Niger-Congo/Benue-Congo/Plateau/General/Plateau%20State%20of%20the%20art.pdf>

out from the predominantly Hausa-speaking areas further north – although, being the regional *lingua franca* of northern Nigeria, Hausa is also widely spoken on the Plateau. There has been a reaction against this in some areas, with a cultural resurgence that is encouraging the replacement of Hausa place names and ethnonyms with indigenous ones, and to a lesser extent the use of indigenous languages rather than Hausa. The sense of difference on the Plateau is also clear in social attitudes, politics, and patterns of life, and has affected trajectories of contemporary conflict in Plateau State, with mobilisation around ethnicity and ideas of indigeneity being of major importance.

The particularities of the Plateau and the minority status of its inhabitants after their incorporation into the system of British colonial rule as part of the North from the early twentieth century has fed into one aspect of Plateau politics: the assertion of autonomy from the Muslim north. Middle Belt writers have described the Hausa/Fulani presence in, and perceived domination of, the lower north as a form of ‘internal colonialism’ (Logams, 2004). But although this is a prominent political theme in Plateau State, it is not the only one. Historically, there were regional connections between the Plateau and surrounding peoples of the savanna plains and there were also non-conflictual encounters with Muslims, such as in trade. In the regional system of colonial rule and in the First Republic (1960-66), there was both divergence and convergence in the social practices and political linkages between what was then Plateau Province and the rest of the North. It is only recently that religious violence has started in Jos.

The high plateau constitutes only part of Plateau State: a slightly larger portion of the state’s territory is lowlands plains, beneath the plateau escarpment. Muslims established more settlements and had a more extensive presence in the lowlands than on the high plateau – at least going back to the nineteenth century in Wase, and perhaps earlier in Kanam, the two emirates within Plateau State. The ethnic composition and social relations of Plateau State, in its totality, were further diversified by migration from throughout Nigeria from the early colonial period, stimulated by industrial-scale tin and columbite mining on the plateau. This led to the establishment of Jos and many smaller mining settlements, from the early twentieth century, inhabited mainly by people from other parts of Northern Nigeria and from Southern Nigeria. For some of the indigenous communities of the Plateau, such as sections of the Berom and Anaguta, mining and colonialism led to dispossession from large areas of their customary land. Rapid social

and economic transformation also ensued, and the indigenous inhabitants of the Plateau were marginalised in the colonial economy and social order. In the lowlands, agricultural production was commercialised to supply the minesfields. In some areas, non-Muslims were for the first time placed under the authority of Muslims as part of the 'indirect rule' system (Ballard, 1972; Rotimi, 2010), sowing some of the seeds of later conflicts.

Jos grew as a town of migrants, who arrived there from other parts of Nigeria. From its genesis, Jos has had a substantial southern Christian population – the Yoruba and Igbo comprise the majority of Christians in Jos. In rural areas and in the smaller towns of the Jos Plateau, 'indigenous' Christians form the majority, but in Jos itself the population of Plateau peoples is relatively small. Politically, Jos has tended more towards progressive parties<sup>2</sup>, but ideology has become less important in contemporary politics. With the break-up of the regions into states in 1967 power has steadily shifted towards Christians, the majority in Plateau. Benue-Plateau State was created in 1967, Plateau State was formed after the division of Benue and Plateau into separate states in 1976, and the state boundary was again altered in 1996 when Nassarawa State was carved out of Plateau – which may have had some deleterious effects on Plateau as many educated Muslims moved to work in the new Nassarawa State government and civil service. The salience of communal identities is now more prominent and appears to have increased as a result of the violence over the past decade, which has generated greater spatial polarisation of people in Jos along religious lines and accentuated social and political divisions between Muslims and Christians. Consequently, more people are directly affected by and conscious of social divisions now and articulate their religious and ethnic allegiances more categorically than they did previously.

## **2. Religious and ethnic politics**

For both Islamic and Christian organisations in northern Nigeria, Jos is a centre point for proselytisation and it has proved to be a fertile ground for the establishment and development of new religious movements and ideas. This is partly because Jos is a relatively new city – only about one hundred years old – without the long established

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<sup>2</sup> in the First Republic, most of the Hausa community supported Aminu Kano's NEPU (Northern Elements' Progressive Union) and Azikiwe's NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons) respectively – considered to be the radical parties of the North and East during the 1950s and First Republic.

traditions and religious orthodoxies in old northern cities like Kano and Zaria (Last, 2007). This makes it attractive for Muslim reformers, who have been able to establish themselves more easily in Jos than elsewhere. The largest Islamic reform movement in Nigeria (with a presence in contiguous countries in West Africa too) is Izala: *Jama'atu Izzalat al-Bid'a wa Iqamat al-Sunna* ('the Association for Suppressing Innovations and Restoring the Sunna'). Izala was started in Jos in 1978 and is considered Salafist, promoting what it asserts is a more orthodox, scriptural Islam, emphasising the *Sunna* and denouncing the supposedly heterodox practices of the Sufis (Loimeier, 1997; Kane, 2003).

Jos has also been conducive for Christian missions, from the European missionaries who established their presence with the founding of the town, to Nigerian and foreign evangelists in the present. The position of Jos as a bastion for Christianity in the north is enhanced by its location on the cusp of the core north while being indisputably part of the middle-belt. Initially Jos was the base for the evangelisation of Plateau peoples but it then became the most important missionary centre for all of northern Nigeria, a base from which evangelisation was organised into areas beyond the Plateau, among the heterogeneous non-Muslim populations of central Nigeria who until the 1930s were unconverted to either of the world religions and difficult to access, physically and socially. Also with its large southern population, Jos became more orientated towards Christianity, although Muslims have always had a strong presence in the city. Religious competition, fundamentalism, and assertiveness have increased in Nigeria and violence occurred elsewhere in the north through the 1980s and 1990s, but large scale violence in Jos still did not seem inevitable. The culture of the city was more cosmopolitan, with tolerance and even friendly relations between the two religious groups. This situation has now been undermined.

As Kane (2003) argues, there has been a fragmentation of religious authority in Nigeria. The multiplicity of movements among both Muslims and Christians have had to formulate their own responses to insecurity and conflict, so processes of mobilisation can be relatively decentralised. Religious reform movements began around the time of an upsurge in communal politics more generally, in the late 1970s. Born-again Christians have at times been strident in their rhetoric against Muslims, and even critical of the principles of democracy (Marshall, 1995, 2009). The same is true of some of the Islamic

movements in attitudes towards Christians and the secular state, although the disputes among Muslims themselves have also been intense (Loimeier, 1997; Falola, 1998; Kane, 2003). The intensification of ethnic and religious politics coincided with growing socio-economic crisis in Nigeria, prevalent through the 1980s with falling oil revenues and the impact of a disastrous Structural Adjustment Programme, implemented by Babangida's military regime from 1986. As communal politics became more acute, social and political exclusion on the basis of ethnicity and religion increased. This does not explain why violence occurred on such a large scale, but discrimination and bias in government, and the narrow ethnic and religious politics among both Christians and Muslims increased tension and polarisation along communal lines. In addition, social problems at different levels of society – including high levels of group inequality and youth unemployment – have increased the propensity for violence.

The dominant discourses in the conflicts refer to political exclusion on the basis of ethnicity and religion, on the Muslim side, and fears of religious and cultural domination, among Plateau Christians. There are variations across Plateau State in the way these themes are articulated, but the issues are similar. There is much political propaganda, inciting religious or cultural fears – such as of a Muslim conspiracy to Islamise Nigeria – that are not necessarily grounded in reality. In most cases *the state* is a central reference point. A key element of the dispute is over which groups are represented in government and have access to the state, with much controversy over how state and local governments exercise power. For these reasons the conflicts need to be placed in the context of the local political economy. Sometimes the behaviour of actors within the political and economic spheres is influenced by religious beliefs and ethnic patronage and clientelism, but people also act according to political and economic expediency. Government decision-making and patronage tends to benefit communities with representatives in positions of political power more than it does communities who are excluded. In fact, government decisions may be made to the detriment of those who do not have political power, particularly where politics is underpinned by ethnic ideologies – where politics is ethnically exclusive rather than inclusive.

Among Nigerian elites there is a big financial incentive for gaining political positions and there are instrumental reasons for ethnic mobilisation, which is even used

to create new political constituencies.<sup>3</sup> Nigeria is an oil-based, rentier state. Money is transferred monthly to each of the 36 states and 774 local governments in the federation. This transfer, the federal revenue allocation, goes from the central government into a separate account for each state and LGA.<sup>4</sup> A formula is used to calculate the size of the transfer to each unit in the federation, based on population size and the derivation principle (oil-producing states receive a higher share than non-oil producing states). Oil revenues comprise more than 90 per cent of Nigeria's internal income and its diversion by political elites allows that class to sustain itself in power.

This lucrative arrangement generates demand for new administrative units in Nigeria, although other factors, such as minority concerns, are also important (Suberu, 2001). The creation of new states and local government areas is often demanded on an ethnic basis, with groups making territorial claims by arguing they have a historical attachment to a particular area. This tendency has greatly exacerbated indigeneity politics, as groups compete for the control of states, local governments, and even wards, on account of the financial benefits and status this will bring to them. Statism is exacerbated by the dependence on petroleum export revenues, which have undermined and led to the neglect of other economic sectors – to quote Rotimi Suberu (1998: 277), the 'economic centrality of the Nigerian state derives significantly from the underdevelopment of the country's economy'.

### **3. Citizenship and Indigeneity**

Plateau State is among the most ethnically and linguistically diverse parts of Nigeria, with more than 30 ethno-linguistic groups in the state recognised by the state government as 'indigenous'. In fact, these diverse groups have their own histories of migration and settlement, often with different traditions of origin among the various clans of what are now regarded as single corporate groups. There is also a long history of migration of people from across Nigeria to Plateau. Defining which groups are 'indigenous' and which

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<sup>3</sup> For a report on the inflated salary scales of Nigerian politicians and legislators, see 'Legislators: Between jumbo pay and the impoverished populace', *Punch* newspaper, 10 August 2010. [www.punchng.com/Articl.aspx?theartic=Art20100810226048](http://www.punchng.com/Articl.aspx?theartic=Art20100810226048).

<sup>4</sup> But as Suberu (1998: 278) notes, 'Although this [Federal] Account is expected to serve all three tiers of government, it is often unilaterally, arbitrarily and illegally operated, appropriated and manipulated by the central authorities.' In addition, state governments often divert money from the Local Government accounts.

are 'settlers' is one of the main areas of dispute. Ethnicity is very salient as a political identity in Plateau State and the ideology of indigeneity is part of this ethnic politics. Ethnicity is prominent as a form of collective mobilisation: communal politics tends to override class politics in Plateau State, partly because Plateau peoples are minorities in the regional and national contexts and have mobilised around ethnicity in their quest for greater autonomy from the majority groups. This was the situation in the regional system in the 1950s and 1960s, and to some extent under the military, but in the state context and in the present political dispensation Plateau 'indigenes' form a majority in Plateau State and they control political power there. There are, however, also political divisions among the 'indigene' groups, and at times these have led to violent conflicts.

The management of this ethnic, linguistic and religious pluralism in the political sphere is one of the main challenges in Plateau. Currently, the political culture is oriented towards ethnic populism and patron-client relationships rather than the public good. This has been very divisive, polarising groups along ethnic and religious lines instead of accommodating people in an inclusive system of government. Due to the violence since 2001, there has been an increase in xenophobia and ethnic and religious chauvinism on all sides. To a large extent, political legitimacy is defined, and exclusion practised, in terms of indigeneity (autochthony). Indigeneity refers to 'place of origin' – defined by ancestry rather than by birth (Bach, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 2006).<sup>5</sup> The issue of indigeneity is hardly new, but it has been accentuated as the number of states has increased. In the regional system (up to 1967, when states were created) indigeneity was an issue in the North due to the dominance of southerners in the civil service and other skilled roles, owing to the enormous gap between North and South in levels of Western education. In 1954, an indigenisation decree was implemented in the Northern Region, the purpose of which was to replace the large southern contingent in the Northern civil service with Northerners.

In the present state system, a person's constitutional rights as a Nigerian citizen should be upheld in all parts of the country, but there are some benefits which are disbursed or accrue within states, and it is these that favour so-called indigenes and which are often denied to those classified as settlers. In Nigeria, people are given

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<sup>5</sup> For comparative perspectives of autochthony in other countries, see the special issue of *African Studies Review*, 49 (2), 2006. On citizenship struggles in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa see Manby (2009).

indigene status of particular states – recognised through possession of an indigene certificate, issued by local authorities. This gives greater access to state services and resources – such as school or university scholarships, or jobs in the state civil service or parastatal companies – compared to non-indigenes. Perhaps more important than the formal benefits that accrue from ‘indigene’ status is the discrimination that whole communities face if they are regarded as being ‘non-indigenes’ or ‘settlers’. There are allegations that state and local governments in Plateau State allocate resources to infrastructure or other development projects to areas where ‘indigenes’ are concentrated but neglect ‘settler’ neighbourhoods or villages. Those excluded from politics as a consequence also tend to be excluded from the state’s patron-client networks.

Indigene certificates are issued by local governments and need to be signed by ward and district heads, but there is no clear agreement upon a set of criteria for deciding whether or not someone is an ‘indigene’. The system is therefore ambiguous, subject to abuse and to the whims of those in positions of authority. Problems have arisen with this system across Nigeria, because many of those regarded as settlers in their state of residence live there permanently; some were even born there and their families have been there for generations, yet they do not have indigenous status. The latter situation, although often mentioned, may not be the norm, but it is often the case. The problem is that even with ‘indigene certificates’ discrimination still occurs. Furthermore, people not recognised as indigenes in their state of residence can have difficulty attaining the benefits of indigeneity in any state at all – even if they have an indigene certificate of another state they may not receive anything because they are not living there. The concept of indigeneity generates exclusion at all levels, even among Plateau indigenes at the local government and district levels *within* states. The potency of indigeneity in Plateau is reinforced by its frequent conflation with religion. In Plateau politics and popular discourse, Hausa and Fulani Muslims tend to be defined as ‘settlers’, whereas Plateau peoples, most of whom are Christian, define themselves as ‘indigenous’ to the state, although there are some disputes over which group belongs to which local government or area of land. Moreover, some ‘indigenes’ are Muslim, and many ‘settlers’ are Christian – including a majority of the Christians in Jos, who are originally from southern Nigeria. As the violence runs along religious lines, it is not simply between indigenes and settlers – as some media and human rights organisations have implied.

Nonetheless, if discrimination against 'non-indigenes' or 'settlers' was curtailed it would help improve community relations.

As this suggests, a key issue in the conflicts in Plateau State is the relationship between the state and different sections of the citizenry. This also relates to elections and to the general political and institutional management of diversity (Mustapha, 2002). In practice, the category of 'settler' is not only defined by the official document of the indigene certificate. People can have an indigene certificate – as many Muslims do, even in Jos North – and so *de jure* they are indigenes, but *de facto* they may still be regarded as settlers in the popular consciousness and by the state. As such, those perceived to be settlers can face opposition and discrimination in aspects of life that require dealing with state officials or bureaucracies: at the political level, this has an impact on appointments in the civil service and government, and on who contests for elections within the ruling PDP in Plateau State (which is controlled by 'indigenes'). There are also many people in Plateau – as elsewhere – who claim they are indigenes but are not recognised as such by the local government where they reside and are refused indigene certificates. In some instances, these individuals have had their indigene status retracted, as happened to some of the Muslims in Jos and Yelwa at different points in the 1990s.

These issues are complicated by differing conceptions of citizenship between groups, and conflicting interests with regard to citizenship rights. This is an important aspect of the conflicts in Plateau State, but while indigeneity politics is widespread in Nigeria, it does not give rise to conflict everywhere. Disputes around indigeneity and citizenship in Plateau State are acute because they also express deeper divisions and contradictions within the political system and in society. In Plateau, relations between minorities and majorities in the wider northern context are important, as is religious competition, and in some places, land alienation and land tenure. These conflicts gain expression and are exacerbated through ideas of indigeneity, but they have built up over decades and draw on the repertoires of longer term social encounters and inequalities between religious, linguistic, and ethnic groups. While disputes have generally been handled peacefully, if not always resolved, the onset of mass violence since 2001 has coincided with a changed political environment. There has been increasing ethnic and religious exclusion and discrimination in politics, strident religious assertiveness in both the political and public spheres, and inadequate conflict mediation by government and religious bodies.

This follows a situation where, during the most recent period of military rule (1983-1999), some Christians in Plateau State perceive there was favouritism towards Muslims. Some sole administrators were Muslim while others were Christian, but they were judged in terms of performance, not only in religious terms. In any case, the opening up of politics since 1999 shifted political power in the state firmly towards 'indigene' Christians, who are in the majority, while 'non-indigene' Muslims – particularly in Jos – are now politically marginalised from the state government. The idea that a person's competence and integrity is what is really important, to serve in politics for the public good regardless of ethnic or religious orientation, is absent.

#### **4. Co-operation and conflict in Plateau State: an historical outline**

##### **Communal violence in Plateau State in regional perspective**

For the most part, inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in northern Nigeria are peaceable: although there have been a large number of incidents of communal violence across the region, these tend to be episodic. The proliferation of media and academic attention given to Muslim-Christian violence in northern Nigeria over the past decade is often perfunctory and tends towards hyperbole – summed up by Murray Last (2007) as 'an economy of political panic'. Mass violence is concentrated in certain states and urban riots in particular are relatively short-lived, lasting a few days if it is serious, after which people are compelled to continue with work and find sustenance – if not as before, then as close to normalcy as possible (curfews permitting). Much of the literature on violence in northern Nigeria does indeed neglect the extent of "co-operation" between Muslims and Christians – a wider shortcoming of research on ethnic violence, which tends to highlight conflict rather than the much more common situation of inter-ethnic peace (Fearon and Laitin, 1996).

Nonetheless, there is no denying the seriousness of violence in northern Nigeria. There have been a large number of incidents of communal violence across the north, including some appalling episodes in which hundreds or even thousands of people have been killed. These have occurred in the "hotspots" of the middle-belt Last (2007) refers to – notably Kaduna and Plateau States, where there was intense rioting in the cities, but also violence in some of the old Hausa trading settlements, in places like Zangon Kataf

and Yelwa, which are situated in mainly non-Muslim areas. But there has also been much communal violence outside of the middle belt, in most northern cities since the 1980s, including Kano, Zaria, Katsina, Maiduguri, Potiskum, Bauchi, and Gombe (Falola, 1998; Boer, 2004a, 2004b) – and, ethnic conflicts in other parts of the country (Yakubu et al, 2005a, 2005b). The cumulative loss of life in these episodes is in the thousands, with hundreds of churches burned and billions of naira of properties destroyed. There have continued to be cases of violence against Christian minorities in the north, including some major incidents, as in Kano in 2004, Maiduguri in 2006 and Bauchi in 2009. There have also been violent conflicts between Muslim sects or movements. In most areas of the middle-belt, however, there are more Christians than Muslims and the dynamics of the conflicts are different from those in the core Muslim north.

Religious violence in its contemporary expression became a problem in the north from the 1980s, continuing through the 1990s and after 2000. In the 1980s and 1990s, Plateau State was among the most peaceable parts of the north, while neighbouring states experienced periods of mayhem – Kaduna State in 1987 and 1992; Bauchi State in 1991, and several episodes of violence in Kano in these decades. Consequently, there was some movement of people, especially of Christians, from other northern states to live in Plateau. Since 2001 this situation has reversed; there has been intermittent violence for a decade in Plateau State (2001-2010) and in Jos no resolution is in sight. People have moved out in large numbers – the scale of out-migration from the state has not been precisely estimated, but there are thousands of (mainly Fulani) people in resettlement communities in neighbouring Bauchi State alone. They are probably a fraction of the total number who have left or been displaced from Plateau State for other parts of Nigeria.

Across the north as a whole, with the important exception of Plateau, the level of Muslim-Christian violence since the thousands killed in Kaduna in 2000 and 2002, appears to be less than it was in the 1980s and 1990s. It is clearly a delicate situation, but large-scale inter-religious violence in Kaduna, Kano and Bauchi – the worst affected areas in the 1990s – has been dampened. As of October 2010, there has been no mass violence in Kaduna State since the ‘Miss World’ riots of 2002 and none in Kano since 2004. The major incidents of violence in the far north since 2009 have involved clashes between the security forces and the Islamist sect Boko Haram. Christians have been

adversely affected in some of this violence – some of the churches were reported to have been burned in Maiduguri in 2009 – but the Nigerian secular state, not specifically Christians, appears to be the main target of followers of Boko Haram. The sect has been strongly criticised by reformist Islamic groups. Meanwhile, the police and army response to Boko Haram, particularly the extra-judicial killings of ‘suspects’, has been condemned by international human rights agencies. While religious militancy also has a role in the Plateau conflicts, the politics and dynamics of the violence in Plateau are different to the Boko Haram case. While there have been incidents of violence across the north and these various episodes have some features in common, there are also locally specific causes to any particular incident. The next section outlines key issues in the conflicts in Plateau State since 2001, based on my own research there and on existing records and reports.

### **An overview of the Plateau State conflicts, 2001-2010**

There have been two main zones of conflict in Plateau State over the past decade (2001-2010): on the Jos Plateau proper – the highlands – and beneath the plateau escarpment on the lowland plains. There are commonalities but also some important differences between the dynamics of conflict in these two areas of the state. Some violent incidents have occurred in central parts of the Jos Plateau, such as in Pankshin and Amper in January 2010, where mosques were burned, but there has been less violence there than in northern and southern parts of the state. Even Mangu, a town and LGA with a large Muslim population, has not been as seriously affected by communal violence as the areas around Jos and further south in the lowlands – although there were some clashes in January 2010. The religious polarisation in politics that obtains in Jos does not apply to the same degree in the central areas of the plateau, mainly because Muslims form a smaller minority so are not as politically assertive, but also because ethnicity cuts across religious divisions more than it does in Jos, Wase and Yelwa.

There has been a steady shift in political power from northern Hausa Muslims to local minority Christians across central Nigeria (Blench, 2010). In the Northern Region, the colonial system of indirect rule favoured the Muslim Hausa/Fulani *sarauta* (title-holding) class over Muslim *talakawa* (commoners) and minority non-Muslim groups, most

of whom are now Christian. The break-up of the then four regions in Nigeria into states and local government areas in 1967, and the multiplication of these political units since then, has accentuated ethnic and sub-ethnic political demands. The changed political configuration of the federation has changed minority-majority relations and generated inter-communal conflicts (Mustapha, 2000). In Plateau State, an 'indigenous' Christian elite has consolidated its power since 1999 at the expense of northern Muslims, except in a few wards, as in parts of Jos North, and LGAs like Kanam and Wase – which also have the two emirates in Plateau State, where Muslims are sufficient in number to have retained political power in the Local Government Councils.

The mass violence in Plateau State over the past decade began on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2001, just over two years after the transition from military to civilian rule in 1999. The idea that the Plateau was previously free of conflict – the self-styled 'Home of Peace and Tourism' – is somewhat misleading, as there were very high levels of violence against the Igbo and other Easterners in Jos, Bukuru and the minesfields in 1966 in which thousands were massacred by Hausa and Berom mobs. The political dynamics were different but more people were killed on the plateau in 1966 than in 2001. These killings tend to be ignored in the literature, which treats the mass violence in Jos in 2001 as unprecedented. There have also been several smaller clashes, particularly in rural areas. But it is true that large-scale religious violence which affected other parts of the north in the 1980s and 1990s, including severe conflicts in other middle belt states, did not occur in Plateau. The 7-12 September 2001 Muslim-Christian violence in Jos, in which an estimated 1,000 people were killed, was therefore a terrible shock. The main precursor to the 2001 mass violence in Jos – in that the political dynamics of the conflict were similar, not the scale of killing or destruction – was in April 1994. In both cases, a Muslim was appointed to a political position in Jos triggering protests by Plateau 'indigenes' in Jos, then counter-protests by Hausa Muslims which led to violence.

The Jos riots in 2001 – as in 2010 – spread to rural areas outside the city, where there were clashes between Berom (mainly Christian) farmers and Fulani (mainly Muslim) pastoralists and attacks on Muslims in some of the old mining settlements. The rural violence on the Jos Plateau continued intermittently until the end of 2002, when there were a series of what were probably reprisal attacks by the Fulani, many of whom had been displaced from Plateau into Bauchi State, on villages inhabited by Berom and

Irigwe people – predominantly farming communities living on the high plateau outside of Jos. Communal violence also occurred across the lowlands, in southern and central areas of Plateau State – this was mainly rural-based and as many as a hundred villages were affected, but some towns and their immediate hinterlands also experienced high levels of violence, Wase and Yelwa being major flashpoints. There were repeated episodes of violence between Muslims and Christians in Yelwa, in 2002 and 2004. After an attack in which several hundred Muslims were massacred – following earlier attacks on Christians – pressure on the federal government from northern leaders led the then President Obasanjo to visit Yelwa and declare a state of emergency in Plateau State. A retired Major-General, Chris Alli, was put in charge of the state for six months (18 May to 18 November 2004) and a peace conference was inaugurated. The state governor at the time, Joshua Dariye, and his state legislature, were suspended from office, but returned to power after the state of emergency ended. Jonah Jang, Berom from Du village by ethnicity, and a retired Air Commodore and former military governor of Benue (1985-86) and Gongola (1986-87) States, has been Governor of Plateau State since 2007. He wants to contest the 2011 elections for a second term. His administration is widely accused of having adopted a Berom ethnic agenda, to the detriment of other groups, and by both Hausa and Fulani, especially, of having a strong anti-Muslim bias (see Ostien, 2009, for further details). This is the context in which the renewed violence in 2008 and 2010 has occurred.

The past decade of violence in Plateau State, from 2001-2010, took place under civilian governments, but this does not mean military administrations were better at controlling religious or ethnic tensions in Nigeria. Military authoritarianism inflamed communal tensions in some areas, as the political demands of excluded groups were not met, and in the absence of open politics religious activism became more pronounced. The violence in northern cities in the 1980s and 1990s occurred mainly under military regimes, leaving thousands of people dead. The point is that in Plateau State the opening up of politics under civilian rule has been accompanied by intense ethnic competition, at all levels – state, local government and ward – and Plateau elites have consolidated their power and control of the state, excluding other groups on the basis of religion and ethnicity. Politics under post-1998 civilian administrations have provided opportunities for ‘indigenous’ elites in Plateau to gain power, but not for ‘settlers’.

Policies of exclusion and discrimination by the state government, combined with restive and politically assertive Muslim groups, are what have generated violence since 2001.

The total number of people killed in Plateau State in the decade 2001-2010 certainly runs into the thousands. There have been some very wild claims, totally unsubstantiated, stating that tens of thousands of people were killed in the first period of violence from 2001-2004. A report by a committee set up by the Plateau State government reported there had been 53,787 violent deaths in Plateau from 7 September 2001 to 18 May 2004, when a six month state of emergency was imposed by the federal government and the state governor and legislature suspended from office. This figure is certainly an exaggeration: it does not draw on credible or verifiable data. On 8 October 2004, the day after the report was published, IRIN, a media project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, wrote:

The Committee of Rehabilitation and Reconciliation of Internally Displaced People said in a report published on Thursday that almost 19,000 men and more than 17,000 women and 17,000 children had been killed during 32 months of retaliatory violence between Christians and Muslims — 53,787 deaths in all. (...) The committee reported that 280,000 people had been forced to flee their homes as a result of the violence in Plateau State, although the majority had now been resettled. But at least 25,000 houses had been razed to the ground and some 1,300 herds of cattle had been slaughtered during the battles.<sup>6</sup>

IRIN and several other media organisations went on to quote these figures uncritically in their subsequent reporting of the conflicts in Plateau State.<sup>7</sup> The 54,000 figure has also been repeated in academic texts (Harnischfeger, 2008: 17; Paden, 2005: 195). Human Rights Watch (2005) were more sceptical:

Human Rights Watch asked the director for press affairs of the Plateau state government how they had arrived at these figures, which are significantly higher than those advanced by any other organization monitoring the conflict in Plateau State. He said that these were the findings of a verification committee, set up as part of the peace program, which had visited communities in all the local government areas affected by the violence. Human Rights Watch believes this figure to be too high. Even allowing for a number of unreported incidents, it is more than ten times higher than a rough total of all the highest estimates received to date on the number of deaths resulting from the violence in the state. It is not clear

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<sup>6</sup> International Relief and Information Network (IRIN), 'NIGERIA: Plateau State violence claimed 53,000 lives – report.' 8 October 2004. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=51641>

<sup>7</sup> I was told by a lawyer at the International Criminal Court in The Hague that the claim that 54,000 people had been killed in Plateau State also caught the attention of the ICC. It is unclear if they carried out any further investigations.

what the state government hoped to achieve by citing such an inflated figure. The statement did not include any information on the number of arrests or prosecutions of the perpetrators of these killings.<sup>8</sup>

Without detailed and systematic sampling across the state it is difficult and perhaps impossible to precisely estimate the number of people killed in the violence. The figures I use are drawn from interviews with religious leaders and district or ward heads in affected areas – neighbourhoods, towns, and villages – and from memoranda submitted to government by representatives of ethnic or religious communities. I would also estimate the figure for the number of people killed in Plateau State between September 2001 and May 2004 at about 5,000, but no one can be sure because of the dearth of records. The violence in 2008 and 2010 may have claimed a further 2,000 lives in and around Jos (see below).

Regarding justice, the fact is that in most of the conflicts mentioned above, few of those who planned or perpetrated the violence were arrested and they were certainly not prosecuted. Where arrests have been made – and these are rarely of individuals in positions of authority – the evidence required by the courts for a prosecution to be made is usually lacking. Building up a case against suspects may be difficult in situations of mass mobilisation and violence, where there are so many people involved, but there is little doubt that innocent people are often arrested. There are cases where the police arrested people arbitrarily during or shortly after riots, picking them up off the streets and detaining them for months without trial. Arrests were sometimes made simply on the basis of religious or ethnic affiliation, or of individuals who happened to be in the vicinity of a town, village or neighbourhood where trouble had occurred, whether or not they were involved. When they came to trial, many of the cases collapsed for lack of evidence. Worse, there are allegations of instances where some of those rounded up by the security forces in this way were shot dead by the roadside.<sup>9</sup>

It is often claimed by Christians that the violence is part of an Islamic *jihad* against non-Muslims – continuing on from that of the nineteenth century, when central Nigerian peoples were subjected to slave raiding by surrounding Muslim emirates, but also resisted attacks from Bauchi and Zaria emirates (Morrison, 1982; Nengel, 1999).

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<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Revenge in the Name of Religion: the Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano States.” May 2005, Vol. 17, No. 8 (A): pp 53-54.

<sup>9</sup> I was shown graphic video footage, said to be from the 2010 violence, showing soldiers and/or MOPOL killing ‘suspects’, by shooting them through the head as they lay face down on the tarmac – incidents alleged to have occurred by the roadside outside of Bukuru.

The way historical memories of slave-raiding and past injustices reverberate and are represented in the present is important (Last, 2007; Blench, 2010), but accusations that there is currently an organised *jihad* against Christians in central Nigeria are unfounded in my view. Such thinking is widespread, however, and it generates fear among populations who in the wider regional and national context, if not necessarily in Plateau State, are minorities. There is some religious militancy on both sides and allegations that some churches and mosques are increasingly stockpiling guns. Religious beliefs and hostile attitudes towards the religious 'other', whether Christian or Muslim, have a role in the conflicts but this in itself does not adequately explain the high level of current violence. It does not account for why Plateau State was relatively free of violence in the 1980s and 1990s, when violence was increasing elsewhere in northern Nigeria. This was despite the strong reformist – even 'fundamentalist' – presence among sections of both the Muslim and Christian populations in Plateau State during these decades.

Some religious leaders, such as the Catholic Archbishop Kaigama, have played a positive role in inter-religious dialogue, trying to promote peace. Religious interface committees were formed after the 2001 Jos violence, but the conflicts are underpinned by political and socio-economic and not just religious factors. In practice, religion and politics are not mutually exclusive spheres of society in Nigeria (Usman, 1987; Kukah, 1993; Enwerem, 1995; Loimeier, 1997; Kane, 2003), and it is the dramatic deterioration in *political relations* between Muslims and Christians in Plateau State, at all levels of government, that is the hallmark of the increased tension. Nonetheless, the churches do have political influence in Plateau State, and religious leaders can influence the attitudes of their congregations in mosques and churches, so they have an important role in conflict prevention and resolution.

## **5. Collective Violence on the Jos Plateau in 2008 and 2010**

Local government elections were held across Plateau State in November 2008. The conduct of the election in Jos North and the dispute over the outcome sparked renewed mass violence in Jos. Hundreds of people were killed – probably more than 700 – in two days of communal rioting and mob violence in Jos North. This tragic turn of events again raised suspicions, fears and tensions in the state, especially in and around Jos. The

popular grievances and anger on both sides stemming from the 2008 violence again went unaddressed, and it was just over a year later, in January 2010, that Jos plunged into its next crisis, this time more widespread and longer lasting as it spilled out of the city into rural areas. It is thought that upwards of a thousand people have been killed in 2010, with the highest casualties in the old mining settlements outside of Jos. At least 200 Muslim residents were massacred at Kuru Jenta in January, and in March at least 300 Berom Christians were murdered in an attack on Dogo Nahauwa. The Fulani also suffered heavy casualties in rural areas on the Jos Plateau, notably in Barakin Ladi and Jos South LGAs, but also in Riyom LGA. One of the leaders of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association in Plateau State – a predominantly Fulani ethnic association – has compiled the names of 215 Fulani people he says were killed in 2010. I was not able to verify this figure, but there have certainly been major losses. Many of the killings in Plateau were carried out in very cruel ways and in some instances the bodies of victims were mutilated. The mass killings resemble the forms of extreme violence in ethnic riots analysed comparatively across regions by Horowitz (2000). In mid-2010, violence was still occurring on the Plateau – the scale was less, but there was an attack on an Anaguta village, Mazah, and although reduced, ‘silent killings’ – of individuals, in Jos and surrounding areas, rather than mass, group-based violence – were still being reported.

### **The post-election violence in Jos North, 28-29 November 2008 and Commissions of Inquiry**

The political lead-up to the 2008 crisis in Jos North and the conduct of the election is analysed in detail by Philip Ostien (2009). Rioting broke out during the collation stage and went on through the Friday and Saturday, 28-29 November 2008, before it was quelled by the army and mobile police. Killings were committed by both sides; houses and other properties were destroyed in the affected areas and churches and mosques were burned down. Human Rights Watch documented killings by the mobile police and military, who entered in force on the Saturday, stating that there were at least 130 extra-judicial killings, some of them allegedly carried out inside people’s houses.<sup>10</sup> The violence was concentrated in certain areas of Jos North, not the whole city, and unlike in

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<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: Investigate Killings by Security Forces, 20 July 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/07/20/nigeria-investigate-killings-security-forces>

2001 and 2010, it did not extend beyond Jos North into the rural areas. But even though the violence was not as widespread as in 2001, there was still a lot of killing in 2008 and the damage to property may even have been worse than in 2001.

Markets were targeted: the Katako timber market, the largest in Jos and run principally by Igbo traders, was burned down, as was the mainly Hausa controlled grains and yam market (Mang, 2008; newspaper coverage). Hausa car traders along Zaria Road were also badly hit, with the burning of hundreds of vehicles. In total, hundreds of millions of naira of destruction was caused in the two days of riots, in addition to the hundreds of people killed and the physical injuries and psychological harm caused to many more people. There were also allegations, by both sides, of 'fake soldiers' – men in army uniforms with weapons, but directly assisting one side or the other and entering houses to kill people. Consequently, after the violence, the soldiers deployed to Jos were given desert camouflage trousers combined with jungle camouflage jackets and red neck-tags to distinguish them from the fake soldiers who had been dressing in the usual jungle camouflage. Christians also claim the Muslims hired mercenaries, from Niger, Chad, and the Muslim north. The arrest of 16 apparently Nigérien citizens in Jos was met with diplomatic protests from the Nigérien government and reported in the French media.<sup>11</sup> Another incident involved the apprehension of 26 men in a minibus in January 2009, thought to be mercenaries, reportedly in possession of khaki uniforms and weapons and the inscription on their bus of 'Okene Legislative Council'. This fuelled rumours in Jos, while the Okene LG chairman in Kogi State explained they were vigilantes hired from Bauchi to reduce armed robbery on the main road out of Lokoja.<sup>12</sup>

After the riots, there was a public split between the state and federal governments. In his response to the violence, President Yar'Adua showed greater sympathy towards the Muslim population of Jos and he discarded protocol bypassing Government House, and refusing to meet the Plateau State Governor, Jonah Jang. The federal government also banned the Jasawa from taking corpses 'home' to Kano to bury, as this was seen as a deliberate provocation to spreading violence.<sup>13</sup> Muslims in Jos called for a state of emergency to be reimposed on Plateau State – as they did again in 2010 – but instead

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<sup>11</sup> AFP, 'Nigeria: 16 "mercenaires" du Niger arrêtés à Jos, démenti nigérien', 28 November 2008; RFI, 'Des Nigériens accusés d'avoir participé aux tueries de Jos', 3 December 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Jos 'Mercenaries': Kogi Police Support Okene LG Chairman', *Daily Trust*, 12 January 2009.

<sup>13</sup> I thank Olly Owen for pointing this out.

the federal government sent the then Army Chief of Staff, General Dambazau, to assess the situation in Jos. The General Officer Commanding the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armoured Division, based at Rukuba Barracks just outside of Jos, Major General Saleh Maina, was then ordered to take full security control of Plateau State, using a joint task-force comprising all the federal security agencies.

As in previous crises in the state, the government also responded by setting up a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the causes of the violence and document what occurred. These judicial commissions have been headed by prominent Nigerian judges and tasked with investigating the causes of the violence, documenting what occurred, and recommending possible courses of action for the government. But due to the bad blood between them, the federal and state governments each set up their own inquiries after the 2008 crisis. Both took out lawsuits against each other, and as was predicted (Ostien, 2009), neither advanced the cause of conflict resolution because both were perceived as partial – the federal government towards Muslims and the state government towards Christians. The Abisoye Presidential Panel of Inquiry, the federal government’s commission, seems to have mainly heard testimony from Muslims and has not submitted a report. The Ajibola Commission was constituted by the Plateau State government and was largely boycotted by Muslims in Jos. The Ajibola Commission submitted its report on 27 October 2009, but it is a one-sided document, almost exclusively referring to the alleged Muslim acts of violence during the riots, and echoes the state government’s line on the conflict.<sup>14</sup> Its proposed solutions, such as through the implementation of the state government’s Jos Development Plan – which is not publically available, if it exists – were made with little or no public consultation. It is alleged that the Jos Development Plan would see house demolitions and the expulsion of people from some of the densely populated, predominantly Hausa areas of Jos North to make way for infrastructure developments – with possible compensation only for those with tenancy certificates. More information is needed on what the state government plans are and on how its proposals would affect the different communities in Jos.

The Ajibola Commission found that 312 people were killed in the riots and a further 323 people sustained injuries, but these are mainly based on names obtained of

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<sup>14</sup> *The Justice Bola Ajibola Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the Unrest in Some Parts of Jos North on November 28, 2008*. Report submitted to the Plateau State Government on 27 October 2009.

Christian dead and wounded. The figures are based on submissions by ethnic communities and churches in Jos which listed the names of their members killed. According to the data quoted by the Ajibola Commission, 118 members of the Igbo Community Association in Jos were killed, and about 31 Yoruba people, from various states, were named among the dead. There were also submissions from Plateau groups and other southern groups. The Muslims cited by the Ajibola Commission as having lost their lives were mainly Yoruba, not Jasawa. The data compiled by the central mosque and the Jasawa Development Association suggest Muslim fatalities were higher. The memoranda of the 'Jos North Muslim Ummah' cite a total of 632 Hausa/Fulani Muslims killed on 28-29 November 2008: 569 men, 39 women, and 24 children.<sup>15</sup> A separate list, which documents the Muslim death toll by neighbourhood and ward, cites the names of a total of 469 people killed on 28-29 November 2008. This also records the method by which each person was killed. What is very striking in this data is that it indicates the vast majority of people died from gun shot wounds.<sup>16</sup> This corresponds with reports I received during the crisis that guns were more widely used compared to 2001, but it is also consistent with accusations that large numbers of people were shot by the mobile police and army. Some Christians cast doubt on the Muslim figures, even claiming that bodies of non-Muslims have been taken to the central mosque to inflate the Muslim casualty statistics as part of a 'numbers game' – the politics of victimhood. While numbers may to some degree have become part of the propaganda war by both sides, there is no evidence for the fabrication of names in the data given by each side. On the Muslim side, perhaps in response to these accusations, the individual profiles of those killed are being recorded, with photos, addresses, and signatures of relatives, so that the records can be checked. According to these figures, therefore, a total of 781 people were killed in the two days of rioting in Jos North on 28-29 November 2008.

There was no effective reconciliation after the 2008 violence. The evidence suggests that the state government used its Commission of Inquiry to further its political objectives in Jos rather than seeking to resolve the conflict. There have not been credible trials of anyone involved in the rioting and no concerted effort to arrest and prosecute organisers of the violence. Communication between the Plateau State government and

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<sup>15</sup> Jos North Muslim Ummah, 'November 2008 Jos Crisis: Appeal to Our Christian Brothers'; 'Facts about the Jos Mayhem' (2008). Memoranda obtained from Jos Central Mosque, June 2010.

<sup>16</sup> *Muslims Massacred Toll Recording During 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2008 Post Plateau State Local Government Council Elections*. Obtained from the offices of Jos central mosque, June 2010.

the Jasawa leadership in Jos ceased after the 2008 crisis. According to one of the Muslim representatives, the only channel of communication they have had with the state government from November 2008 to the present has been through the security agencies.<sup>17</sup>

### **The urban and rural violence on the Jos Plateau in 2010**

The 2008 riots were very intense and caused considerable destruction and loss of life, but they lasted for just two days and were contained within Jos North. In contrast, the 2010 violence started on Sunday, 17 January, at Dutse Uku – in the Nassarawa area of Jos North – but it spread to Jos South and rural areas of the high plateau, affecting around seven LGAs.<sup>18</sup> As well as being more extensive, the violence in 2010 has also been more protracted. This section outlines the main patterns of the violence in 2010 and touches on processes of mobilisation, arguing that what has occurred also needs to be understood in the context of previous episodes, in 2001-2, and 2008 and the upheavals these caused.

Most accounts agree that the renewed fighting in Jos began when a Muslim man, Mohammed Kabir Umar went to do construction work on his house in Dutse Uku. When I spoke with him he recounted his version of events and that he had been shot and injured in the 2008 crisis and his house had been burned down, along with many other properties in the area.<sup>19</sup> From about late 2009 he and others began rebuilding their houses. He said he was prompted to start rebuilding after an announcement by the state government that people should move back to their former areas. That Sunday, 17 January, Mohammed Kabir Umar said he was laying the roof decking and brought with him a large group of 60-70 workers to help him do this. In his account, the fighting started when Christians, predominantly Afizere, in Dutse Uku attempted to stop them. They threatened that if he rebuilt the house they would burn it again, and began throwing stones into the tipper. The Christians mobilised, blowing a whistle and asking people to ‘come out and fight for Jesus’. Kabir went and fetched some soldiers, but only about six

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Sani Mudi, head of media and publicity for the Ulama/Elders Council, Jos Central Mosque, 27 June 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Violent conflict occurred in the following LGAs in January 2010: Jos North, Jos South, Barakin Ladi, Riyom, Mangu, Pankshin, and Kanke. The level of violence was contained and at a low level in the latter three LGAs.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Mohammed Kabir Umar in Jos, 27 June 2010.

of them, and they sought to resolve the problem through the village head. But there were a large group of Christian youths by this stage who began burning Muslim houses, although not Kabir's as his workers were still there. The Muslims sought to defend themselves, throwing stones.

Christians in Dutse Uku give a different account, as documented by the Citizens' Monitoring Group, a Christian grouping in Jos.<sup>20</sup> The large group of Muslims at Kabir's house raised suspicions and fears, they say. The Muslim workers had blocked the road and were abusing passers-by on their way to church, calling them derogatory names like *arna* (infidels). Christians state it was the Muslims who began fighting and that several Christians were shot dead with sophisticated guns. It is not clear at what stage of the conflict this occurred. The Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) church in the area was apparently attacked and burned down. There are no indications that St. Michael's Catholic Church itself was attacked and it was certainly not burned. The fighting appears to have occurred behind St Michael's church. Christians also say the soldiers deployed that day, and that the General Officer in Command (GOC) of the Third Armoured Division, Major-General Saleh Maina – based at Rukuba Barracks, just outside of Jos – took sides with the Muslims.

Whatever the sequence of events on the Sunday, the violence appears to have been contained within Nassarawa, possibly even within Dutse Uku. But that day, the Plateau State Radio and Television Corporation (PRTVC) broadcast a statement on television by the police commissioner in Jos, Mr Gregory Anyanting flanked by media spokesmen of the Plateau State government. He stated: "just this morning, there was a breach of the peace when some Muslim youths without any provocation whatsoever started attacking some worshippers within the Nasarawa Gwong area, especially around St. Michael Catholic Church. When information got to us, we sent our men and they have been able to contain the situation." Muslims claim that after the police commissioner had made this statement PRTV broadcast it every 30 minutes, including throughout Monday, accompanied by Bob Marley's lyrics 'Get up stand up, stand up for your rights'.<sup>21</sup> Subsequently, the General Manager of PRTV, Pastor Abraham Yiljap, former editor of the COCIN newspaper, *The Lightbearer* (and Goemai by ethnicity), was

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<sup>20</sup> Citizens' Monitoring Group, *Plateau Under Attack! Jos Crisis 2010: Eyewitness & Survivor Accounts*. Jos, February 2010. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/28479137/Plateau-Under-Attack-Jos-Crisis-2010>

<sup>21</sup> Interview with representatives of the Jasawa Development Association, Jos, 27 June 2010.

summoned by CID to Abuja to answer questions. The impact of the media in stoking the tension is still not entirely clear from the evidence I have, but it appears to have had a negative role. By this point, and indeed prior to the outbreak of violence in Dutse Uku, rumours were also circulating via text messages of an imminent crisis. On Tuesday, 19 January, the violence restarted and on a scale that exceeded 2001, mass killings occurred in Jos South, starting in Bukuru then spreading to the old mining settlements and to rural areas where there were clashes between the Berom and Fulani. This set in motion a cycle of violence and insecurity that was still ongoing in some of the rural areas when I visited Jos in June-July 2010.

During the January crisis, as previously, it was the poor killing the poor: as one interviewee put it, 'When the crisis started in January you could see all these fancy jeeps going out of Jos into Abuja; all the big people in Jos just left. They left the poor people to come and kill themselves.'<sup>22</sup> It is widely alleged that politicians and chiefs had a role in planning and inciting violence in 2010, though to what end is unclear. Large parts of Bukuru were devastated by the violence which broke out there on Tuesday, 19 January 2010. Anguwan Doki was the worst affected neighbourhood, with both Muslim and Christian properties completely destroyed: whole streets were shattered and still deserted and uninhabitable in June 2010. It is unclear how it started. Berom youths in Gyel, which is a short distance west of Bukuru town, separated only by the Bukuru expressway, claim they heard the Muslim call to prayer at around 1am, in the very early hours of Tuesday. This alerted them to a possible attack, so they mobilised and went out on to the expressway to cross into Bukuru, partly in an attempt to assist Christians in Bukuru if there was going to be fighting there. What is agreed upon is that the Gyel youths were prevented from crossing the expressway by the army, and in the process the chief's son was shot dead by soldiers. This heightened tempers further, but the Dagwom Gyel (the district head) seems to have called for calm and insisted that his son be buried that morning. After the burial, however, the youths mobilised and marched into Bukuru, and fought the Muslims there.

The Hausa district heads and community leaders in Bukuru tell a different story, which is that they sounded the call for prayer on seeing the youths from Gyel mobilising and attempting to cross the expressway and attack them. They explained that the

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<sup>22</sup> Interview carried out in Jos on 18 June 2010.

violence began that morning after Berom youths – probably from Du – attacked Anguwan Doki. Whatever the case, the level of preparedness of the Hausa and Igbo traders in Bukuru does not appear to have been very high, judging by the destruction of their market stalls and property. A significant development since the crisis has been the expansion of the market in Gyel, with Christians congregating there rather than in Bukuru, which the Berom in particular are boycotting at the time of writing. There are now two rival, ethnically segregated markets on either side of the Bukuru expressway.

The violence perpetrated outside of Bukuru on Tuesday, 19 January, had a clearer pattern, as these were co-ordinated attacks on Muslims in majority Berom districts in Jos South, Barakin Ladi, and Riyom LGAs. In the settlements that were attacked, all Muslims were targeted: Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, and even Berom Muslims. The old mining settlements were the worst hit: Kuru Jentar (also known as Kuru Karama), Sabon Gida Kanar, Gero, Timtim, Mai Adiko, Bisichi, and Farin Lamba, were all attacked and all suffered extensive devastation and in some of them, near total destruction. The planning of these attacks is clear, because in some of them Berom youths were brought in from surrounding areas in TOYOTA Hiluxes (pickups), armed with guns and machetes. I was informed that most of these attacks happened at the same time: between 11am and 1pm on Tuesday.

The youths were stirred up through text messages and in the churches, with assertions that Muslims were coming *en masse* from the far north – such as from Maiduguri and Kano – to kill Christians in Jos. It was also said that the bodies of two Berom boys killed in the Sunday violence in Jos were brought back to their village in Heipang district. This occurs among most communities, and advertently or inadvertently can mobilise people for rioting or attacks on the perceived enemy. There are allegations that the massacre in Kuru was organised by the Dagwoms (Berom district heads) in Heipang and Kuru. Such claims are difficult to substantiate, but the youth in these districts mobilised and were involved in the attacks. The Muslim minority was also targeted in Kaduna Vom, where it was explained the attackers came with lists of all the Muslim houses, both in the village and the veterinary institute. There were some killings in Vom, but the casualties were much lower than the mining settlements, and staff at the veterinary institute (most of them Christian, including Plateau ‘indigenes’) helped to safeguard and then evacuate those in danger.

One expatriate interviewee recounted the reaction of a Nigerian military officer who had been deployed to Gero village and the shock the officer expressed at the scene he witnessed there – particularly the cruelty that had been meted out to the inhabitants and the desecration of the bodies of those killed: more brutal than anything he had seen in his deployment on peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sudan. The highest casualties were in Kuru, where around 200 bodies are said to have been recovered in the aftermath of the attack, with many more not recovered because they were thrown into wells, and the wells subsequently had to be sealed, or because the victims were killed in the bush as they were trying to escape and their bodies were not found.<sup>23</sup> The Plateau State Muslim Ummah name 182 men, women and children murdered in Kuru Babba (which is still totally deserted) and Kuru Karama, with quoted ages of the victims ranging from a 3 month old baby to a man over 100 years old.<sup>24</sup> The same dataset, listing the names, ages, area of killing and way in which the victims were killed, for all the recorded deaths of Muslims on the Jos Plateau in January 2010, records that a total of 968 people were killed.

I obtained no equivalent data for Christian victims of the January 2010 violence, but the figure will be much lower, with most of the casualties in Jos and some in Bukuru and environs. This data may be an underestimate of the total number of Muslims killed because not all of the bodies were recovered, and it seemingly only accounts for the victims of the January violence. In the subsequent months both Christians and Muslims were victims of ‘silent killings’: there was a respite from the mass violence and killing, but people were murdered on an individual basis, in Jos and in the rural areas. There are many reports of abductions and numerous people who have gone missing in the months after the January and March violence. In Riyom, for example, some Fulani herders were killed when they went to recover their stolen cattle. Their bodies were discovered in shallow graves, which were exhumed by the security agencies.<sup>25</sup>

In the early hours of Sunday, 7 March 2010 a massive attack was launched on the village of Dogo Nahauwa – another old mining settlement – in Shen village area of Jos South LGA. More than 300 Berom villagers were massacred that night, including a

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<sup>23</sup> Discussions by the author with Muslims in Jos and Kuru in June-July 2010.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Plateau State Muslim Ummah: Muslims Massacred Toll Recorded January 17<sup>th</sup> 2010, Jos and Environs Crises.’ Obtained in Jos from the Jasawa Development Association.

<sup>25</sup> Interview at the office of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, Barakin Ladi, 26 June 2010. I was shown digital photographs of the exhumation to support this story.

very large number of young children and women. I saw video footage taken with a hand-held camera the following day of the bodies of victims taken to Jos University Teaching Hospital and the mortuary, and of dead children lined up in rows on the ground in Dogo Nahauwa, and there were international media pictures of bodies being placed into mass graves. Most of the bodies had machete wounds; most of the victims were killed by being stabbed and hacked to death rather than shot. The attackers surrounded Dogo Nahauwa and reportedly began shooting with the guns they had, which forced people to try and flee the scene, including the men, so there was confusion and seemingly little resistance when the larger number of attackers with knives went into the village itself, killing as many people as they could and burning down the houses with petrol. When I went to Dogo Nahauwa in June 2010 the surviving population was clearly still traumatised by what had been done to them. There were people with burns and knife wounds and children with missing limbs. Some arrests were made of suspects in the immediate aftermath of the killings. There is little doubt the attackers were Fulani and they almost certainly came in from Bauchi State. They also attacked other Berom settlements in Shen.

Why did this occur? The attacks were most likely in retaliation for the killing of Fulani men, women, and children and their cattle in Berom areas in January 2010. Pastoralists were badly hit and many were displaced, again, to Bauchi State. There does not seem to have been violence in Dogo Nahauwa in January, but the Fulani were attacked in other parts of Jos South, such as around Mai Adiko – also an old mining camp – where entire families were massacred. The selection of Dogo Nahauwa for a reprisal attack may also have been motivated by pre-existing grievances, because the Fulani were expelled from there in the 2001 violence. There is little doubt about this, as I recorded it in an interview with Fulani men in Jos South in August 2006. No killing in Dogo Nahauwa was reported to me, but the houses of the Fulani population there were burned down and they were forced to leave the area. Post-2001, some of the Fulani returned to the area around Dogo Nahauwa to graze their cattle after peace was (temporarily) restored. Fulani youths aged 10-25 looked after the cattle and they stayed in make-shift shelters covered with plastic sheeting, not in the village itself.

The violence between the Berom and Fulani on the Jos Plateau has been widely described in the international media, particularly by journalists, as a struggle for land.

The land question was mainly significant in the *fadama* or dry-season farming areas, where some of the valuable farms previously owned by Hausa and Fulani farmers were taken over by Berom farmers during the 2001 crisis. More problematic is the claim that pastoralists are being pushed southwards into the middle belt by desertification in the northern savanna and an expanding Sahara, increasing pressure on land and resources and generating conflict with farming communities.<sup>26</sup> As a description of what is happening on the Jos Plateau, this is deeply misleading. Although it needs further investigation, patterns of Fulani migration across the Jos Plateau – while altered by the impact of the violence – otherwise appear to be relatively stable. It is the same pastoralist families year after year who are migrating. The Fulani I spoke with in Barakin Ladi and Riyom who are living on the Plateau also denied there had been any influx of herders from further north. The available evidence does not allow us to make the claims being popularised in the media. Demographic increase is generating pressure on land and constraining pastoral production in northern Nigeria, but this does not explain the situation in Plateau. The fighting between the Berom and Fulani is generally not about land.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The 2011 elections will be a critical moment both for Nigeria and Plateau State. In the interests of peace in Jos and its environs, there needs to be greater political discussion and co-operation between Hausa and Plateau ‘indigene’ political leaders. Political polarisation along religious lines, with competing Muslim and Christian blocs, has proved to be dangerous. Currently, there appears to be no or very limited dialogue between the state government and the Jasawa (Muslim) leadership in Jos North. A resolution to the political conflicts in Jos North, in which Muslims currently have little representation, is essential if efforts at violence prevention and conflict resolution are to succeed. If elections are conducted cleanly, with less rigging, this would help. This does not mean any single community should be able to dominate another, but politics needs to become more inclusive, without brazen discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or religion. There are very high levels of suspicion, fear, and anger on all sides – as well as

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<sup>26</sup> See Eliza Griswold, ‘God’s Country’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 2008; Jean Herskovits, ‘Critical Time for Nigeria’s Future’, Guest Column, 14 March 2010 – <http://allafrica.com/stories/201003150001.html>

misunderstandings – and this is unlikely to dissipate if the political leaderships of each community remain as polarised as they have been, without even talking to each other. In this regard, mediation from outside, with balanced Christian and Muslim mediators, may be necessary to move things forward.

The judicial commissions of inquiry have not been productive. Despite numerous commissions, the violence has continued – and in some places has got worse. The severity of the violence in 2010 in the rural hinterland of Jos, in places like Kuru and Dogo Nahauwa, require serious investigations in which those responsible are held to account, but very little has been achieved. Some activists are now calling for an international investigation, notably from the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>27</sup> Few people who committed murder and/or organised the mass killing of hundreds of innocent people have been arrested or prosecuted. As the farce between the state and federal commissions of inquiry after the 2008 violence indicated, there appears to be a problem with establishing the relative jurisdiction of the federal and state governments in responding to such crimes. Justice is normally an important element in conflict mediation and resolution, but this means the rule of law has to be applied, not just to one side or community but to all, and to individuals in positions of authority.

Plateau State is now awash with guns and sophisticated weapons. Nothing seems to be being done to control or limit weapons in the state but this problem needs to be remedied. The more the population is armed, the more deadly will be outbreaks of violence, and localised incidents may escalate more easily. These are just a few of the long-term challenges in Jos that the next governments will need to address, at federal, state and local levels. Plateau State used to be a peaceful part of Nigeria and this is still in people's memories. This tradition of co-existence will be important to draw upon if peace is to be restored to the Plateau.

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<sup>27</sup> 'ICC prosecutor analyses Jos massacre', Radio Netherlands Worldwide, 11 November 2010. <http://www.rnw.nl/international-justice/article/icc-prosecutor-analyses-jos-massacre>

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