

## *A Decade of Fear & Violence: Ethno-religious Conflicts on the Jos Plateau, Nigeria*

Plateau State in North Central Nigeria, home to diverse ethnic and religious groups, was one of the most peaceful states in the country until 2001, when this peace was shattered by a cycle of repeated violence that has claimed thousands of lives. This policy brief deals with the conflict between largely Christian indigenous ethnic groups and the settler Muslim Hausa and Fulani that has festered in Plateau State. Current policies are based on two failed strategies: (1) reactive deployment of military force, and (2) addressing the problem through privileging either the importance of an inclusive national civic citizenship guaranteed to all by the constitution or the need to defend the cultural and territorial rights of indigenous populations faced by more assertive settler communities. We argue that the conflict cannot be resolved by military force alone. We also assert that a political solution is near impossible if we approach the conflict from either the principle of inclusive civic citizenship or that of indigenous rights. Exclusive emphasis on either principle, along with the intransigence and opportunism of some politicians, makes it difficult to find a mutually agreeable route to peace. We suggest that confidence-building measures that address everyday fears and insecurities in Jos and Plateau must come before we gradually broach the more contentious and substantive issues of rights. Only pragmatic, practical, piece-meal confidence-building steps aimed at addressing everyday security challenges faced by individuals and neighbourhoods can build the necessary trust needed to address the wider questions of conflicting constitutional and civic rights. Political leadership needed for this approach is vital at all levels: federal, state, community, and in local neighbourhoods.

### Overview of the conflict

Plateau State is strategically located on the Jos Plateau in central Nigeria. Since the colonial period, it attracted large numbers of economic migrants from across Nigeria in search of livelihood from the tin mines near Jos. Since 1994, conflict between the migrant Muslim Hausa and Fulani and the predominantly Christian indigenous groups that include Berom, Afizere and Anaguta, has characterised the area around Jos. From 1999 to 2004, there were more than 80 episodes of ethno-religious violence. By 2012, about 4,000 people have allegedly been killed and property in excess of US\$6.4 billion destroyed.

### Urban conflicts in Jos

Historically, there have been a few violent blips in the otherwise peaceful city of Jos. There was a Hausa versus Igbo riot in Jos in 1945, and anti-Igbo violence around the tin mines in 1966. The turn to collective violence between the indigenes and migrants started with a small riot in April 1994 and intensified with the September 2001 riot, which is now seen as the departure from a more peaceful past. Jos changed from 'a city where one's religion or ethnicity never mattered', to 'a heart-wrenching site of repeat mass murders, hate speech and massive destruction of lives and property'. There have been other serious riots since 2001 – in

2002, 2008, 2010, and 2011. The use of sophisticated weapons and repeated bombings by Boko Haram in 2010 and 2012 have compounded the insecurity.

### Rural conflicts on the Plateau

Some urban violence spilled over into rural conflicts in 2001 and 2002. However, since January 2010, rural violence has developed a momentum of its own, concentrated in four of the 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Plateau State: Barakin Ladi, Riyom, Mangu, and Jos South. Since 2010, the highest levels of violence in Plateau State are now in the rural areas, primarily between two ethnic groups, the dominant indigenous Christian Berom and the agro-pastoral Muslim Fulani. The Fulani, chased out of their settlements, have regrouped to launch counter-attacks.

There are urban-rural links in the pattern of violence. However, there are also some important differences. There is not a generalised conflict between Muslims and Christians in rural Plateau; the conflict is limited to certain areas and certain groups. Though different conflicts are conflated in the public discourse and imagination, there are particular features in the affected rural areas that have contributed to the present conflicts: (a) the interplay of religion, ethnicity and politics; (b) ethnic socioeconomic disparities and indigeneity; (c) education; (d) political leadership and 'the youth'; and (e) land and cattle.

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### Box 1: A clash of two normative principles

‘The Jos crisis is the result of failure to amend the constitution to privilege broad-based citizenship over exclusive indigene status and ensure that residency rather than indigeneity determines citizens’ rights. ... There is an urgent need to... engage in a constitutional reform process to replace the indigene principle with... residency.’

- International Crisis Group, Curbing Violence in Nigeria (I): The Jos Crisis, December 2012, pages i & 23.

‘... with or without constitutional provisions, we cannot deny the existence of the natives and non-natives since even birds have a home.’

- Alhaji Umoru Miango, head of indigenous Plateau Muslims, cited in Pam Ayuba, ‘Plateau Muslims accuse Jos North Hausa Muslims of Discrimination’, The Nation, 01/02/2009.

## Contentious issues

### Indigenes & settlers

A legacy of tin mining in the colonial period is the descendants of the labourers forcefully recruited from other parts of the northern provinces inhabited by the Hausa, Kanuri, Nupe, and others. Jos city developed on the back of the tin mining industry, principally as a place of trade. While most of the miners were Hausa or Kanuri peasants from rural Hausaland, the Hausa people who migrated to what is now metropolitan Jos were from urban commercial centres like Kano and Bauchi. The Hausa people in Jos call themselves Jasawa, to signify their belonging to Jos. Many Jasawa believe they founded Jos, an idea that underpins their sense of entitlement to a greater role in the administration of Jos North LGA where they are concentrated, and explains their bitterness at being excluded as ‘settlers’. The Jasawa claims to political rights are opposed by the indigenous Berom, Anaguta and Afizere, who claim ‘ownership’ of Jos based on the principle of ‘indigeneship’. ‘Ownership’ is contested, but the term is not used in the narrow juridical sense of owning a piece of private property. In dispute is the right to recognition as the pre-eminent group within a specific territory: the right to ‘set the rules of engagement in organising inter-community relations.’

### Economic inequalities

The dominant economic group in Jos are Igbo. There are also some well-established and wealthy Yoruba families who control some key commodities. Jasawa traders are vital to the Jos economy, controlling some of the large markets and dominating sectors like transport. Lebanese capital is also important. Plateau ‘indigenes’ have a smaller economic presence. However, the increasing segregation of the city has meant some of the Jasawa-controlled markets are conceived as ‘unsafe’ by ‘indigenes’ and Christians. This has propelled the ‘indigenes’ into retail businesses as they establish new markets in areas perceived as safe. Despite this budding entrepreneurialism, the share of the economy controlled by indigenes is not proportional to their population. An important aspect of the conflicts in the rural areas are the economic disparities between ‘indigenes’ and ‘settlers’, which over time have widened. The descendants of the settler tin miners became commercial drivers and dry-season farmers, as well as artisanal miners. They were, on average, more economically prosperous than the Berom, as were the Fulani. In the vicinity of most of the mine settlements, there is highly productive *fadama* land being farmed by the Hausa and Fulani. There appear to have been some economic incentives for the violence because the Berom are now utilising some of these plots, justifying this forceful appropriation on the basis of it being ‘their land.’

## Cultural inequalities

There has been tension between the Berom and Hausa in some of the mining settlements over intermarriage and occasional fighting over girlfriend-boyfriend relations. There was some resentment over Hausa men marrying Berom women, sometimes as second or third wives. The Hausa did not tend to learn Berom, and the children of Hausa fathers and Berom mothers do not normally speak Berom. The Fulani situation is different because many are fluent in Berom. Berom people mainly have deemed it more acceptable for a Berom woman to marry a Fulani than to marry a Hausa. In general, the indigenes accuse the Jasawa/Hausa of cultural arrogance; even the indigenous Muslims complain of religious discrimination – a fact accentuated by the prevalence of fundamentalist Islamic reformist creeds within the Jasawa and the Plateau Fulani.

## Political inequalities

In the colonial period, indigenous groups were subject to Muslim Emirate indirect rule for the administrative convenience of the British. In the immediate independence period, they were regarded as ‘ethnic minorities’ in a Hausa/Fulani-dominated Northern Region. ‘Emancipation’ from political domination became a major theme in indigenous thought from the 1950s. The break-up of the Northern Region in 1967 provided a brief respite, but periods of northern-led federal military administrations from 1976 were seen as re-entrenching northern political domination. Furthermore, administrative boundary changes hived off the indigenous ethnic groups in Benue and Nassarawa States from the old Benue-Plateau State. The new Plateau State is a narrower field of politics with a zero-sum logic between the Berom and other indigenous groups on the one hand and the Jasawa/Hausa on the other. The indigenous groups accuse the Jasawa of using their national ethnic and religious connections to corner federal appointments from Jos; in return, indigenous elites seek to exclude the Jasawa and Fulani from political positions and resources at the LGA and state levels.

## Youth & education

The Berom and other indigenous groups had a head start in Western education through the mission schools as they converted to Christianity from the 1930s. However, the younger generations of the Jasawa and Plateau Fulani have tended to receive more Western education than their elders. On average, school attendance and educational levels are probably still lower among the Jasawa and Fulani than among the Berom, but the gap has been narrowed considerably. In some places there may be more highly performing Jasawa and Fulani students, who complete their schooling and go on to further education, than Berom. This is partly a question of

discipline, as there are arguably more social problems in Berom society – alcoholism is especially serious – but availability of money is also a decisive factor. The increasing demand for state scholarships, school places, and public sector jobs by a rising tide of Western-educated Jasawa and Fulani youth who feel excluded on the basis of indigeneity is a powerful driver of discontent within the settler communities.

### Use & abuse of religion

Since the mid-1960s and the Islamisation campaign launched by the premier of the Northern Region, the Christian indigenous groups have developed a fear of ‘Islamisation’. The term has become a label liberally attached to anything to do with the Jasawa. For their part, the Jasawa have tended to express their grievances against political marginalisation by reinforcing their communal boundaries, increasingly resorting to religious symbols, especially ‘street praying’ on Fridays to the inconvenience of their Christian neighbours. Both religious groups seek to inscribe their presence on the territory of Jos through the deployment of noisy loud-speakers.

### Elite manipulation

Violence in Plateau State cannot be divorced from the roles played by elite political entrepreneurs from both religious communities. At the federal level, successive officials, including Presidents Babangida and Yar Adua have been accused of bias in favour of the Jasawa in federal appointments and the creation of LGAs. The indigenes see the Jasawa as the thin wedge of a wider Hausa/Islamic conspiracy of domination. At the state and LGA level, on the other hand, indigenous officials like Governor David Jang and LGA Chair Frank Tardy have been variously accused of blatant and provocative bias against the Jasawa. Lack of trust in the political leadership at all levels, from federal to LGA, has hampered the search for effective solutions to the crisis.

### Current approaches to end the conflict

At the normative level, most approaches to tackling the crisis tend to support one or the other of two opposed principles: (a) inclusive civic citizenship; or (b) respect for the rights of indigenous minorities. At the operational level, two key approaches to the crisis have been: (1) the fire-fighting deployment of security forces to contain immediate violence; and (2) the repeated setting up of probe panels whose reports are never implemented – effectively kicking the problem into the long grass till the next bout of killings. A coherent, politically balanced, sustainably resourced, and long-term strategy is lacking.

### Security operations

The police and the army have been deployed at various times to contain the violence. They have

subsequently been drawn into the conflict, with different communities preferring one or the other. Accusations of bias, extra-judicial killings, the condoning of atrocities, and even the arming of combatants have been made against both the army and the police. The Special Task Force is an attempt to bring different arms of the security forces together under one command. The ethnic and religious affiliation of commanders is under constant popular scrutiny. The security forces remain highly distrusted. Operation Rainbow, a collaborative effort between the federal security authorities, the state government, and the UNDP is now trying to get communities involved in the security process (ICG, 2012, p. 22), but it is still at an early stage. Force can only contain the conflict, not solve it. Furthermore, there is the risk of the politicisation of the military through internal security deployments.

### Unimplemented Panel Recommendations

The deployment of troops is often complemented by the setting up of peace conferences and commissions of inquiry by the state and federal governments. These have only led to an unending trail of panel reports, none of which has been fully implemented for a number of reasons: (a) political conflict between state and federal convening authorities; (b) perceived partisanship of the panels; (c) accusations and recommendations in the reports that are not backed by facts; (d) lack of political will.

### What current approaches ignore: Threat perceptions

All the structural drivers of the conflict have existed since the 1930s without leading to the type of violent conflict that has become endemic since 1999. We argue that the upsurge in violence from 1999 can only be understood in the context of a series of political and administrative changes from 1976, which began to re-shape how the indigenes

#### Box 2: Panels and commissions to reduce conflict in Plateau State

**1994:** Justice Aribiton Fiberesima Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the April 1994 Crisis

**2001:** Justice Niki Tobi Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the September 2001 Crisis

**2002:** Justice Okpene Judicial Commission of inquiry into communal conflicts in Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau and Taraba states in 2002

**2004:** Presidential Peace Initiative Committee on Plateau State, headed by Shehu Idris, Emir of Zazzau, May 2004

**2004:** Plateau Peace Conference (“Plateau Resolves”), 18 August-21 September 2004

**2008:** Federal administrative panel of inquiry into the 2008 crisis, headed by Major General Emmanuel Abisoye

**2008:** Justice Bola Ajibola Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the November 2008 Crisis

**2010:** Presidential Advisory Committee on the Jos Crisis, headed by Solomon Lar



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For contact details and publications of researchers involved in the Nigeria Research Network (NRN), see: [www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/nrn/](http://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/nrn/)

and the Jasawa settlers interpreted the long-run structural characteristics of their shared city. With time, this process of re-interpretation led to perceptions of acute threat which both the indigenes and the Jasawa had to contend with. Given the threat perceptions, the two groups increasingly sought for ways to defend and protect their core interests. The break-down of established patterns of managing difference was therefore central to the search for new ways – including the resort to pre-emptory violence. The policy implication of this observation are: (a) we must first address and lessen the threats felt by individuals and groups; (b) we must then find new ways of managing ethnic and religious difference that can contain conflict within non-violent channels; (c) building on these two steps, we can then begin to address the wider questions of civic and indigenous rights. The deployment of force for immediate security must be matched by the willingness to commit to a long-term political strategy.

**Policy Recommendations**

**More professional, impartial, and consultative security provision**

- Community participation is critical to the organisation and deployment of Operation Rainbow. Local community leaders, youth and women organisations, and community vigilantes must all be involved in the collective process of securing lives and limbs and building confidence across communal and religious lines.
- The capacity for professional and human-rights based internal security operations by the Nigerian security forces is low. Various federal institutions can be supported to provide this capability.

**Recognising neighbourhood initiatives and building on these**

- Violence has re-shaped individuals' social networks and accelerated processes of neighbourhood segregation and communal vigilantism. This is not a good long-term situation, but policies to address fears should come first. Recognise existing neighbourhood initiatives and build on them through Operation Rainbow.

**Supporting local level pan-community peace-building efforts**

- Various religious, women's, and youth groups have been trying to build bridges across the reli-

gious and ethnic divisions, sometimes with very limited resources. These initiatives are very important and should be supported. Exposure to similar groups in places like Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Israel/Palestine could be useful.

**Identifying and promoting useful recommendations of past Panels of Inquiry**

- Some of the Panels of Inquiry contain useful suggestions that can contribute to the political resolution of the conflict. These include recommendations on compensation for verifiable losses, creation of new political and administrative units, and a robust response to impunity. In particular, we recommend serious consideration of the recommendations of the 2010 Presidential Advisory Committee headed by Chief Solomon Lar.

**Lobbying Nigerian authorities for a coordinated, sustained, and inclusive peace-building approach**

- The architecture for an early warning system and peace-building in Nigeria is non-existent, despite its contributions to building these same capabilities at the ECOWAS and AU levels. Nigerian authorities should be reminded at every opportunity that charity should begin at home.

**The role of the International community**

- Interfaith dialogue instituted by the Catholic Archbishop of Jos and NGOs like 'The Search for Common Ground' should be supported. There are a number of initiatives to choose from.
- Contribute to conversations on communal problems and interfaith solutions at the level of school children. One such project, 'Naija Girls Unite', is already being piloted in Jos by the NGO Search for Common Ground. A number of NGOs have also been discussing launching a 'Face-to-Faith' initiative of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation in Nigeria. Jos is an ideal place to launch such a programme that links young people together via internal and social media, across 19 countries racked by communal violence.
- The changing nature of international jurisdiction in matters of domestic atrocities opens up potential spaces for dialogue with Nigerian community leaders, either directly or through the media.
- Contribute to the policing effort by providing international-standard humans rights training for the security services.