The Spatial Dimension of Muslim-Christian Conflict in the Middle Belt of Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper intends to show the added value that the perspective of Political Geography and Geographic Conflict Research can contribute to the better understanding of inter-religious conflicts. Many of the facets of the root causes, power relations, dynamics, and progression of this type of multi-layered conflicts can be better understood when taking into account the specific spatial dimension.

In this paper, we attempt to explore the impact of socio-spatial segregation and partitioning within settlement areas on the development of the inter-religious conflict in Jos and the adjoining areas of the central Nigerian State of Plateau. Furthermore, the paper contends that the urban violence in some flashpoints in Jos and the recurrent guerrilla-style attacks on spatially isolated communities had tested the limits of the strategies of spatial segregation and partitioning, adopted by the Muslim and Christian communities, and the fortification of the city through military presence.

By tracking the incidence of such attacks over a period of one year and interrogating factors that regrettably contributed to their success, we came to grips with how perpetrators have repeatedly exploited the different spatial scales of vulnerability of the city of Jos and its rural environs, as well as the failure of government to put in place an appropriate security system that adapts to the socio-spatial challenges and dynamics of the conflict.

Keywords Nigeria, inter-religious conflicts, religious freedom, Muslim-Christian violence, mob and partisan terror, socio-spatial segregation, spatial vulnerability.

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1. Introduction and statement of problem

Religious liberty rights, determined by Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations[1] as belonging to the basic human rights, are still an astonishingly neglected research topic within social science (Marshall 2008:11).

According to the Pew Forum's 2009 study "Global Restrictions on Religion", 70 % of the world population live in those 32 % of countries worldwide that are characterised by high or even very high restrictions on religion. Available data suggests that Christians are the most numerous belief group worldwide, suffering from systematic discrimination and persecution. There is uncertainty, however, about the exact number of people affected, as there is not even a common definition of the term "persecution" (Tieszen 2008). Estimations range between 100 and over 200 million Christians worldwide who presently face persecution (Hildmann 2007:5). Christians living in countries with a strong Muslim population face the severest degree of discrimination or persecution (Grim 2009a:38, Marshall 2009:27, and Pew Forum 2009a:14, 24).

Despite the suffering of millions of people in countries throughout the world, scholarly research on this challenging matter is scarce and in most social science disciplines almost nonexistent.[2] Even though a considerable number of scholars from the Global South are dedicating themselves to this issue, they are hardly heard by the scientific representatives and institutions of the "West", which dominate international academic discourse.

2. "Terror" as a possible transition stage to persecution?

Scholars focusing on the issue of discrimination along religious lines have not yet agreed on a common definition of the term "persecution" (Sauer 2008:29 and Tieszen 2008:68). We consider that "persecution"

[1] "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

[2] Sauer (2008:34-47) indicates possible contributions of various disciplines which could help to advance knowledge on the challenge of religious persecution.

implies a certain degree of severity and systematic intentionality,[3] otherwise we would subscribe to Marshall's (1998:5) delineation of "discrimination" or "harassment". Yet, none of the terms parallels the case of the Nigerian Middle Belt[4] and violent conflicts elsewhere of a similar kind. Religious persecution of Christians defined as "any unjust action of varying levels of hostility, perpetrated primarily on the basis of religion, and directed at Christians, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim's perspective" (Tieszen 2008:76), does not entirely capture the specificity of the situation of the so-called "Jos conflict" in Plateau State. Hence, we are employing the term "terror" to describe "deliberately targeted surprise attacks on arbitrarily chosen civilians, designed to frighten other people" (Keohane 2002:77). We understand religiously motivated terrorism as a phenomenon which may pave the way for complete territorial control through a government that has adopted a hegemonic religion as state religion (see also Heidenreich 2010:12 and Stump 2008:229). As conflicts are always provoked by several, mostly inter-related factors, there is always a specific set of other criteria, such as poverty, ethnicity, resource access, corruption and other forms of government dysfunction which play a role in the formation and development of a conflict that shows as common baseline the religious identification of the groups involved. We recommend the use of the term "persecution" when governments, in response to the pressure of hegemonic social and religious groups, show an authoritarian attitude towards adherents of other religions, thus creating a "religious violence cycle" (Grim 2009b:43)[5]. Persecution for us implies a systematic control and oppression of the subjugated religious groups, restricting their human and religious rights and trying, as the final goal, to demoralise and even eradicate that group physically, or at least its cultural heritage, within a delimitated national territory, construed in public discourse as culturally homogeneous. Even though state sponsored religious

[3] In this point we don't subscribe to Tieszen (2008:69) who suggests that, regardless of the "objective" severity of the event, all acts of discrimination against a religious minority should be considered as "persecution".

[4] The Middle Belt is a human geographical term referring to the central Nigerian region, and extending beyond, which is inhabited by a greater number of minority ethnic groups who are predominantly Christians and animists.

[5] Brian Grim (2009:40-41 and Pew Forum 2009a:6-26) has made a very valuable contribution to the scholarly work on religious freedom by introducing separate indicators for government and society-based restrictions.

persecution, as soon as it reaches a higher degree of severity, tends to replace the phenomenon of society-based, religiously motivated terrorism, both phenomena can coexist over a longer period of time.

3. The discursive construction of a purely "Muslim North"

In the twelve Sharia states of northern Nigeria, political and religious Muslim forces clearly exert homogenising territoriality and dominate the government system and public life. In political and public discourse, this region is generally portrayed as being a culturally monolithic Muslim bloc (Bergstresser 2010:80 and 199), revealing the strongly asymmetric discursive power relations (Foulcault 2007:11) among majority and minority groups. It is also important to note that the politically instrumented "doubtful myth" of a purely Muslim North of Nigeria, neglecting the over 25 % of marginalised Christians who live in that area (Bergstresser 2010:188), has been deliberately sustained by the lack of reliable statistical data, as the population census in Nigeria is made without taking into account the religious affiliation of citizens[6]. From a perspective of critical geopolitics, the discursive creation of northern Nigeria as a purely Muslim territory leads to the assumption that the hegemonic religious actors and the respective political beneficiaries of that region subscribe to the traditional Islamist geo-religious agenda of inserting Nigeria into the "dar al-islam", the "sacral geography" (Heidenreich 2010) of Islamic rule over an ever expanding territory. Growing international linkages to other Muslim countries, such as Afghanistan, Chad, Libya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, partly providing considerable financial support to build mosques and train imams (Ogbunwezeh 2009:116 and USCIRF 2010:84), may, besides generally growing inter-religious hostility after several decades of military interference of the West in Islamic countries, explain the radicalisation of Muslim groups in Nigeria since the 1970s (Bergstresser 2010:193, 196).

The struggle over the right to dominate the country, or at least great parts of it, is mirrored by the quarrel around the share of Muslim and Christian populations living in Nigeria and especially in the north.

[6] Emmanuel Igah (2007) highlights some of the controversies that have always surrounded the results of census in Nigeria. Concerns about the manipulation of census, to advance a certain political agenda or to increase access to national revenues, are common.

Whereas Christian and Muslim populations are generally estimated to have roughly the same share (40-45 % each; Igah 2007:4), some sources state that Muslims already outnumber Christians at the national level (Pew Forum 2009:5 and CIA 2010). Consequently, the whole nation, which was made a member of the Organisation of Islamic Conference[7] in 1986 and of the Islamic Development Bank in 2005 in defiance of previous public debate (Bergstresser 2010:202, Kukah 1993:230, Marshall 2008:310, and Ogbunwezeh 2009:112), is seen by Islamic leaders as being part of the construct of the "Muslim World"[8]. Yet, it is indisputable that the Muslim religion plays such a dominant role in all facets of political and public life of northern Nigeria (comparable to Saudi Arabia, in four of the twelve Sharia states there is even a religious police, the so-called "Hisbah", in force; Bergstresser 2010:191, Marshall 2008:311, and USCIRF 2010:83)[9] that one can refer to Islam as being the state religion, contravening clearly the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Marshall 2008:310)[10]. Therefore, for the Muslim-dominated spatial construct of the "north of Nigeria", it is duly justified to qualify the many subtle and severe restrictions Christian minorities face on a daily basis, as "persecution". Of course, the degree of sophistication and rigidity may vary in space and time over the large region and is on average still distant from the degree of severity and persecution of that of a communist country like North Korea or an Islamic theocracy like Saudi Arabia[11].

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[7] For further information on the OIC, please refer to www.oic-oci.org.

[8] The "status" of belonging to the "Muslim World" refers to national territories with a share of Muslim population above 50 %, regardless of their inherent religious pluralism. A list of Muslim-majority countries can be found in the study, "The Future of the Global Muslim Population" (Pew Forum 2011:156-157).

[9] The local Muslim security group in Kano, Hisbah, has constituted itself, with the support of the State Government into a "religious police" with 9,000 officers (Marshall 2008:311) unleashing terror on residents. See the following newspaper reports: http://www.compassnewspaper.com/NG/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30616:hisbah-non-indigenes-in-kano-raise-alarm-of-imminent-violence-&catid=43:news&Itemid=799 and http://www.vanguardngr.com/2009/07/ethnic-communities-cry-out-over-attack-by-hisbah-operatives-in-kano/

[10] Chapter I, Part II, Section 10: "The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion."

4. Muslim-Christian violence in the Middle Belt

In the predominantly Christian Middle Belt region, to which the Plateau State with a Muslim population of an estimated 30 % belongs[12], the increasing suffering of non-Muslims cannot yet be qualified as systematic "persecution" according to the above definition. Religious persecution, as we understand it, requires a strong control of government power directly or indirectly exerted by the dominant religious or ideological group. For the repeated inter-religious, mainly anti-Christian, violence in Nigeria the appropriate term for us is "terror". The attacks have so far led to the displacement of several hundred thousand refugees (Bergstresser 2010:211) and have generated a death toll of at least 12,000 since 1999 (USCIRF 2010:4; some sources even estimate 60,000, Marshall 2008:311)[13]. Terror, as we propose to use this term in inter-religious conflicts, is a geopolitical strategy of a religiously motivated group which aggressively follows an expansionist agenda, defining the territorial domination and eradication, or at least subjugation or conversion of the "religious other" in a certain territory as the final goal.

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[11] The study "Global Restrictions on Religion" rates government restrictions on religion (GRI) in Nigeria for 2008-2009 as being 3.6 and in Saudi Arabia as 8.4 on a scale from 0 to 10 (Pew Forum 2009:51-52).

[12] Also Plateau State reflects the general Nigerian dispute over the total state population (determining the redistribution of national funding; Igah 2007) and the share of Muslim and Christian population (impacting the political rights). Whereas the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) "State Population and Development Programme" for Plateau indicates a Muslim population of 15 % (http://nigeria.unfpa.org/unfpastates.htm), considered as under-estimated by us, the Plateau Muslim Forum of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) claimed in 2007 that the share of Muslim population in this state amounted to 42 %, a number which has to be seen as exaggerated and obviously "political" (http://www.amanaonline.com/Articles/art_4000.html).

[13] This great variation in the numbers of fatalities, caused by inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria, bears testimony to the difficulty in obtaining reliable information on such incidents. In some cases numbers are kept secret by police forces or are not circulated by the media to prevent further violence. In other cases false information is deliberately circulated by a conflict party through the media in order to provide a justification for violence or to minimise the damage caused to the opposing group. Moreover, it is sometimes unclear if the majority of victims have been injured through a religiously motivated attack itself or through subsequent police and even military response.

The "religious other", conceptualised as a foreign religious minority, has been proposed by Sauer (2009:64-65) as a frame of analysis of the root causes of aggressions against religious minorities. However, we suggest that the concept of "otherness" representing a vulnerable minority coming from "outside" needs to be further differentiated to also remain valid for the case of religiously motivated violence against an autochthonous majority population, as is the case in Plateau State. Therefore, we hypothesise that neither the factor of provenance ("inside"/"outside") nor the quantitative importance of the respective groups ("majority"/"minority") must necessarily be key to explaining the basis of aggression against a particular group, or violence between different religious groups. Thus, it has to be assumed that it is rather the goals and characteristics of the politico-religious agenda of religions that determine their attitude and performance towards the "religious other".

From the perspective of the people of Plateau State who have been victims of unabated violence in recent times, there is another strong reason to call the repeated aggressions "terror": Apparently, the goal of the perpetrators of past and present attacks is, above all, to destabilise and demoralise targeted parts of society, in the long-term supposedly even the full domination of the respective territory, through destruction of lives and properties as well as livelihoods. As government bodies, police and military, have not made serious efforts to bring to justice the perpetrators so far, the "culture of impunity" encourages further attacks that can happen at any time (USCIRF 2010:82).

The more the city of Jos is fortified through military patrols and road blocks[14], the greater the danger seems to grow for the selective urban "flash points of inter-religious violence" and, in a centrifugal spill-over effect, for all unprotected villages and scattered settlements in rural areas, even only a few miles (mostly of hardly accessible dirt road) away from the state capital: the new "vulnerable spaces" of religiously motivated terror attacks in the so-called "Jos conflict". The traditional small-scale farmers, mainly Christians, of Dogo Nahawa, Mazah, Rawhinku, Kwata, Rukwe Chongwuru[15] and numerous other threatened villages who are deprived of sleep in their clay huts,

[14] Getting from Abuja to the centre of the state capital Jos, in August 2010 one had to pass a minimum of five military checkpoints within the urban area alone.

without electricity in the completely dark and unprotected night-time countryside, belong to the most vulnerable groups living in constant fear and directly feeling the impact of this type of "terror".

The terror affecting the most vulnerable, above all the socio-economically and/or spatially marginalised people of Jos and other parts of Plateau State, can be further categorised according to the spatial setting in which such incidents usually occur:

- "Mob terror" is a rather spontaneous urban phenomenon which is usually perpetrated by large numbers of marginalised youth that can easily be revolutionised by religious leaders, local politicians or other economically influential sponsors through hate speech, spreading of rumours, bribery or specific incidents that are interpreted as provocation or "insult";
- "Partisan terror" is a planned and, presently in Plateau State, mainly rural phenomenon. It affects the spatially most vulnerable areas of the state with complex topography and dispersed settlement structures. It involves well equipped and trained aggressors who usually launch orchestrated attacks on scattered and therefore unprotected villages and who retreat in a well prepared manoeuvre;
- "Hate crime" is a spontaneous phenomenon which can occur both in urban and rural areas. This category comprises any kind of attacks on individuals or small groups committed without a systematic plan but within the general context of hostility towards threatened religious groups. The lines between "hate crime" and regular, non-religiously motivated crime are often blurred.

The following discussion on Muslim-Christian violence is based on the analysis of different reports on the human rights situation in Nigeria, site visits during a field research stay in Plateau State in August 2010, meetings with victims of violence in the villages and on the results of a variety of expert interviews that have been conducted with different representatives of Christian communities and NGOs actively engaged in peace building. It is the purpose of this paper to shed light especially on the characteristics of the inter-religious

[15] For a more comprehensive list of Christian villages near Jos which have been attacked in 2010 see table 1.

conflicts and their impacts on socio-spatial processes, as perceived from the perspective of affected Christians.

5. Daily life of Christians in spaces of insecurity and places of fear

The life of Christians and other non-Muslim groups in Plateau State (approx. 70 % of the total population) and the state capital Jos, has changed dramatically in the past decade. The constantly looming threat of further destruction of Christian neighbourhoods, including mass killings, has altered public discourse patterns by prescribing rules of "religious correctness" for public debate. In order to better understand the situation Christians are confronted with in Plateau State on a daily basis, it is important to show the whole bandwidth of repressions non-Muslims face nowadays in the Middle Belt and especially in northern Nigeria. The listing of acts of discrimination and violence given below reflects the character, quality and severity of oppression that Christians in these most affected parts of Nigeria have reported in recent years (Backes 2005:104-121, CMG 2010:9-27, Marshall 2008:311-312, Ogbunwezeh 2009:113-116, Stephanos Foundation 2010:52-53, and USCIRF 2010:81-84)[16]:

- Denial of burial ground and of building permits for churches and schools, as well as demolition of existing structures;
- Obstruction of Christians from land ownership;
- Strongly discriminatory access to public services, including water, electricity, and roads;
- Denial of equal access to public media;
- Forced wearing of headscarf and use of gender-segregated public transport;
- Kidnapping and forced conversion of youth, as well as forced marriages of young girls;
- Denial of religious education in public schools;

[16] These complaints have been gathered by Jos based Stephanos Foundation in countless interviews with Christian victims of religiously motivated violence. Due to its precise empirical research work, exhaustively covering all major conflicts in Jos and the surrounding areas, the reports of this NGO have sometimes even been used as evidence by government bodies and courts.

- Discrimination in access to higher education;
- Discrimination in job appointments and promotion in public administration, universities, police, military, and public contract award;
- Denial of posts in government and schools;
- Discriminatory applications of Sharia also against Christians;
- Regular terror strikes against believers, church buildings and Christian neighbourhoods;
- Judicial inactivity, in some cases even subtle government, police and military complicity, in the murders and strikes.

The abovementioned threats show that the Muslim-Christian conflict in the Middle Belt and North of Nigeria is characterised by a clear asymmetry in the power relations and in the degree and extent of aggressiveness. However, there are also reported acts of self-defence and of violent retaliation by Christians in regions affected by inter-religious attacks (CMG 2010:41-44). In the majority of Christian areas of southern Nigeria a certain degree of usually non-violent discrimination against Muslims (USCIRF 2010:84) calls for further investigation as well.

6. Background of the Plateau conflict: from a "Home of Peace and Tourism" to a segregated city

A modicum of history will be required in order to understand Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle Belt and in particular on the Jos Plateau. Jos is the capital of Plateau State in central Nigeria.[17] Since 2001 a cycle of sectarian violence involving Muslims and Christians has taken place in the state. Until this time, Jos had been referred to as the most peaceful cosmopolitan city in Nigeria, which was why it was christened "Home of Peace and Tourism". It was also variously described as the "melting pot of ethnic nationalities", "Tin City", "microcosm of Nigeria" and "the nerve-centre of Christian evangelism in Nigeria" (Ibrahim n.d.).[18] Demographically, Plateau

[17] Bergstresser (2010:185) estimates that Jos has 800,000 inhabitants.

[18] Maurice Archibong 2006, "Many Allegories of Jos", *Daily Sun*, 7 September 2006. http://www.sunnewsonline.com/webpages/features/travels/2006/sept/07/travels

State is unique because it is a mainly Christian state bordering on the predominantly Muslim North of Nigeria.

In pre-colonial times, the autochthonous peoples of Plateau, comprising relatively small ethnic groups, were used to having contact and interactions with ethnic groups from other parts of the country and co-existing peacefully with those who settled among them (Kukah 1993). The Islamic Jihad led by Usman dan Fodio[19] from 1804 to 1808 to create a Muslim state in northern Nigeria and its concomitant proselytising and expansionist tendencies brought about further change in the demography of the Middle Belt, including the Jos area. The majority of the autochthonous ethnic groups of the Middle Belt, particularly around the Jos Plateau, resisted the Islamic proselytisation. Thus, the Middle Belt provided safe havens for many people, including even the Hausa-Fulani,[20] who were escaping from the invading forces of the Jihad (Best and Abdulrahman 1999). Apart from its religious and geopolitical dimensions, the Jihad also manifested significant sociological consequences, which nurtured a dominance-subjugation relationship between the Hausa-Fulani and minority groups in the northern part of Nigeria. Yusufu Turaki (2010:62) noted the seeming disjuncture that emanated from Jihad:

> Although the stated primary objectives of waging a jihad are to make unbelievers Muslims and to establish an Islamic state, in practice the Caliphate used jihad for slavery and colonialism. In fact, large numbers of free people rapidly became slaves and the machinery of their enslavement was bloody and ruthless. Thus there was a religious contradiction in the Caliphate between the injunctions of Islam and the practices of the Caliphate that undermined the legitimacy of the Caliphate's holy war. The religious goal of Islamization through the jihad was overshadowed by the emphasis on slave raiding, slave trading and slavery, on looting of property, colonizing and subjugating peoples, and on exacting yearly taxes and tributes of slaves.

The characteristics of the Jihad described by Yusufu Turaki continue to have implications for inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in northern Nigeria up to today. The failure of the Jihad to achieve a

-07-09-2006-001.htm – Retrieved 22 Nov. 2010

[19] Usman dan Fodio (1754-1817) was a Fulani religious and political leader from Sokoto Caliphate who led the Islamic Jihad in northern Nigeria (Turaki 2010:51-52).

[20] Hausa-Fulani is a hybrid term referring jointly to the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups of Nigeria (Parris 1996).

significant level of success in the Middle Belt, also referred to as "North Central", as it did in the "North West" and "North East", to a large degree created what today is referred to as the "Christian-Muslim fault line" in Nigeria. This "fault line" lies between a majority Christian South and a majority Muslim North.[21] It may be important to clarify here that there are millions of Christians in the northern parts of Nigeria and millions of Muslims in the southern parts as well. As stated earlier, the exact proportions of Muslims and Christians in Nigeria and their distribution in the north and south are subject to contestation (Pew Forum 2010:64).

There is a perplexing difference in Christian-Muslim relations between the northern and southern regions of Nigeria. Two major historical factors contribute to this difference. In spite of its drawback, as noted earlier, the 19th century Jihad caused Islam to make further inroads in parts of northern Nigeria, as mentioned above. The second factor was the British application of two distinct systems of rule in the regions. While in the south the British imposed "Direct Rule", they adopted "Indirect Rule" in the north, with its associated policy of maintaining traditional Islamic governance structures and restricting Christian missionaries from interfering in Muslim areas (Backes 2005:113, Bergstresser 2010:191 and 198, Blench 2010:1, and Turaki 2010:113-115).

Modern tin mining during the colonial period, which began around 1902, facilitated the influx of labour migrants to Jos from across the country. The Muslim Hausa-Fulani were among the ethnic groups that came in large numbers and settled in Jos to work as labourers in the booming tin industry (USAID 2010). As a result of this development, Jos became a home to diverse ethnic and religious groups. The "indigenous" ethnic groups in Jos, the Afizere, Anakuta, Berom, Jarawa and the rest of the autochthonous peoples of Plateau, who were mostly adherents of traditional religions and Christianity, accommodated these migrant communities. For many years, Jos attracted people from all over the country and beyond. Many wealthy Nigerians from different parts of the country owned homes in Jos

[21] The terminology "fault line" may be seen as a representation of the perception of both religious groups who have witnessed repeated outbursts of violence along religious lines in the past decades. Some scholars from the region even call for a reassessment of Huntington's theory of the "Clash of Civilizations" (see also Stump 2008:294).

because of the serenity, moderate climate and the cosmopolitan nature of the city. It was also a place close to the hearts of Christians in northern Nigeria because of the preponderance of Christian ministries, church headquarters, theological seminaries, and Christian hospitals.

In the last two decades the relations between Muslims and Christians in Jos, as in other parts of northern Nigeria, took a downturn with occasional violent outbursts. Many scholars and peace researchers have attempted to analyse and interrogate the causes of these inter-religious conflicts in Jos. Numerous factors have been suggested to precipitate these conflicts: "Indigene-Settler Divide", tussle over "ownership" of Jos, rising religious extremism, poverty and inequality, resource competition, pre-colonial and colonial history, political corruption, and the adoption of the Sharia legal system in twelve northern states (IPCR 2002, Ostien 2009, USAID 2010, USCIRF 2010).

6. Spatial aspects of "life under terror": segregation of settlements along religious lines

Our preoccupation in this paper is with the impacts of socio-spatial segregation in Jos as a result of incessant sectarian violence. One of many ways that people respond to recurrent disaster is to get away from the hazard as much as possible. This implies recognition that vulnerability to a disaster is partly a function of one's distance to the location of the particular hazard. However, moving away from a place where one has lived for a long time or spent an entire lifetime is not an easy decision. There is more to a "home" than just members of one's household and the building. The natural endowments of the environment, neighbours and the neighbourhood are all part of what makes us develop topophilia ("love of a place") for where we live. Protracted inter-religious violence in the central Nigerian city of Jos and its environs forced thousands of people to abandon their original homes and relocate to "safe havens". The resultant effect of this is the bifurcation, or even ghettoisation, of the city into Christian and Muslim neighbourhoods. This process implies the construction of socio-spatial boundaries and the labelling of certain neighbourhoods as "no go areas". The evolving topophobia ("fear of a place") is accompanied by a strong exhibition of territoriality by the two communities on a day-to-day basis. Thus a twofold strategy emerged –

people try as much as possible to avoid the so-called "no go areas" and fortify the security of their neighbourhoods through communal and individual efforts.

7. The 2001 crisis and prior violent incidents

Christians and Muslims, who had lived side by side in Jos for years, became locked in conflict, developed mutual suspicion, and became mentally, and over the course of time also spatially, polarised. Between 1991 and 2010 there were several incidents of inter-religious violence in the Jos area. In 1994 violence along religious lines erupted as a result of a dispute over who was to be the chairman of Jos North Local Government. The Christian and Muslim communities still remained together. Until 2001, there was nothing such as an exclusively Christian or Muslim neighbourhood. Large scale violence broke out on 7 September 2001 and lasted for several days. The trigger was a purported attempt by a young lady to pass through a road in her neighbourhood, Congo-Russia, blocked by Muslim worshippers on Friday, and the subsequent reaction of the Muslim group.

Prior to that, there had been disagreement over the appointment of the National Poverty Eradication Programme Coordinator for Jos North Local Government, which was a manifestation of the tussle over the ownership of Jos Township between the autochthonous ethnic groups, the Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere, who are predominantly Christians, on the one hand, and the Hausa and Fulani, who are predominantly Muslims, on the other hand.[22] This incident led to the first major inter-religious crisis in Jos, with hundreds of people killed and property worth millions of dollars destroyed. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was alarming (USCIRF 2010:81). Some people migrated from Jos, others simply returned to their homes after some time. Those whose houses were destroyed tried to rebuild them.

The violence of 2001 took a debilitating toll of the city and most residents thought they had seen the last of it. To their dismay, in less than one year, on 2 May 2002, violence again erupted during a

[22] Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation's "Report on Internal Conflicts in Nassarawa, Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Kaduna, Adamawa and Bauchi States", submitted at the Conference on Internal Conflicts held at the Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Nigeria, 23-26 January 2002.

political party congress. The scale and magnitude of the crisis were even greater than in the previous conflict. Despite the major extent of the violence, it did not spread to all parts of the city of Jos.[23] Tragically, some of the victims were those who had returned after fleeing in 2001.

8. The crises of 2002-2004 and the State of Emergency

The 2002 violence led to increased feelings of insecurity among residents of Jos, particularly those living in the neighbourhoods that had become "flashpoints of inter-religious violence". As a result, Jos became more segregated and partitioned along religious lines. Although the violence did not spread to all parts of the city of Jos, as corpses were taken for funerals in the victims' villages of origin, it triggered reprisals and the violence reverberated for about two and a half years across the southern parts of Plateau State. This development, drawing attention from the international mass media, prompted the Federal Government of Nigeria to impose a State of Emergency[24] on Plateau State for six months (Plateau State Government 2004 and Marshall 2008:311).

A series of peace workshops, seminars, and other activities, aimed at building confidence and fostering reconciliation, were organised by state and non-state stakeholders. The Plateau State Government convened a month long Plateau Peace Conference,[25] which adopted several far-reaching resolutions, which were later disowned by the Hausa-Fulani Muslims community (Plateau State Government 2004:124). Nevertheless, there was widespread acknowledgement that spatial segregation was detrimental to the process of reconciliation. Between November 2004 and November

[23] The neighbourhoods where intense violence occurred included *Anguwan Rogo, Anguwan Rimi, Anguwan Rukuba, Bauchi Road, Dilimi, Yan Taya, Gangare, Jentan Adamu, Zololo Junction, Anguwan Congo-Russia, Tudun Wada, Abattoir/Dogon Karfe, Zaria Road, Farin Gada, Rock Haven/Utan, Ali Kazaure, Katako, Busabuji, New Market/Kwararafa, Konan Shagari,* and *Eto Baba*.

[24] The Plateau State Governor, Mr. Joshua C. Dariye, his deputy, Mr. Michael Bot-Mang, as well as the state legislature were suspended for six months and an Administrator, Major General Chris Alli (Rtd), was appointed.

[25] Plateau Peace Conference, held from 19 August - 21 September 2004, was convened by the Plateau State Government and endorsed by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

2008 there was a semblance of peace, and a few people returned to the neighbourhoods they had deserted and dared to hope that they had seen the last of the carnage.

Still most of the so-called "flashpoint" neighbourhoods mentioned above remained mostly segregated throughout this window period. Within most mixed neighbourhoods there was partitioning between Christian and Muslim houses.[26] The "window period" ended on 28 November 2008 when violence broke out as a result of a disputed local government election in Jos North. Hundreds of people were killed, particularly those living as minorities in the so-called "flashpoints". Those who had succeeded in eradicating the minorities or the "enemies" in their area organised themselves and attacked parts of adjoining neighbourhoods. Once again, the attention of the international media was attracted by the scale of the destruction and the claims by each side to be the victim. Some international media agencies were quick to accept such claims without determining their veracity.

9. The January 2010 crisis

About one year later, on 17 January 2010, another spate of violence broke out in the *Nassarawa Gwom* neighbourhood and spread like wildfire across the city of Jos and its environs. The day was Sunday and Christians had gathered in several churches for the usual Sunday service. As usual, there were conflicting versions of the "trigger". Muslims alleged that an attempt by one of them to rebuild his destroyed house met with stiff resistance from Christian youths. Christians argued that the said person mobilised about 200 youths to come and rebuild his destroyed house during Sunday service as a deliberate attempt to disrupt the fragile peace in the city and that the Muslim youths began to throw stones at worshippers, besides daring anyone to stop them from rebuilding the house. The Christians claimed that, when Christian youths from the church came out to challenge those throwing stones at the church, a situation that started as a disagreement turned into full blown violence, with every reason for one to think that it was well orchestrated.[27] The violence extended

[26] Many families in the Middle Belt and also North of Nigeria have members that adhere to the different faith groups.

[27] Our informants were eyewitnesses who attended Sunday service around the area that was attacked and managed to escape.

to more areas than during the attacks in 2008.[28] Following this violence, residential segregation and partitioning between Christians and Muslims became the socio-spatial defining feature of Jos.[29]

10. The "no go areas" and their implications for security

The so-called "no go areas" are neighbourhoods that have effectively "removed"[30] members of the "other" faith groups from their midst and as such are perceived as too dangerous by the "other". This perception is built as a result of the memories that people have about the acts of aggression in the form of collective violent behaviour that had taken place in the so-called "no go areas" during the crisis. Memories of the ordeal people experienced during the attacks are transmitted in the form of contradicting narratives of the violence shared by Christians and Muslims. Consequently, Christians and Muslims maintain a mutual distrust and feeling of insecurity towards neighbourhoods occupied exclusively by the "other".

Since different groups give different meanings to a place for different purposes (Knox and Pinch 2006 and Stump 2008) and as the feeling of insecurity, even though it may be shared collectively, is always perceived individually, we have to admit that the mental cataloguing of a neighbourhood as a "no go area" is subjective, though very "real" in the minds of those involved.[31] However, investigating how people socially construct a "place", and the spatial characterisation of conflicts, can provide important insights into relations between disputants and their security concerns. It was also observed that segregation and territoriality go hand in hand. The degree of territoriality varies with the level of segregation. Although

[28] The list of flashpoints increased by the addition of the following neighbourhoods: *Anglo-Jos, Abattoir/Dogon Karfe, Dadin Kowa (Sabon Abuja), Rusau-Student Village, Bisichi, Kuru Jenta, Dutse Uku, Nassarawa Gwom, Yan Trailer, Mai Adiko-Rayfield,* and *Bukuru.*

[29] In August 2010, we undertook fieldwork in Jos and collected data through observation, interviews and filming of some of the affected areas.

[30] People were eliminated, forced to flee or decided of their own volition to relocate to other places.

[31] We identified the following neighbourhoods in Jos as being perceived as "no go areas": *Anguwan Rogo*, *Anguwan Rukuba*, *Eto Baba*, *Jenta Adamu*, *Congo Russia*, *Jentan Mongoro*, parts of *Rikkos*, *Anguwan Rimi*, *Gangare,* parts of *Bukuru Kasuwa* and parts of *Anguwan Doki*.

most neighbourhoods in Jos exhibited some degree of territoriality through mounting civil check-points (before the deployment of the military), establishing vigilante groups, holding communal security meetings and being overtly or covertly suspicious of strangers, it was more pronounced in the flashpoint areas. This situation also impedes the services of state utility companies and maintenance agencies, and seems to create an impression of discriminative neglect of such neighbourhoods by the state and local governments.

In general, due to limited access and interaction among Christians and Muslims the mutual suspicion keeps growing, rumours about attacks planned by the "other" have become part of everyday life in the city. Imagination, besides real life experience, is very powerful in these circumstances and it is the screen on which the mental maps of places of segregation and fear are drawn.

11. The mixed neighbourhoods

There are still a few mixed neighbourhoods in the city of Jos where Christians and Muslims live together without any form of partitioning.[32] These areas share certain characteristics. By and large, they fall within the Christian parts of the city, where population-wise Muslims are the minority. They are also better-off residential areas where generally direct violence had not taken place throughout the period of 2001-2010. The majority of the inhabitants can be considered well educated and middle class. Christians and Muslims work together to prevent spill-over of crises into these areas. It is hard to judge whether residents of these neighbourhoods are more peace-loving than those of the areas where violence has occurred. Certainly as a matter of life choices, they show a higher degree of concern with their personal comfort, as most of them live in high-fenced or gated houses. From the interviews we found that they equally share their religious groups' sentiments about the conflict and privately express adversarial opinions towards the "other". Hence, the difference between the mixed and segregated neighbourhoods is to a large extent attributable to their variance in spatial vulnerabilities correlating with the prevailing level of socio-economic well-being. Nevertheless, people

[32] Some of these neighbourhoods include *State Low-Cost*, *Federal Low-Cost*, *Rayfield*, *GRA/Apollo Crescent*, *University of Jos Staff Quarters*, and *Millionaires' Quarters*.

living here have the potential to facilitate interface with their religious communities across segregated neighbourhoods to open the channel for peace interventions.

12. Attacks on spatially isolated villages near Jos

As residents of Jos became more watchful and government concentrated security within the city, the predominantly Christian farming settlements in the countryside, which until then were calm, came under persistent guerrilla-style attacks of the most unimaginably gruesome nature. Cutter, Richardson and Wilbanks (2003:2) consider such a shift of strategy as a rational response of the aggressors to maintain public anxiety: "Terrorism is an adaptive threat which changes its target, timing, and mode of delivery as circumstances are altered." Heidenreich (2010:8) stresses that spatial aspects cannot be seen as a negligible factor in jihadist "partisan war": "It requires mountains, natural or urban masses of stone, spaces of shelter and the local population which can make the warrior invisible and from which he can attack."[33]

The Christian villages affected are dispersed across the hills and plains of Jos. They would be attacked in the night by unidentified assailants who would descend on the small community with guns and machetes. The attackers would open fire on the victims, set houses ablaze and use machetes on those at close range. Since 7 March 2010 when this pattern of terror strikes emerged, hundreds of people, mainly from the most vulnerable group of women and children, have been killed. These episodic attacks, constituting a new trend in the ongoing inter-religious conflict in Plateau State, have further revealed the spatial dimension of vulnerability. Between January 2010 and February 2011, numerous isolated attacks on Christian villages have taken place under the watch of the Special Task Force (STF) on the Jos crisis, "Operation Safe Haven".[34] The situation is compounded with the STF admitting its helplessness due to the difficult topography of Plateau State[35]. The table below gives a

[33] Translation by the authors.

[34] For further information see http://www.specialtaskforceonplateaustate.gov.ng/ - Retrieved 7 Dec. 2010).

[35] The STF Commander, Brig. Gen. Hassan Umaru, admitted their inability to stop the frequent attacks on Christian villages to what he referred to as Plateau's "very terrible terrain, full of hills, rocks, gullies". See report of "The Nation" on this: http://thenationonlineng.net/web3/news/20712.html - Retrieved 7 Dec. 2010).

breakdown of the dispersal of attacks that followed the January 2010 mass violence in Jos.

Table 1: The spatial dispersion of terror attacks along religious lines in Jos and the adjoining rural areas from January 2010 - February 2011[36]

S/N	Location	Date of attack	No. of people killed (estimate)
1	Jos, Bukuru (Jos North and South)	17 -19 January 2010	326
2	Dogo Nahawa, Ratsat, Zot (Jos South)	7 March 2010	400
3	Byei (Riyom)	17 March 2010	13
4	Rim (Riyom)	19 April 2010	2
5	Mazah (Jos East)	17 July 2010	8
6	Rawhinku (Bassa)	26 October 2010	6
7	Kwata (Jos South)	26 November 2010	3
8	Rukwe Chongwuru (Bassa)	2 December 2010	10
9	Angwan Rukuba, Kabong bombing (Jos North)	24 December 2010	86
10	Chaha Kuru (Jos South)	28 December 2010	3
11	Gokohong Vwang (Jos South)	31 December 2010	8
12	Bauchi Road/Dilimi (Jos North)	8 January 2011	50
13	Wereng Kuru (Jos South)	11 January 2011	17
14	Dorowa in Fan District (Barkin Ladi)	11 January 2011	3
15	Nyarwai Village (Barkin Ladi)	11 January 2011	5
16	Nding Rayidi (Barkin Ladi)	11 January 2011	6
17	Fed. College of Soil Conservation in Kuru (Jos South)	11 January 2011	5
18	Terminus Area (Jos North)	15 February 2011	12
19	Labare village in Fan District (Barkin Ladi)	22 February 2011	18
		17/01/2010 – 22/02/2011	Total of 1,055

13. Urban violence and the flashpoints within the flashpoints

Another disturbing dimension of spatial vulnerability is the intermittent occurrence of violence in areas we categorised as

[36] Source: various police and media reports, reports of human rights organisations, humanitarian NGOs in Plateau State, and expert interviews. The list is not exhaustive as unverified reports have not been included.

"flashpoints". Despite the presence of the STF in the whole of the city of Jos, occasional violent clashes have been taking place. The most recent of such episodes took place in *Bukuru/Anguwan Doki, Bauchi Road, Terminus Area, Farin Gada, Anglo-Jos, Anguwan Rukuba* and *Kabong-Gada Biyu*. It takes great efforts on the part of the security forces to contain the violence in these areas due to the fierceness of the fighters and the amount of small and light weapons in their possession, the very nature of "urban warfare" and security lapses.

Two bombs exploded in Anguwan Rukuba and Kabong-Gada Biyu, both mainly Christian neighbourhoods, on the eve of Christmas 2010, killing 86 people. This further revealed the spatial vulnerability of the flashpoints as well as a new trend in the unfolding inter-religious violence. As a result, it became obvious that spatial segregation and partitioning cannot provide the "safety-net" around neighbourhoods when the tactics of terror are employed in inter-communal violence.

14. Conclusions and domains for further research

This paper has focused on the spatial dimensions of inter-religious conflict and the socio-spatial segregation along religious lines in the central Nigerian city of Jos. Spatial dimensions inevitably exist in conflict situations in the "real" or in the "symbolic" world. The specific spatial processes and patterns in the Christian-Muslim conflict in Jos include socio-spatial segregation and partitioning, territoriality, avoidance of places perceived as insecure and the construction of mental maps of certain neighbourhoods as "no go areas". These socio-spatial orientations to the inter-religious conflict in Jos among the Christian and Muslim communities evolved an adaptive strategy by which each party relates with the "other" and deals with its fear and concern for safety.

No doubt, this strategy helped those who had, as a result of their religious identity, suffered and/or survived repeated violent aggressions of their neighbours to seek refuge elsewhere. It also helped them to move to areas where they share group solidarity and forge a common defence. However, this strategy has some limitations.

The major drawback of socio-spatial segregation is its exposure of the differential spatial vulnerabilities of neighbourhoods across

segregated settlement areas. The efforts of each party to maintain personal security through territoriality and mental mapping of "no go areas" and the concentration of security in the city by the deployment of a STF, made geographically dispersed, small Christian communities especially prone to intermittent partisan terror. Also, within the city of Jos neighbourhoods categorised as flashpoints continue to experience sporadic violence. Two simultaneous bombings in two separate mainly Christian neighbourhoods on the eve of Christmas 2010 also showed the trajectory of "spatial vulnerability".

If we consider that each conflict has its specific "life cycle" (Verstegen 2001:10), we have to assume that the inter-religious conflicts of the Middle Belt and other parts of northern Nigeria are likely to still be in the escalation phase unless adequate steps are taken by all stakeholders, including the Federal Government, to address their root causes.[37] Taking into consideration the aspirations of Nigeria to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council (Igah 2007:7) and considering also the projected near doubling in population to 289,1 million by 2050 (UNFPA 2010:103) the immediate relevance of the ongoing inter-religious conflict, not only for the African continent, but also for Europe, becomes evident.

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[37] The Global Peace Index 2010 ranks Nigeria already as no. 137 out of 149 assessed countries worldwide (http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/#/2010/scor).

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