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Identity politics and the Jos crisis: Evidence, lessons and challenges of good governance

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Concerns with identity politics especially those woven around conflict have got an almost outrageous timeliness. The salient global role of ethnic and religious identity as it affects everything from democratic development to risk of disruptive communal conflicts at domestic level has become an important dimension of present-day world societies, looming largely in multiethnic societies. This paper takes a critical look at identity politics and conflict in Jos, a setting once regarded as “the home of peace and tourism in Nigeria”. The point of departure is a critical examination of the 28 November, 2008 crisis in Jos North LGA. Using in-depth interviews and content analysis of opinions, the study situates the conflict within the relationship between the “indigene-settler” syndrome and the state, with its ugly hydra-headed manifestations. It argues that the conflict with a colouration of ethnic and religious garb was also orchestrated under the façade of politics. It is suggested that the commitment of good governance and the institutionalisation of democracy remains the surest means of nipping in the bud the crises in Jos. The findings have important implications for aggregate research on ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Key words: Identity politics, ethnic and religious conflicts, indigene-settler, Jos, good governance.

INTRODUCTION

Both Nigerians and foreigners regarded Plateau State of Nigeria as a peaceful settlement with a temperate climate of magnetic attraction. While the serenity of the place lasted, the place was reputed as “The Home of Peace and Tourism”. This reputation seems to be a thing of the past as the peace of the State has recently been questioned following the spate of violent eruption of conflicts between different communities that had hitherto lived in peace and harmony with one another. Examples of these conflicts include the Mangu-Fier border conflicts in 1984, the conflicts in Jos and Bukuru between the indigenous communities and settlers which culminated in the explosions of the April 1994, the Mangu-Bukkos conflicts of 1992 and 1995, the Bukuru Gyero Road conflicts of 1997 between the Birom and Hausa communities, the Mangu-Chagal conflicts of 1997, the conflicts between Bassa and Igbirra communities in Toto Local Government (now Nassarawa State), the conflicts between the Tiv and Plateau communities in Doma, Awe and Keana (now Nassarawa State), the Jos Crisis of 2001 and the 27 April 2004 clashes between rival ethnic militias in central

Plateau State, etc. This paper, therefore, is a modest attempt at understanding the recent crisis in the Jos North Local Government of Plateau State through the prism of identity politics. A central concern of this paper is the increase in the scope, frequency; magnitude and sophistication of crises in Jos. Conflicts in the State keep occurring sporadically and have acquired a force of their own. The causes of these conflicts and the role of good governance are important variables explaining the nature and intensity of the conflict. In the case of the Jos North Local Government conflict, this last point is of particular importance given the actors involved in the conflict. What traits place the 2008 crisis from a score of others? How does the 2008 crisis differ from others? What perceptions prevail among the people with regards to the settler-indigene syndrome? What about the distinctive challenges of leadership in fueling or nipping in the bud recurring crises in this area? These are the general questions that underpin our project. Using a theoretical approach of identity politics, we were interested in exploring whether and to what extent the arpeggio of ethnicity, religion and

politics mixed in shaping the Jos crisis- a plural cultural community - thereby threatening the peace, lives and properties of members of the community.

First, we will elucidate the history of Jos North crises and why we assume its case to be of special interest. Subsequently, we will present our theoretical frame of reference and the way in which we examine identity politics and conflict in Nigeria. Thereafter, we specify our research questions and describe our research population and data. Finally, we summarize our findings and our research questions.

BACKGROUND

The historical background

Plateau State is located in the highlands of Central Nigeria. It belongs to the Central States of Nigeria otherwise called the "Middle Belt", a geo-political term with a lot of ethno-religious connotations comprising of the states of Bauchi, Benue, Kaduna, Nassarawa, Plateau and Taraba. These states have unique characteristics vis-à-vis other states in the federation. A special report by the National Orientation Agency (NOA, 2002) identifies these features to include:

- (1) Home to over 50% of ethnic groups in Nigeria; although no ethnic group shares 100% of its culture with other ethnic groups;
- (2) Christianity, Islam and Traditional African Religion all command considerable influence on the lives of the people. That is, there is deep-seated religious and cultural diversity;
- (3) Apart from rich mineral resources, the zone is also endowed with massive land and grazing activities, explaining the massive influx of people from other areas to this zone;
- (4) In terms of development, the zone is one of the least developed in spite of the location of the Federal Capital close to the zone;
- (5) The zone has a very large pool of ex-servicemen, some of who are not gainfully employed;
- (6) The people of this zone are known to be hospitable, accommodating and peaceful. It is indeed worrisome that such a people could suddenly be engaged in frequent violent clashes (NOA, 2002).

Plateau State especially, has a lot of features, which attract a large population and support various economic activities (Mohammed, 2005). It is the discovery of tin and columbite on the plateau by the British that led to the conscription of labourers from all the provinces of Northern Nigeria to work in the tin mines. The high fertility of the land equally attracted farmers from distant places to engage in the production of various crops. The climatic situation of the plateau, which is near temperate along with the abundant water and pasture led to the flocking of

livestock rearers to the area. The absence of diseases which are detrimental to the rearing of flocks led to a heavy concentration of livestock usually reared by the Fulani on the plateau. The temperate climate of the Jos Plateau coupled with its natural tourist's resources attracted Nigerians and foreigners alike to the Plateau for vacation, permanent settlement or retirement. The location of Jos as a transport node served by an airport and rail link, to the north and south of the country as well as road transport network to different parts of the country facilitates commerce.

Plateau State, including its capital Jos, is inhabited by both Christians and Muslims. While Christians are in the majority, the Muslims constitute a significant minority (Human Rights Watch, 2001). It is home to several ethnic groups, which fall into two broad categories: those who consider themselves "indigenes" or original inhabitants of the area-among them the Birom, the Afizere and the Anaguta and those who are termed "non-indigenes" or "settlers," composed in large part of Hausa (the majority ethnic group in Northern Nigeria), but also of southern Igbo, Yoruba and other ethnic groups. Some of the "settlers," notably the Hausa, have been living in the area for several generations. Neither the "indigenes" nor the "settlers" are monolithic in religious terms, but Christianity tends to be the dominant religion among the indigenes, while Islam is the dominant religion among the settlers (HRW, 2001).

Egwu (2009) acknowledged that ethnic minority consciousness in Jos and Plateau State, has since the 1970s, been on a dramatic rise. This consciousness has been accentuated by the systematic construction of ethnic minority political identity in the "Middle Belt" based on the lived experience in the erstwhile Northern Nigerian and the general perception of the Nigerian state. It is a consciousness based on the perception that the indigenous ethnic minorities had long been dominated by the Hausa/Fulani community in the control of commerce and politics in which the former had been reduced to spectators. This is apparently a reference to the fact that the Hausa/Fulani community has always occupied a pre-eminent position in the social and economic life of the city owing to its early start. Even though this domination is not limited to the Hausa/Fulani community, the other groups such as the Yoruba and the Ibo do not stake similar political claims as the former. The additional perception by the 'Middle Belt' elites that successive military regimes were firmly under the control of Hausa/Fulani elements and the 'reckless' manner in which military officers of Plateau origins were executed in the aftermath of the assassination of General Murtala Mohammed in 1976 contributed to the building of anti-Hausa/Fulani sentiments in the Jos Plateau (Egwu, 2009).

Identity politics at the plateau has manifested itself in the political calculus between "indigenes" and "non-indigenes", involving a fierce competition for political posts. In 1994, there were the first signs of violence and

attacks on religious institutions following the appointment of a Muslim as sole administrator of Jos North local government area. There were tensions over other public appointments in 1996 and again in 1998. The case, which contributed most directly to the outbreak of hostilities in September 2001, was the appointment of the poverty eradication coordinator in Jos North in August, a few weeks before the crisis. The appointment of Mukhtar Muhammad, a Hausa, was controversial: in December 1998, during the transition to civilian rule, he had been forced to stand down as chairman of the newly-elected Jos North local government after he was accused of falsifying his credentials. His subsequent appointment to the coveted post of poverty eradication coordinator was seen by some as a provocation and was strongly opposed by Christian groups. This singular issue became the *casus belli* for the 2001 crisis that became the scene of mass killing and destruction of property.

The 2008 Jos North Local Government Crisis, even though may not reflect a radical shift from the 2001 crisis, still mirrors the extent and level of struggle for control of political and by extension economic resources in a prebendal, decadent and unproductive African state. In this crisis, what began as an electoral dispute quickly snowballed into an ethnic and religious conflagration with grave consequences for life and property. It stemmed from a longstanding battle for control of political power and economic rivalry between different ethnic groups and between those labeled "indigenous" or "non-indigenous" inhabitants of the area. As grievances built up over time, appeal to religious sentiments was used by both sides to manipulate popular emotions and eventually to inflame the situation to a level where it could no longer be controlled. Christians and Muslims, "indigenes" and "non-indigenes," became both perpetrators and victims. For this paper, we shall attempt an understudy of the 2008 crisis within the broad remit of identity politics.

Identity politics as a theoretical framework

Identity politics as a political concept refers to the political activity of various ethnic, religious and cultural groupings in demanding greater economic, social and political rights or self-determination. Identity politics claim to represent and seek to advance the interests of particular groups in society, the members of which often share and unite around common experiences of actual or perceived social and economic injustice, relative to the wider society of which they form part and exist in. In this way, the identity of the oppressed group gives rise to a political basis around which they may unite and begin to assert themselves in society (Zweiri and Zahid, 2007). Identity politics means more than the sole recognition of ethnic, religious or cultural identity, in fact identity politics seeks to carry these identities forward, beyond mere self-identification, to a political framework based upon that

identity. For example, Modern Jewish Zionism was originally secular (and marginal) within the Jewish community, but became driven by its own form of identity politics upon the formation of the State of Israel in 1948. Like wise identity politics played a major role in the creation of the Central Asian states in the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet Union.

Nigeria is a plural society per excellence. It is characterized as a deeply divided State in which major political issues are vigorously and violently contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious and regional divisions in the country (Smyth and Robinson, 2001). The issues that generate the fiercest contestation include those that are considered fundamental to the existence and legitimacy of the state, over which competing groups tend to adopt exclusionary, winner-take-all strategies. These include the control of state power, resource allocation and citizenship. As a consequence, deeply divided states tend to be fragile and unstable because almost by definition, there are fewer points of convergence and consensus among the constituent groups than are required to effectively mitigate or contain the centrifugal forces that tear the society apart (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

In such societies, disintegration, secession, civil strife, civil war, minority agitation and violent conflicts, all of which would normally be considered aberrant to 'normal' state formation, are quite common threats or actual occurrences in divided states. It is not surprising therefore that divided states have devised some of the most innovative and delicate systems of government. Most states practice some variant of the federal solution, with the emphasis on political accommodation and inter-segmental balance. This emphasis has made it necessary and expedient to adopt instrumentalities that mitigate the effects of majoritarianism, as well as promote inclusion, equity and distributive justice between the different salient groups. Despite the precautions taken, divided states remain perennially unstable and many survive on the brink of collapse and disintegration (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972), as the case of Nigeria and other African states show. By virtue of its complex web of politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts and instability, Nigeria can be rightly described as one of the most deeply divided states in Africa (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). From its inception as a colonial state, Nigeria has faced a perennial crisis of territorial or state legitimacy, which has often challenged its efforts at national cohesion, democratization, stability and economic transformation (Kirk-Greene, 1971; Maier, 2000; Melson and Wolpe, 1971; Soyinka, 1997). The high point of the crisis seems to have been the civil war in the late 1960s, which ensued shortly after independence in 1960. However, rather than mellow down, conflicts in Nigeria correlate positively with modernization and have become more or less pervasive and intense in the post-civil war period in

Nigeria.

However, as noted by Osaghae and Suberu (2005), instead of adopting a simplistic analysis of the implications of diversity in Nigeria and other countries, diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for conflict. In other words, the very fact that a country has different ethnic, communal, religious and racial groups does not make division and conflicts inevitable. And for that matter, empirical evidence shows that division and conflict are not dependent on the degree of diversity, as some of the most diverse countries (for example, Switzerland, Belgium, Malaysia and Tanzania) enjoy relative peace and stability, while some of the least diverse are the most unstable or violent (for example, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi and perhaps, Sri Lanka).

Thus, Fearon and Laitin (2003) have claimed that “a greater degree of ethnic or religious diversity... by itself” is not “a major and direct cause” of violent civil conflict. Rather, they see violent civil conflict as associated with “conditions that favour insurgency,” including “poverty, which marks financially and bureaucratically weak states” (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). Commentators have also identified other factors that intervene between diversity and conflict to include the role of formal and informal institutions for conflict regulation, the different sizes of groups relative to the national arena and the extent to which different identities (ethnic, regional, religious, class, etc) overlap with, or crosscut, each other (Horowitz, 1985; Posner, 2004; Weingast, 1997). We can therefore confidently assert that there are a set of intervening variables between diversity and conflicts that sets the parameters for identity politics and conflict.

Our framework situates identity as the intersection between group and individual identity and broadly defines identity following Osaghae and Suberu (2005), as any group attribute that provides recognition or definition, reference, affinity, coherence and meaning for individual members of the group, acting individually or collectively. There are at least two approaches that have been used to capture and analyze the nature of Nigeria’s identity diversity. One is the classification based on Geertz’s (1963) cited in Osaghae and Suberu (2005) famous distinction between primordial ties which are basically ascriptive and based on the “givens” of life (tribe, kinship and ethnicity among others) and civil ties, which hinge on industrial society-type aggregations like class, political party affiliation, interest group membership and so on. Primordial ties are prevalent in the ‘new states’ of Africa and Asia. Their resilience has made it difficult for the integrative revolution, which involves the erosion of primordial ties by civil ties. The problem with Geertz’s scheme, however, is that by presenting civil ties and primordial ties as mutually exclusive categories, it creates a false dichotomy between them. In reality, there is no way the prevalence of supposedly primordial ties like ethnicity and kinship can be understood in isolation of class and other civil ties. This is because, as adherents of

the constructivist school of ethnicity argue, identities based on the so-called “givens of life” are constructed and not natural (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). It is also not true that class and other civil ties are equality-oriented especially where they are recursive with ethnicity and other supposedly primordial ties. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, Geertz’s distinction provides a useful schema that provides a guidepost for our analysis.

Another approach relates to what is essentially a conflict-based perspective, in which only identities that form the basis of political demand mobilization and action, or so-called politicized identities, may be regarded as salient and relevant (Rothschild, 1981). While this approach has the merit of focusing attention on active identities, it is mistaken in the exclusion of identities that are not politically active. This is first because by the nature of their invocation, identities tend to be situational, that is salient based on the situation at hand. As it were, the individual has an array of identities that he/she can decide to adopt or play up depending on the perception of the situation, including the identity adopted by competing actors. Although the situationality thesis is more easily observed at the individual level, it also exists at the collective level. Thus, members of a group can decide to identify themselves as religious rather than ‘ethnic’ - as groups in Northern Nigeria do from time to time - depending on the level and scope of conflict. Indeed, as the adherents of the constructivist school of ethnicity have argued, identities are constructed. Second, like volcanoes, identities that are dormant today can become active tomorrow. For example, gender has certainly become an active identity marker in Nigeria today due to several local and global factors, yet three decades ago gender-based identity would have been considered dormant. Finally, identities have a way of being intricately inter-connected and mutually reinforcing, meaning it is unlikely that any one identity can exist in a pure form.

Nigeria presents a complex of individual as well as crisscrossing and recursive identities of which the ethnic, religious, regional and sub-ethnic (communal) are the most salient and the main bases for violent conflicts in the country. This is both from the point of view of the identities most commonly assumed by citizens especially for political purposes and the identities often implicated in day-to-day contestations over citizenship as well as competitions and conflicts over resources and privileges. To emphasize the inter-connectedness of ethnic, regional and religious identities and the fact that they are often mutually reinforcing, they are sometimes compounded or hyphenated as ethno-regional and ethno-religious. The latter references have historical, geographical and political origins. They evolved from the old regional structures of the Nigerian federation, where identities were shaped by leaders of the dominant ethnic groups – Hausa/Fulani in the Northern region (predominately Muslim), Igbo in the Eastern region and Yoruba in the

Western region – that exercised some form of hegemonic control over the regions. As a result, ethno-regional identities were and continue to be, used as shorthand references to the dominant ethnic groups acting as regional ‘hegemons’. This is the sense in which conflicts among the three dominant groups are generally referred to as ethno-regional. With the division of the country into six semi-official geo-political zones in the late 1990s, which not only have ethnic referents but have also gained currency in the political lexicon, the usage of ethno-regional categories is likely to expand but so far the old regional references remain dominant.

Of fundamental importance to our framework is the extent to which ‘primordial’ identities have gained wide currency and greater political significance, especially in contestations over citizenship, those referred to as ‘indigenes’, ‘non-indigenes’, ‘migrants’ and ‘settlers’. These categories have ethnic, communal, religious and regional origins and have evolved from an entrenched system of discriminatory practices in which non-indigenes, migrants and settlers are exclusionary denied equal access to the resources, rights and privileges of a locality, community, town or state, to which ‘sons and daughters of the soil’ have first or exclusionary access. The system produces and sustains a hierarchical, unequal and ranked system of citizenship that has provoked violent conflicts all over the country and goes to the very heart of the ‘National Question’. Although these identities have grown in significance in the recent past, which obviously has to do with the aggravation of the ‘National Question’, they have deep historical roots in pre-colonial patterns of inter-group relations and the discriminatory practices and ethnic inequalities entrenched by both the colonial regime and continued by post-independence administrations. These have cumulatively provoked various forms of self-determination agitation by different groups (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

The final set of identities identified by Osaghae and Suberu (2005) falls under Geertz’s category of civil ties those distinguished by their non-territorial character. The main identities here include class, gender and a host of generational identities, of which the most important is youth. Class interests underlie supposedly ethnic mobilization and demands, but at the same time, ethnic divisions have stymied the process of class solidarity (Otiite, 1979). Gender and youth have also emerged as critical and active identities, especially in the struggle for rights and privileges. What is more, gender and youth identities in many parts of the country have strong ethnic complexions, especially in the Niger Delta region where violent minority nationalism has been on the rise since the 1990s.

In the next paragraph, focus will be on what may be called primary identities that provide the most basic divisions or cleavages from which other identities take their cues and are constructed. Broadly, the basic identities are ethnicity, religion, regionalism, class, gender and youth.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is generally regarded as the most basic and politically salient identity in Nigeria. This claim is supported by the fact that both in competitive and non-competitive settings, Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of their ethnic affinities than any other identity. Indeed, according to the authoritative 2000 survey on “Attitudes to Democracy and Markets in Nigeria”, Lewis and Bratton (2000) conclude that ethnicity “is demonstrably the most conspicuous group identity in Nigeria”. Their survey found that almost one-half (48.2%) of Nigerians chose to label themselves with an ethnic identity, compared to almost one-third (28.4%) who opted for class identities and 21.0% who chose a religious identity (Lewis and Bratton, 2000). In essence, close to two-thirds of the population see themselves as members of primordial ethnic, regional and religious groups. In other words, “Nigerians tend to cluster more readily around the cultural solidarities of kin than the class solidarities of the workplace” (Lewis and Bratton, 2000). What is more, “religious and ethnic identities are more fully formed, more holistic and more strongly felt than class identities” as evidenced in the fact that “whereas those who identify with religious and ethnic communities are almost universally proud of their group identities...those who see themselves as members of a social class are somewhat more equivocal about their pride” (Lewis and Bratton, 2000). All of this is not surprising, considering that ethnic formations are perhaps the most historically enduring behavioural units in the country and were further reinforced by the colonial and post-colonial regimes. In a major critique of modernization theory, Robert Melson and Howard Wolpe asserted that, “inter-group conflict is seldom a product of simple cultural diversity and in the Nigerian case, there is little that is ‘traditional’ about the contemporary pattern of political divisions. On the contrary, Nigeria’s political crisis is traceable directly to the widening of social horizons and to the process of modernization at work within the national boundaries”. The articles in the volume edited by Melson and Wolpe demonstrate that rather than eliminating ethnicity modernization managed to create and reinforce it (Melson and Wolpe, 1971).

Religion

Religion ranks only next to ethnic identity. Yet, as noted by Osaghae and Suberu (2005), in parts of the North commonly referred to as the ‘core’ or ‘Hausa-Fulani North’ - which is roughly coterminous with those states that adopted Sharia law in the Fourth Republic. Religious identity is more critical than ethnic identity and in fact serves to activate ethnicity. Thus, among Nigeria’s two largest ethnic groupings, the (southern) Yoruba were considerably more prone to define themselves ethnically..

.than were the (northern) Hausa-Fulani...who rather opted for a religious (Muslim) identity” (Lewis and Bratton, 2000). Religious identities in Nigeria are usually classified into three; Christian, Muslim and Traditional.

Ethno-religious clashes

Partly because of their tendency to spill over from their initial theatres into other localities, states, or even regions of the federation, ethno-religious clashes have proven to be the most violent instances of inter-group crisis in Nigeria. They have occurred mainly in the Middle-Belt and cultural borderline states of the Muslim North, where Muslim Hausa-Fulani groups have been pitted against non-Muslim ethnic groups in a “dangerous convergence of religious and ethnic fears and animosities...[in which it] is often difficult to differentiate between religious and ethnic conflicts as the dividing line between the two is very thin” (IDEA, 2000). The major examples of violent ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have included the Kafanchan-Kaduna crises in 1987 and 1999, the Tiv-Jukun crises in 1998, Zangon-Kataf riots of 1992, 2001 Tafawa Balewa clashes in 1991, 1995 and 2000, the Kaduna Sharia riots of 2000 and the Jos riots of 2001. Although no exact figures of casualties are available, the Kaduna riots of 2000 and the Jos riots of 2001, each claimed several hundreds of lives and generated violent ripple effects beyond Kaduna and Jos, respectively (HRW, 2001).

Inter-ethnic violence

Like ethno-religious violence, recent inter-ethnic clashes in Nigeria have also been particularly combustible especially when they have involved relatively large groups like the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv, Urhobo or Ijaw. The major cases of inter-ethnic violence in Nigeria since the late 1980s have included the Tiv-Jukun conflicts in Taraba and Benue states, the three-cornered Urhobo-Ijaw-Itsekiri clashes in Warri, Delta state, the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba clashes in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo and Kano states and the recurrent clashes between Hausa-Fulani and Igbo groups in Kano State, which have acquired an ethno-religious complexion since the Hausa-Fulani are Muslims and the Igbos are mainly Christians. While the Tiv-Jukun, Urhobo-Ijaw-Itsekiri and Hausa/Fulani-Igbo clashes are long-running conflicts that have erupted periodically during the 1980s up until the present moment, the Hausa/Fulani-Yoruba clashes took place mainly in 1999 - 2000 in the wake of the transition from Northern-dominated military rule to a Yoruba-led civilian administration.

Class, gender and youth

Class represents yet another important expression of

identity politics in Nigeria. Although the existence of this class is the subject of a debate because, as some argue, the middle class was wiped out by the regime of structural adjustment and authoritarianism that encouraged massive brain drain and pauperised members of the class (Olukoshi, 1993). As rightly argued by Osaghae and Suberu (2005), although class categories exist, in terms of consciousness of belonging to classes and acting on that basis, classes are fragile and underdeveloped in Nigeria. This explains why the term ‘elite’ is sometimes preferred to ‘class’. It is, however, generally agreed that the Nigerian elite is divided along ethnic, regional and religious lines and that this is a major factor in the underdevelopment of class forces, including working class consciousness. As Otite (1979) puts it, “the attachment to the exclusive symbols of ethnicity weakens class cultures as well as elite organization and occupational collegueship”. Notwithstanding such structural weaknesses, however, both the elite and the non-elite have proven capable of class-based mobilization and action, especially when their constitutive interests are threatened. In their study on “Ethnic Groups and Conflict in Nigeria”, Isumonah and Gaskia (2001) also note that “in virtually all the conflicts, the role of ethnic entrepreneurs who mobilizes ethnic grievances in pursuit of their material interest has been decisive”. Politicians, businessmen and youth leaders have been implicated in virtually all the conflicts. Usually the aim has been to mobilize ethnic grievances to achieve personal individual objects, which are oftentimes even subversive of collective communal interests.

Gender and youth identities have grown in importance over the last two decades, partly due to the strategic roles played by women and youths in the democratization struggles and partly due to the expansion of political space. However, a large part of the emergent youth identities is well entrenched in ethnicity and communalism, having emerged from redress-seeking struggles by aggrieved ethnic groups. This is evident in the activities of new militant ethnic youth movements like the Odua Peoples Congress, the Arewa Peoples Congress, the Ijaw Youth Council, the Egbesu Boys of Africa, the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force, the Bakassi Boys, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra, the Hisba or Sharia Vigilante groups in the Muslim North and the militias of the Tiv, Jukun and other ethnic groups in Nigeria’s many conflict zones. This ethnicisation and militarization of Nigerian youth culture has been promoted significantly by: widespread socio-economic frustration and alienation (including relatively high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment); the legacy of state repression and impunity since 1984; and the sheer failure or inability of the national police and security agencies to fulfill their basic obligations to maintain law and order or protect lives and properties.

The same can be said about gender identities which

are mostly pursued through religious, ethnic and regional structures. They also mostly belong to mainstream elitist and professional struggles for equality, representation and participation. On the one hand gender and sectional identities are often linked together in the construction of political claims in the Nigerian setting. Many Nigerian women have channeled their demands for recognition and participation through primordial organizations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the previous paragraphs we described the historical scene and theoretical framework that guided our research. To investigate identity politics and the 2008 Jos North LG crisis, the study began by posing five research questions:

RQ1: What is the mix between ethnicity, religion and politics in attenuating social conflict in the Jos North LG Area?

RQ2: What evidence, if any, set the crisis apart from the 2001 and other crises in Jos?

RQ3: What role did the federal and state governments play in complicating the crises and exacerbating its scope and magnitude?

RQ4: Does the involvement of security operatives in the conflict differ from earlier involvements in other crises in Jos? Can it be said that they promptly responded to the crisis?

RQ5: Does the alleged presence of mercenaries from within and outside the country and the use of sophisticated weapons signal a threat to the security of the State and the country as a whole?

METHODS

Since the research questions at the heart of the study were concerned with perceptions, loosely structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method. The decision implies a constructionist approach aimed at discovering, as Silverman (2001) said, how subjects actively create meaning.

Interview subjects were selected from among groups of 136 religious, media, educational, security and civil society organizations who responded to a state-wide probability-sample survey assessing perceptions of the role of identity construction in Jos crises. So while such a limited number of qualitative participants preclude any claim of generalisability of the data gleaned from the interviews, the purposive sampling of the interview subjects is the most appropriate for the aim of this project, which is to explore the subjects' perception of identity and conflict, as a basis for contributing to identity framework. As Arber (2001) notes, such a purposive sampling is idea to "generate theory and a wider understanding of the social processes or social action" (Arber, 2001:61). As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) explain, the theoretical justification for interview methodology rests on the active selection of "people" over "population." That is, individuals are deliberately chosen as subjects for their competency in "narrative production" that serve to illuminate social context, interdependency and construction of reality. To ensure that interviews encompass

the widest possible variety of identity perspectives, selection of subjects proceeded so that the broadest range of ethnic, educational and religious backgrounds were sought while simultaneously maximizing the use of travel time and expenses. According to Kvale (1996), the number of most interview studies is around 10 to 15, representing an attempt to guard against the merely anecdotal while allowing sufficient focus to "investigate in detail the relationship between the individual and the situation" (Kvale, 1996). While the limitations of geographic distribution of respondents, security challenges, individual consent and availability are acknowledged, the selection of interview subjects for this project also had the aim of achieving a diversity of subjects based on gender, age and length of stay.

The interview data proved to be crucial in making sense of how identity politics is implicated in crises in the Jos Plateau. The interview were relatively structured and focused on the respondents' personalized perceptions of identity questions to better assess the latitude they possessed in responding to such questions. However, it is imperative to stress that interviews were not limited to survey respondents; in most cases, having arranged interviews with journalists, civil society organizations, especially religious groups, the researcher was able to be introduced to and "handed off" to a number of other groups.

Ethnicity, religion and politics

An electoral misadventure

In his response to an advertorial in the Nation newspaper on "Jos Crises" written by Reverend Sam T. Alaha, Ahmed (2008) argued that the Jos North LG crisis was triggered by political differences surrounding the Jos North LG elections, but eventually hijacked by xenophobic and misguided elements to complete the annihilation and extermination of Hausa/Fulani and indeed the Muslim community in Plateau State, a process according to him which began since September, 2001.

This claim, representing the shared position of the Hausa/Fulani community traced the root causes of the conflict to the deliberate and systematic government policies aimed at disenfranchising and discriminating against some segments of the society particularly those of Hausa/Fulani extraction.

According to the view of the indigenes, the indigenous communities, mostly Beroms, Anagutas and Afizeres in Jos North were completely sidelined in state creation arrangement. While the Beroms were ceded to Jos South, the Afizeres to the Jos East, the Anagutas remained largely in Jos North. The indigenous communities believe the Hausas were able to get what they wanted- "political control" as they have an upper hand in subsequent state and federal elections. To the indigenes, the creation of the local government under the military government led by a Moslem was intended to disenfranchise them.

In the past state elections, the Hausas have won in various polls conducted in the State House of Assembly elections in Jos North, while the locals always take charge of Jos North-West. In the federal elections, the Hausas have dominated in the federal constituency of Bassa/Jos North. This arrangement made the Hausas to believe that they were hegemon in the place and that going by the ethno-religious configuration of the area, they would always win at Jos-North local government election. A journalist with Plateau State Television Authority has said:

"The conflict in Jos has been created by the military government in their attempt to placate the Hausa/Fulani extraction, by making them hegemon in the geo-political milieu at the plateau. The Hausa/Fulani ethnic group had realized its social status in Jos for some time, without necessary making any claim or struggling towards

capturing state power. However, when the military started orchestrating its plan for the Hausa/Fulani to capture local power, it was inevitable that what will follow would be years of conflict”.

Our respondents admitted that local polls became the flashpoint of the crisis. Elections in Jos are often violent and crowded affairs, explaining why there have been no local elections in Jos since the country's military rulers gave way to democracy in 1999. The Jos LGA has a total of twenty wards, out of which the Hausa-Fulani are most pronounced in seven. The outstanding thirteen are inhabited by the Beroms, Afizere, Anguta, Buji, Igbo, Yoruba, Jukun and other ethnic groups (Alamu, 2008). It was the declaration of the victory in Jos for the ruling People Democratic Party widely perceived as mainly a Christian party that set off the chain of events that led to the violence. Backers of the defeated All Nigerians People's Party, a mainly Muslim Hausa-Fulani outfit, protested that the vote had been rigged. During the election, the PDP Chairmanship aspirant, Timothy Buba polled 92,907 votes to beat his closest rival from ANPP, Aminu Baba with 72,890 votes. The PDP also won 16 out of the 17 Local Governments. It was the alleged rigging at the newly created controversial collation centre at Kabong, Ali Kazaure, which triggered the crisis. It must be mentioned that Jos North is the commercial nerve centre of Plateau State, making the LG Chairman a powerful political force, as this interview fragments shows:

“The crisis in Jos is certainly a political one, as people and groups jostle for power and control of the Jos North Local Government Council. Let me tell you that whoever occupies this office has a say in the affairs of the state. This place is a stage where political parties and ethnic and religious groups try to show their worth (...). The hottest competition at the moment however is between the PDP and the ANPP. Sincerely, this role of ethnic and religious mobilization is just a chameleon tactics to ensure that political bigwigs in the state continue to control economic and political power”.

However, most of the respondents also blamed the escalation of the crisis on the government of Plateau State and to the insensitivity of the Plateau State Independent Electoral Commission (PLASIEC) for announcing the result of the election at the height of the crisis. They noted that the Commission should have allowed the situation to calm down before announcing the election results (Bolowale, 2008).

This section further begs the question of how religion has been implicated in the 2008 Jos North Local Government crisis. If the crisis was certainly only a political issue, how were churches, mosques and clergy attacked and killed? Why were politicians and political party officers not attacked and killed if it was a political conflict? Why were the big premises and property of innocent civilians destroyed? The response according to Pam (2008) meant that the crisis was not political but a premeditated act under the guise of election. As Modupe Ajayi, a Pentecostal cleric mentions:

“I have followed the crises in Jos for some time now. A lot of people argue that violence and mayhem in this place is a political issue. However, based on findings and anecdotal evidence, I can confidently assert that this crisis is a religious matter. When churches are burnt down, mosques are destroyed and religious symbols are embellished, how can you say that this issue is only political? My assessment of recent happenings in Jos shows that religion has become the most potent and lethal weapon for mobilizing people to not only protect their religion, but even to control the machinery of the government”.

In his paper entitled “Religion and State Failure in Nigeria”, Kukah (2000) has shown that the persistence of religious crises in Nigeria has very little if anything to do with the religious colouration of the leader. What can be said is that the crisis of legitimacy of leaders themselves has meant that religion has been constantly employed for selfish ends by politicians to make up for their legitimacy. The uses of the instrumentalities of religion and ethnicity have succeeded in endangering the crisis in Jos because the systematic impoverishment of the people in the area has made them too vulnerable to ethnic and religious manipulation.

The recruitment of mercenaries and use of sophisticated weapons

An interesting feature of the 2008 Jos North Crisis has been the sophistication in the weapons used and the recruitment of mercenaries both within and outside the country. Most people interviewed admitted that the crisis was not only premeditated, but the weapons used pointed to the fact that the crisis was meticulously planned. They were also allegation that hundreds of armed mercenaries sporting fake police and military uniforms were apprehended by security operatives during the crisis. The fact that the mercenaries were imported either from neighbouring countries or from states adjoining Plateau State underscored the fact that the crisis was premeditated, pre-planned and dastardly executed with a view to causing mindless mayhem and tainting or influencing the outcome of the election in Jos North Local Government Area. There were also serious allegations of complicity on the part of some members of the armed forces and security agencies from the two sides to the conflict. The quantum of arms that was used by both sides also pointed to some measure of planning and stockpiling, which raises national security concerns (Omuora and Akhaine, 2009). A spokesman for an NGO explained:

“Crises in Jos are more difficult to isolate and contain than any other in Nigeria...When armed forces and security operatives take side instead of being neutral, there is certainly a tendency towards polarization, which further breeds more violence (...) A major issue in this conflict is the belief that people were imported from within and outside the country to orchestrate the conflict. While I cannot authoritatively state that mercenaries were brought in, the weapons used here admits to a process of arduous planning. I feel and I also think that this is the position of other civil society organizations, that the Federal Government should investigate this claim”.

Related to the above two salient observations, was the role of intelligence reports and security forces in the crisis. The Governor of Plateau State, Jonah Jang had alleged that the security intelligence provided to him explicitly indicated that the political climate of Jos was favourable for local polls (Okocha and Buhari, 2008). Furthermore, a non-governmental organization, Human Rights Writers Association (HRWA) blamed the crisis on the failure of security intelligence by all relevant security agencies in the country. Governor Jang noted that he was fed with a wrong report indicating that all was well while another report was sent to the Presidency that the situation was not conducive for the conduct of the election in Jos North. The Governor also mentioned that he was confronted with the report, which had suggested that he was warned that all was not well with the area before the election erupted (Owuamamam, 2008)

While it remains to be determined the falsity or otherwise of the misguided intelligence reports, the fact that a true assessment of the situation would have averted the conflict leaves much to be desired. In the crisis in Jos, more than 500 people died, 7,000 were displaced and property worth billions of naira was destroyed.

One particular challenge in the use of mercenaries and sophisticated weapons has been the involvement of the federal government in the crisis through the setting up of a Tribunal of Inquiry, a fact-finding panel whose report is expected to guide against the reoccurrence of further conflict in the area. While the Plateau State Government has questioned the jurisdiction of the panel, it remains to be argued based on the opinions of respondents from both sides that the President has moral and ethical responsibility to all Nigerians irrespective of where they reside. The tragedy in Jos claimed hundreds of innocent lives. It has happened several times in the past and there are indications that it will happen again if nothing is done to address the problem. The conclusion drawn from the respondents is that, while it was not out of tone for the state government to file a case at the supreme court to determine whether the federal government had the right to set up this panel, there was an agreement that the quantum of stockpiling of arms and the involvement of mercenaries raises serious and grave security concerns that the federal government is more positioned to address.

Response of the security personnel

Compared to other crisis of similar magnitude in the plateau, the 2008 Jos North Local Government crisis was said to have witnessed relatively timely intervention of security personnel. However, as with other crisis in Jos, preemptive response from the police, the State Security Service (SSS) and the armed forces which would have help reduce the scale and magnitude of the crisis in terms of lost of lives and properties was absent. The commissioner of police was strongly criticized for his failure to prevent the crisis. Even though the state commissioner of police has been redeployed, there have been calls from civil society organizations for him to give account of what happened; the efforts he made in dousing the tension, etc., because people had always speculated that the local government election would be violent given the way elections had been conducted in the country. Respondents also cited the cancellation of March 2008 local government election as enough signals that the police ought to have prepared for the rescheduled polls (Adegboyega, 2008). The police on their part responded that they could not cope with the situation because majority of both regular and mobile policemen were mobilized to other local government areas for elections. The respondents generally agreed that the police did not deploy sufficient efforts to either prevent or limit the violence. The President of Nigeria also ordered military deployment to the affected areas, having consulted with the security chiefs as well as the Governor. The State Governor, Jonah Jang equally imposed a curfew on Jos North Council after he toured the scenes of the crisis. These efforts have finally helped in containing the tension.

Accusations and counter accusations between the federal and state governments

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the 2008 Jos North crisis was the conflict between President Umaru Yar'Adua and Governor Jonah Jang. This heated conflict resulted in a crisis of blame and buck-passing. Following the end of the violence, the seed of distrust had been sown. The Plateau State Government had wanted to swear in "elected" local government officials before the Presidency intervened. In the same week after the violence, the state governor, Jonah Jang's request to see the president was turned down. There was also the debate as who should be blamed for the slow response of the security officials in quelling the violence. Even though the governor is regarded as the chief security officer of the state, it remains obvious that the security forces are controlled by the president and not the governor. The Governor, therefore can

not be said to have any explicit powers and control over security officials.

A major fallout from the accusations and counter accusations has been the setting up of four separate probe panels to look into the remote and immediate causes of the crisis and to proffer tangible solutions to avert a reoccurrence. The federal government panel is led by General Emmanuel Abisoye, while the state government panel is led by Justice Bola Ajibola. Both houses of the National Assembly have also set up panels. An interesting issue here is that, the constitution and composition of the panels have become more important than the objective of setting them up. The argument as to who has the right to constitute a panel has become an issue of its own while the causes of the crisis are left unaddressed. What the above shows is that there is little trust between the state and federal government over the crisis. Statements made by representatives of different sections of the community in Jos and elsewhere also take either the federal or the state position.

Justifying the position of the president in setting up an inquiry panel, Mr. Olusegun Adeniyi, the Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity argued:

"President Yar'adua's interest in the investigations into the Jos crisis is simply to unravel the cause of the dispute and prevent future occurrence in the state and elsewhere. In as much as the President respected the principle of federal structure, he was mindful of his responsibility to all Nigerian's irrespective of where they reside. The belligerent posture of the Plateau State Government is rather unfortunate. But the President is more interested in the cause of peace than in treading words with anyone (Omuora and Akhaine, 2009)".

On the other hand in a statement entitled: "Nigeria Needs President for Both Christians and Muslims", the Plateau State Christian Consultative Forum" Coordinator, Bishop Anderson Pam Jok argued:

"We are compelled to raise this alarm because of our dwindling faith in the leadership of President Umaru Yar'Adua who last May 29, 2007 swore to protect the integrity of all irrespective of tribe, religion, interest and location. We therefore invite the world to focus on Jos crisis critically and join us to ask questions of commitment in Mr. President's avowed management of the issue on ground. The President, with his most powerful wife, the First Lady, Mrs. Turai Yar'Adua, has deliberately avoided the Governor of the state (Jonah Jang) by shunning his entreaties for no stated reason. Governor Jang, just like the President is our elected leader and he is the man on the ground in the state who will rob mind with any other willing authority including the President on how best peace can be achieved. Why is Mr. President shunning the Governor and what peace can that help to achieve? (Omuora and Akhaine, 2009)".

The Northern Christian Elders Forum (NOCEF) also accused the Federal Government of taking sides in the conflict. The elders said that the attitude of Federal Government officials, including the wife of the president and the membership of the committee set up by the House of Representatives, clearly showed bias against Christians. According to the Chairman of the Forum:

"Virtually all the Federal Government officials who visited Jos, who are Muslims including the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Danbazzau and the wife of the president, only visited the Central Mosque and places where displaced Muslims were being camped in Jos without visiting displaced Christians in their camps. They did not even

have the courtesy to visit the governor who is the chief security officer of the State nor the traditional ruler of Jos, the Gbong Gwom Jos, Da Victor Pam”.

Fundamentally, these respective positions, which also share ethno-religious undertones explicitly underscores the fact that the lack of trust between the two tiers of government may stall the process of genuine search for peace and reconciliation in the affected community and Jos as a whole. If the federal and state governments cannot agree on the principles to end this cycle of violence in Jos, it will amount to an act of diminished responsibility.

Conclusion

To conclude our paper we summarize our findings around the questions we formulated for research questions and design.

(1) The longstanding grievances fuelled by modernization and economic downturn together with democratisation has brought to fore the contentious issue of “indigene” and “settlers” in various African countries including Nigeria. Till date, both the government and other stakeholders, including the civil society have not done much in addressing the longstanding grievances of the various communities concerned, nor has it attempted to find a solution to the problems caused by the notion of “indigeneity” which is at the root of many of these conflicts. The 2008 Jos North LG crisis also falls within the broad remit of competition and bitterness over perceived advantages and disadvantages between “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” populations, as illustrated above. Fundamental flaws in Nigeria's constitution have still not been addressed, despite many appeals from civil society groups and others who have pointed out that by reforming the constitution, or at least by instituting a process for consultation to engage different communities in its review, the government could go some way toward putting a stop to inter-communal violence. The legitimacy of the current constitution is hotly disputed, not least because it was drafted without consultation with the Nigerian people, under a military government. In recognition of the multi-ethnic character of Nigeria (HRW, 2001), the 1979 constitution (which forms the basis for the 1999 constitution currently in force) introduced the concept of “federal character.” The federal character provision was intended to give all Nigerians a sense of stake in the government, as well as a sense of belonging and representation. The absence of a clear, official definition of “indigeneity” has caused many problems. In practice, the concept of “indigeneity” or of being “from a state” has been applied and interpreted in inconsistent ways in different parts of Nigeria, often not reflecting the theory or the spirit of the constitution. In some states, claims to “indigeneity” have been used to give specific groups certain rights based not on their Nigerian citizenship but on their ancestors' place of origin within Nigeria. Some political groups have taken advantage of the vagueness

surrounding the definitions to marginalise other groups, leading to further grievances. It is based on this analysis that the Jos North LG crisis is to be situated. Here, as in other crises at the plateau, it is the strain between “indigenes” and “settlers” prettified with ethnicity and religion that remains the springboard for crisis in Jos.

(2) The use of foreign mercenaries from Chad and Niger as well as internal mercenaries from neighbouring states adjoining Jos and the use of sophisticated weapons clearly show that the crisis represents a threat to national security. The timely intervention of the federal government into the crisis should therefore be commended. However, the trading of blame between the presidency and the Plateau State Government leaves much to be desired. Genuine partnership between all tiers of government that transcend ethnic, religious and regional affinity remains the only path toward concerted efforts at reaching the root cause of the crisis and finding lasting solutions to avert a reoccurrence of the crisis.

(3) The response of the police to the crisis was derided by many of the respondents. However, contrary to similar crisis in Jos, the response was swifter especially with the deployment of armed forces to contain the crisis and the imposition of curfew on the Jos North Council. It has also been suggested that the role of security agencies in the crisis should be probed.

(4) The absence of good governance is at the root of the crises in Plateau State. Good governance according to Akpokpari (2004: 243) as “a system of administration that is democratic, efficient and development-oriented” has remained illusive in Africa as legitimacy has been determined not by democratic process but largely by ascriptive and patron-client relations while corruption has remained pervasive”. In the absence of good governance, the ruling elite recourse to ethnic, religious and regional appeal, thereby inflaming primordial identities of the masses. The conclusion here is that only a leadership that is transparent, accountable and rises above primordial identities will be able to enhance the peaceful coexistence of both settlers and indigenes in Jos. The enlargement of political space and the role of civil society are also very important in this regard. However, it is imperative to note that civil societies and the media that does not transcend ethnic, religious and regional identities will not positively impact the crises in the plateau.

Our research may illuminate some questions for future research. Most of the interviewees reported that the crises in Jos may not simmer away for a foreseeable future. Why do people feel that the crises have come to stay with the community? Does this mean that conventional approaches to conflict resolution are ill-positioned to respond to this crisis? Does it indicate something of a prebendal, decadent and unproductive political elite and a state that lack the relative autonomy to mediate between inter and intra-class struggle? What can be learned from the experiences of other plural

societies such as Switzerland Belgium, Malaysia and Tanzania, which even though are diversified, still coexist harmoniously? These are the issues for future research.

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