Ethno-Religious Violence and Peacebuilding Approaches in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Identity, a cornerstone of human existence, often manifests through affiliations such as religion and ethnicity. In Nigeria, the instrumentalisation of these identities for specific gains has frequently fuelled violent conflicts. Nigeria's history is replete with instances of ethno-religious and political violence, resulting in significant losses of life and property. This research examines the historical roots and expressions of ethno-religious violence in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. Specifically, it investigates the 2004 Plateau State Conference,

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a deliberate effort to address and mitigate this violence. The articulated objectives of the conference are analysed. To understand governmental responses to the ethno-religious tensions, the study explores the emergence and functions of the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA), established to foster grassroots engagement and maintain peace. Furthermore, the research considers the contributions of faith-based organisations in offering religious perspectives on conflict resolution. The study also addresses the role of commissions of inquiry and the deployment of security forces in response to these violent episodes. Findings indicate that the indigene-settler dichotomy remains a primary driver of conflict in Jos. The theoretical framework of Peacebuilding Theory is applied to analyse the ethno-religious contestations within Jos. This study relies on secondary data, utilising online resources to access relevant scholarly books, journals, and other materials, all of which are appropriately cited. As a means of addressing ethno-religious violence, the study recommends that religious and ethnic organisations actively cultivate opportunities for increased intergroup interaction and understanding.

Keywords: Ethno-Religious Violence, Ethnicity, Religion, Peacebuilding Approaches in Jos, Jos, Peacebuilding,

Introduction

Since the conclusion of the Cold War, the global landscape has undergone a period of accelerated transformation. Contemporary society is marked by a prevalence of ethnic, religious, territorial, and nationalist disputes, demonstrating a severity, expense, and intensity comparable to past conflicts. Ethno-religious divisions and associated violence remain a persistent characteristic of the international arena. Case studies such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka offer valuable insights into the dynamics and ramifications of ethno-religious conflict. The African continent has also experienced numerous ethnic conflicts in nations like Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Nigeria, and Rwanda. The Berlin Congress of 1885, during which

109

colonial powers partitioned Africa into territorial units, resulted in the arbitrary division of existing kingdoms, states, and communities, alongside the equally arbitrary amalgamation of unrelated regions and populations. A recurring pattern observed across these global and continental instances reveals that ethnicity and religion become potential sources of conflict when they are utilised within the political sphere to mobilise support for or advance specific ethnic, political, and economic objectives (Ettang, 2015). Nigeria, characterised by its pluralistic nature, exhibits a complex interplay of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. Ethno-religious conflicts are major challenges within contemporary Nigeria, exacerbated by the presence of multiple religious groups. This complex interplay of identities has engendered divisions along religious, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and regional lines, precipitating violent conflicts throughout the nation. Historically, the ethno-religious conflicts witnessed in Nigeria since its independence are rooted in the articulation of socio-economic and political marginalisation experienced by affected ethnic and religious groups (Indongesit & Ugo, 2022). The recent intensification of ethno-religious polarisation and conflict in Nigeria is attributed to the increasing politicisation of both religious and ethnic values.

Plateau State has over forty ethno-linguistic groups. Some of the indigenous tribes in the state are the Berom, Afizere, Amo, Anaguta, Aten, Bogghom, Buji, Challa, Chip, Fier, Gashish, Goemai, Irigwe, Jarawa, Jukun, Kofyar (comprising Doemak, Kwalla, and Mernyang), Montol, Mushere, Mupun, Mwaghavul, Ngas, Piapung, Pyem, Ron-Kulere, Bache, Talet, Taroh (Tarok), Youm and Fulani/Kanuri in Wase. Although Plateau State had experienced a prolonged situation of inter-ethnic harmony, especially from the end of the civil war to the 1990s, for which the whole of Plateau State has been acclaimed as a "land of peace and tourism", latent tension has always characterised the inter-ethnic relations.

However, things have rapidly changed in terms of the dominant trends and patterns. For example, on April 12 1994, the seemingly harmonious inter-ethnic relations in Jos were violently interrupted by a confrontation between the Hausa "settlers", on the one hand, and the indigenous ethnic groups such as the Berom, Anaguta and the Afizere, on the other. The immediate cause of the conflagration was the appointment of a Hausa man, Alhaji Aminu Mato, as the Chairman of the Caretaker Management

Committee of Jos North Local Government Council (Samuel, 2004). The appointment was greeted with protest from "indigenes" of Jos, following which action had to be stayed on the swearing-in of the appointee on Monday, April 11, 1994. The counter-protest by the Hausa community led to the deadly confrontation of April 12. Between 2001 and 2012, several violent political, ethno-religious conflicts were reported in Plateau State. It is argued that indigenes and settlers (Hausa/Fulani) are on an unequal footing, with the latter subjected to discriminatory acts and excluded from opportunities, including access to land, educational benefits and participation in political institutions controlled by the 'indigenous' state governments.

As a result of the ethno-religious violence in Plateau, some of the commissions, panels and committees of inquiry by both the federal and state governments established were: the Niki Tobi Commission (2001), Peace Summits (2002), Peace Conference and the Emergency Rule (2004), Abisoye Presidential Panel (2008), Ajibola Gubernatorial Panel (2008), and the Lar-Kwande Presidential Committee (2010). These Commissions of Inquiry were set up to: look into the crisis, find out its genesis, recommend ways of avoiding future resurgence, and recommend appropriate actions against those found guilty of causing the mayhem. At least 16 public commissions have been launched to examine the conflict and identify solutions.

Conceptual Clarification

Ethnicity

According to Wsevolod (1992), a comprehensive understanding of ethnicity necessitates a preliminary grasp of related concepts, most notably those of ethnic group and ethnic identity. The concept of the ethnic group serves as the foundational element, with other concepts branching from it, representing ethnicity as a collective phenomenon. This collective is characterised by a shared nomenclature, a common myth of ancestral lineage, collective historical narratives, one or more distinguishing cultural attributes, a connection to a specific geographic origin ("homeland"), and a pronounced sense of solidarity within significant segments of the population (Zagefka, 2016). At the heart of ethnicity lies the individual's awareness and conviction of belonging to a collective "we," informing their subsequent actions.

111

Ethnicity, therefore, is a socially constructed collective identity, predicated on a shared history, common origins, and unified traditions, seeking to define its culture as distinct from others. Linguistic and/or religious commonality appears to function as key drivers in the formation and maintenance of this identity (Smith, 2003).

Religion

In contemporary society, religion presents a multifaceted and often contradictory phenomenon, both for individuals and for the wider social landscape. While often linked to positive attributes such as ethical frameworks, moral principles, and the cultivation of spirituality, it can also be negatively perceived as a source of superstition, the rigid perpetuation of tradition, a rejection of scientific advancement, and an impediment to broader societal progress (Jeppe, 2014). Appearing in diverse forms, religion has historically exerted considerable influence over individual belief systems, social structures, and cultural norms. Due to its long-standing presence in human civilisation, religion resists a singular, universally accepted definition, as perspectives are shaped by disciplinary backgrounds and the multifaceted nature of religious experience. Idongesit and Ugo (2022) propose that religion can be understood as an individual's system of beliefs that facilitates communication with a perceived higher power. Furthermore, religion serves a function in promoting morality and spirituality, contributing to social equilibrium, the maintenance of order, and the fostering of societal harmony. Danjibo (2012) characterises religion as a specific, interconnected system comprising doctrines, myths, rituals, sentiments, and related elements.

Ethno-Religious Groups

Ethno-religious groups are characterised by the significant influence of religion in the formation of social and cultural identities. Within these groups, religious institutions function beyond representing the community; they wield moral authority and possess the ability to galvanise collective action (Zakka, 2014). However, the utilisation of ethno-religious markers to define intergroup relations can lead to heightened social divisions along ethnic and religious lines, potentially fostering intergroup conflict.

Gambo, Mashal, et al.

Violence

Drawing upon the work of Joshua and Jegede (2013), violence can be conceptualised as the intentional application, or threatened application, of physical force by an individual or collective within a defined geographical area. This act is directed toward another individual or group, or towards property, with the express purpose of inflicting physical harm, causing fatality, and/or damaging or destroying possessions.

Methodology

Data were collected from past documents that contained findings related to ethno-religious violence and peacebuilding in Jos and Plateau State as a whole. The researchers used solely secondary sources of data collection comprising of textbooks, journals, newspapers/magazines, and internet sources.

Theoretical Framework
Peacebuilding Theory

Building upon Galtung's initial use of the term, Lederach (1997) significantly advanced the theoretical framework of peacebuilding. This theory posits that conflict necessitates intervention, either reactive or proactive, by a third party. Peacebuilding, both conceptually and practically, envisions a multi-faceted, collaborative process driven by active and prosocial engagement from civil society. Lederach emphasises the primary objective of peacebuilding as the establishment of positive peace: a stable societal state where emerging disputes are prevented from escalating into violence. Sustainable peace is characterised by the absence of physical and structural violence, the eradication of discrimination, and inherent self-sufficiency. Achieving this necessitates a shift beyond mere problem-solving or conflict management. Peacebuilding endeavours strive to address the fundamental causes underpinning the conflict, transforming the interaction patterns of involved parties.

   The ultimate goal is to transition populations from a state of vulnerability and dependence to one of self-reliance and well-being. Peacebuilding theory directly confronts the root causes of violent conflict to mitigate their recurrence (Longpoe, 2020). Lederach conceptualises peacebuilding as a multi-staged process involving diverse stakeholders. He asserts that a

comprehensive framework for peacebuilding requires addressing structures, engaging with those involved in the conflict, allocating resources, and coordinating government institutions and security agencies. This contemporary theory is applicable at all levels of conflict analysis and intervention to de-escalate situations and restore stability for sustainable peace. It provides a conceptual and operational framework for reconciliation, distributive justice, and restorative justice, especially in contexts of recovery from widespread violence, armed conflict, or human rights violations. Gawerc, as cited in Ndeche and Iroye (2022), argues that effective peacebuilding must concurrently integrate the critical elements of conflict resolution and social justice.

Addressing deep-seated conflict requires comprehensive peacebuilding initiatives, frequently implemented within frameworks of regional and global governance, encompassing prevention, resolution, and transformation. Adenyi et al. (2021) characterise peacebuilding as both a theoretical construct and a pragmatic approach to conflict resolution and transformation, demonstrating its efficacy in mitigating social unrest and tensions. Its communitarian focus renders this theory valuable for researchers and policymakers engaged in the formulation and execution of mutually beneficial policy solutions. The pertinence of peacebuilding theory to the current study lies in its emphasis on the fundamental etiologies of conflict and strategies designed to achieve lasting peace across multiple dimensions. Given the history of ethno-religious conflict in Jos, this study investigates these specific conflicts and the function of institutional mechanisms within the peacebuilding process, following Lederach's articulation, thereby substantiating the relevance of this theoretical framework.

Land ownership disputes, prevalent between Christian and Muslim communities and among diverse ethnic groups such as the Hausa, are primary drivers of conflict in Jos and Plateau State more broadly. Competing claims of native land rights fuel contentious disputes. Furthermore, religion has been instrumentalised to advance political and communal objectives within the state. Consequently, this theoretical lens facilitates the identification of fundamental conflict drivers and proposes the adoption of a religious framework in the pursuit of sustainable peace.

Gambo, Mashal, et al.

Evident Cases of Ethno-Religious Crisis in Jos

The 2001 Ethno-Religious Crisis

The Jos crisis is often linked to the diverse ethnic affiliations within the city, which emerged from the migrations of various ethnic groups to the region during the nineteenth century, primarily for employment in the tin mines (Danfulani & Fwatshak, 2002). A significant factor contributing to the ongoing violence is the contention over the city's founding, leading to fierce disputes regarding its ownership among three principal indigenous ethnic groups— the Berom, Anaguta, and Afizare— as they intersect with the descendants of Hausa-Fulani settlers who initially arrived in Jos as traders and tin miners. The wave of violence in Plateau State that began on September 7, 2001, shortly followed the transition from military to civilian rule in 1999. Furthermore, communal unrest extended throughout the lowlands, affecting both rural areas and urban centres, with notable hotspots including Wase and Yelwa (Danfulani and Fwatshak, 2002).

According to David, Odoh, Onwah, and Fidelis (2015), the outbreak of conflict in Jos on September 7, 2001, was fuelled by economic, political, and religious tensions. Prior to this, conflicts arose in April 2001 between the Taroh and Burum communities over locust bean tree harvesting rights in the Nasarawa village of Wase, alongside disputes involving the Quaan Pan Local Government and the Tiv regarding farmland (Sani, 2007). The situation escalated in September 2001 when the Federal Government appointed Alhaji Mohammed Muktar, a Hausa-Fulani and former Chairman of Jos North Local Government, as the Coordinator of the National Poverty Alleviation Programme and Chairman of the Local Government Monitoring Committee. His appointment, viewed by Indigenous Christian youths as favouring Muslims and exacerbating tensions, triggered violent reactions due to past allegations against him, including falsification of records and perjury (Ojukwu & Onifade, 2010; Best & Rakodi, 2011).

The emergence of violence between Muslims and Christians from September 7 to 12, 2001, culminating in approximately 1,000 deaths, was deeply shocking. The political context surrounding the conflict mirrored prior incidents, particularly the violence of April 1994 (Adam, 2011). Varied accounts suggest that the crisis may have been ignited by a Christian woman's insistence on passing through a road blocked by a Muslim

115

congregation preparing for *Juma'at* prayers, which led to escalating confrontations (Nkanga, 2011). Pre-existing tensions regarding the blockage of the road during Friday prayers had persisted for several years (Best & Saidu, 2007).

The government's failure to heed warnings and requests for intervention exacerbated the situation, leading to violent confrontations in the predominantly impoverished Congo-Russia area, surrounded by Muslim-dominated neighbourhoods. The long-standing dispute over the street obstruction was a significant contributor to the crisis, which had existed since 1996 (Canice, 2019). The mosque located at the entrance of the mainly Christian Congo-Russia neighbourhood had become a flashpoint for violence. Following the initial unrest, both Christian and Muslim youths armed with makeshift weapons engaged in fierce clashes, with religious identities becoming central to the violence as both sides mobilised their communities through church bells and calls to prayer (Tertsakian, 2001).

The conflict led to extensive violence within the university environment, with Muslims taking control of certain areas while Christians faced reprisals, particularly in the Ali Kazaure neighbourhood. The Hausa-Fulani community was reportedly the first to initiate hostilities, prompting retaliatory attacks by Christians, which resulted in a week-long period of violence marked by the destruction of mosques, churches, schools, businesses, homes, and vehicles. Several neighbourhoods, including Angwan Rogo, Dilimi, Trade Centre, Heipang, and Taho, also faced significant repercussions (ICG, 2012). The crisis persisted for a week, resulting in approximately 1,000 fatalities, widespread displacement, and property losses estimated at ₦3,369,716,404.95 (Nkanga, 2011). The aftermath of the 2001 crisis led to a spill-over of violence into other neighbourhoods and surrounding regions, including Shendam, Wase, Langtang North and South, Kanam, Kanke, Mikang, and Pankshin LGAs, exacerbating existing animosities among communities along ethnic lines (Canice, 2019).

The 2003 Ethno-Religious Crisis
The crisis in the Jos region during 2002/2003 emerged from a complex interplay of political, economic, and ethno-religious dynamics (Sani, 2007). This tumultuous period included various conflicts, such as the factional

disputes within the People's Democratic Party (PDP) local government, specifically between rival factions in the Eto-baba and Anguwam Rukuba wards, which centred on leadership contests in Naraguta ward "B" and the rescheduling of primaries. Another significant contributor was the Yelwa-Shendam conflict, ignited by an illicit relationship between a Hausa youth and a female local resident, a situation that had long been disapproved of by the indigenous population.

Additionally, tensions escalated in Barkin Ladi due to disputes over land between the Fulani and Berom communities. The Hausa-Taroh conflict in Yelwa town arose from the Taroh ethnic group's demands for the establishment of a distinct local government, referred to as Kadarko L.G.A. Furthermore, directives from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) discouraged young female Christians from interacting with male Muslims, prompting a reciprocal response from the Muslim community, which advised its members against purchasing food from Christians. Other notable incidents included the *Juma'at* Prayer crisis in Dilimi that stemmed from an assault on a girl by Muslims, while she attempted to cross a road, they had blocked during Friday prayers, as well as the Barkin Ladi crisis and the 2003 attacks on Kadarko village and Wase town. The cumulative impact of these events resulted in approximately 400 fatalities, displaced 300,827 individuals, and led to extensive property destruction (Sani, 2007)

The 2004 Ethno-Religious Crisis
The conflict that arose between Muslim cattle herders and Christian farmers, primarily concerning land and livestock, persisted for a duration of four months, from February to May. This crisis resulted in the loss of over 1,000 lives, the internal displacement of approximately 258,000 individuals, and the destruction of property valued in the billions of naira (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). During this period, Yelwa, a significant commercial hub in the region, experienced extensive violence, with the February assaults predominantly targeting Christians affiliated with the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN). This was followed by retaliatory attacks against Muslims in May.

By the close of 2004, more than 100 villages had been assaulted or razed by various militia factions. Overall, from September 2001 to May 2004, the violent clashes resulted in approximately 5,000 fatalities and

displaced over 250,000 residents (Carnice, 2019). The underlying causes of these violent encounters were largely related to disputes regarding land ownership and chieftaincy positions. In response to the escalating violence, President Obasanjo declared a six-month state of emergency in May and appointed retired General Chris Alli, a Plateau native but not a member of the Berom ethnic group, as the new governor, replacing Dariye (ICG, 2012).

The 2008 Ethno-Religious Crisis

A contentious local government election in Jos North occurred on November 27, 2008, resulting in significant violence. This turmoil was primarily between the predominantly Christian indigenous groups— namely the Berom, Afisare, and Anaputa— who largely supported the Christian candidate from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Muslim 'non-indigenes,' primarily from the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, who favoured the Muslim candidate from the opposition, All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) (HRW, 2009). Timothy Buba, the PDP candidate, won the election with 92,907 votes, surpassing his nearest opponent, Aminu Baba of the ANPP, who received 72,890 votes (Ambe-Uve, 2010).

The announcement of Buba's victory ignited a series of violent events. During the ensuing chaos, unruly youths set fire to numerous vehicles, churches, mosques, gas stations, and private residences, leading to over 700 reported fatalities and the displacement of thousands who sought refuge in various locations (Ojukwu & Onifade, 2010; HRW, 2009). Following the departure of the elected chairman from the 1999 democratic transition in 2002, no elections were conducted for this position until 2008. While the violence on November 27-28 was rooted in political contention, it was inextricably linked to religious and ethnic tensions. In contrast, local government elections in other regions of Plateau State were largely peaceful. The Hausa community asserted that the Electoral Commission collaborated with the government to manipulate voting outcomes in favour of the PDP candidate, whom they claimed had connections with the ANPP candidate during the election process.

Their grievances stemmed from unsuccessful negotiations with Jonah Jang for greater political inclusion, leading to the election being perceived as a confrontation between the Hausa and the indigenous populations, or

Gambo, Mashal, et al.

alternatively, between Christians and Muslims, depending on one's perspective. Part of the ensuing confusion was fuelled by the relocation of the collation centre for Jos North, where both factions had mobilised their youths to safeguard their votes. This shift incited suspicions among the Hausa about potential electoral fraud. The violent actions initiated by the Hausa-Fulani were manifestations of longstanding intercommunal animosity and discord.

The simultaneous nature of the attacks across six locations indicated a level of careful planning. Armed Hausa youths established roadblocks throughout the city, escalating the violence significantly (HRW, 2009). Reports suggested that they targeted non-Muslims in neighbourhoods such as Laranto, Nasarawa Gwong, and Angwan Rogo, where they held a numerical advantage. In retaliation, Christian youths, particularly from Tudun Wada, were accused of burning Muslim properties. The violence severely impacted local markets, including the Igbo timber market and the Hausa grain, yam, and car business markets. Following the initial attacks and alleged extrajudicial killings by security personnel— who were accused of targeting those fleeing for safety— local estimates suggest that more than 1,000 individuals lost their lives, with over 600 homes destroyed. The actions of the security forces, who were expected to safeguard the populace, remain a troubling enigma, as many reported that they executed fleeing individuals (HRW, 2009).

The 2010-2012 Ethno-Religious Crisis
Idahosa and Emmanuel (2012) indicated that in January 2010, violence erupted when a Hausa-Fulani individual sought to rebuild his home, which had been destroyed during the 2008 conflicts. This action faced staunch opposition from local Christian youths, leading to significant ethnic and religious tensions that resulted in over 1,000 fatalities (Kwaja, 2011). That December, twin car bombings claimed the lives of nearly 80 individuals. Since 2010, coordinated bomb attacks on places of worship and public spaces have led to the deaths of hundreds of both Muslims and Christians in Jos. The notorious Boko Haram group has accepted responsibility for some of these incidents, exacerbating the deteriorating security situation in the region. The attacks in January and March were perceived by many as

119

a continuation of the unresolved conflicts from 2008, as different factions sought retribution against one another.

The attacks on January 17 and 19 resulted in the deaths of at least 200 Muslims, while approximately 300 Berom Christians were killed in Dogo Nahauwa in March (Adam, 2011). The attack on March 7 was reportedly executed by numerous Fulani herdsmen targeting Christian villages, perpetuating the cycle of retaliatory violence in the area. As is often the case, the upheaval spread to previously tranquil regions, resulting in a high number of massacres. Youths from both sides of the conflict, initially organised as local vigilante groups, became embroiled in the killings and looting that marked the assaults (Adam, 2011).

Despite the significant violence and attacks experienced in early 2010, the year concluded with bombings on Christmas Eve in primarily Christian marketplaces, as residents were completing their holiday shopping. These bombings resulted in 107 deaths and numerous injuries (HRW, 2011), further reinforcing the perception that the crisis in Jos is rooted in religious conflict. The first half of 2011 saw hundreds of deaths due to violence. For example, between August and September, over 150 individuals were reported killed, including pregnant women, children, and entire families. This surge in violence was accompanied by instances of "silent killings" (ICG, 2012). Following the death of five Muslim youths on January 7 in a Christian neighbourhood in Barkin Ladi village, Muslim youths retaliated against Igbos along Dilimi market and Bauchi roads, with eyewitnesses reporting brutal attacks involving machetes. That same day, Christians conducted a reprisal attack, resulting in the deaths of 14 Muslims in their communities (HRW, 2018).

The first bombing on Christmas Day 2011 targeted churches, leading to approximately fifty casualties (ICG, 2012). From 2011 to 2018, Jos witnessed a series of violent crises that resulted in significant loss of life and property. The year 2011 was characterised by the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2012) as a "bloody year," with hundreds of fatalities recorded in the initial six months. Furthermore, between August 15 and September 12, an estimated 150 individuals lost their lives, averaging around 50 deaths per week. Violent confrontations between Christian and Muslim factions also resulted in an unspecified number of casualties in Barkin-Ladi.

Gambo, Mashal, et al.

In 2012, ongoing attacks and retaliatory strikes led to further loss of life, injuries, and property destruction (ICG, 2012). In response to the violence occurring between 2010 and 2012, initiatives such as "Operation Sweep and Search" were implemented by the Special Task Force to identify and apprehend perpetrators. Additionally, 24-hour curfews were imposed, motorcycle use was prohibited, and the Chief of Defence Staff, Air Vice Marshal Oluseyi Petinrin, was deployed to oversee the security situation (ICG, 2012).

The Plateau Peace Conference

In response to the 2004 state of emergency, General Alli launched the Plateau State Peace Conference, held in Jos from August 18th to September 21st. This initiative, mirroring the structure of the 2002 Peace Summit, was informed by preliminary workshops and meetings designed to incorporate diverse perspectives (Jana, 2010). Subsequently, the appointed Sole Administrator conducted site visits to conflict-affected regions and all Local Governments to facilitate dialogue with ethnic, religious, and other interest-based collectives. Three Peace Committees were then formed, each mandated with restoring stability in designated conflict zones. The 2004 Plateau Peace Conference, operating under the direction of a twelve-member Steering Committee led by Ngo Elizabeth Pam (Danfulani, 2006), was tasked with a multifaceted agenda.

According to Danfulani (2006), the objectives of the conference included:

i.   providing an inclusive platform for all ethnic groups within the state to articulate grievances concerning inter-communal relations or perceived inadequacies in governance;

ii. incorporating the perspectives of other Nigerian ethnic communities residing in the state, as well as relevant professional bodies and interest groups;

iii. fostering a collaborative environment for open discourse on contentious issues affecting Plateau State;

iv. identifying durable resolutions to the underlying challenges perpetuating the ongoing crises; and

v.   establishing mutually agreed-upon principles for coexistence among diverse ethnic and religious groups, to serve as a guiding framework for future generations both within the state and at a national level.

The Plateau Peace Conference, born from a groundswell of local desire for peaceful coexistence articulated in preliminary discussions, operated on the principle that Plateau State residents possessed the inherent capacity to resolve their internal disputes autonomously. The conference structure included delegates from each ethnic group within the state, alongside representatives from other interest groups and Nigerian ethnicities residing in Plateau, totalling 143 participants. Utilising a syndicate format, delegates engaged in daily discussions across thirteen thematic areas, with alternating plenary sessions dedicated to the collective review and analysis of findings until all identified factors contributing to the conflict in Plateau State were comprehensively examined (Danfulani, 2006).

However, criticisms emerged, with one delegate from Yelwa deeming the conference "superficially good," suggesting a failure to adequately represent the diverse demographics of Plateau State, which risked exacerbating existing societal fractures (IRIN, 2005). Furthermore, tensions were heightened by the discord between Christian religious leaders and President Obasanjo. Obasanjo attributed the crisis to the actions of former Governor Dariye and levelled strong criticism against religious leaders (Jana, 2011). Christian leaders, in turn, condemned Obasanjo's decision to remove the governor during a state of emergency and vowed resistance against what they perceived as a "jihad" targeting Plateau State, considered a pivotal centre of Christianity in Nigeria (AFP, 2004). A representative from the Christian Association of Nigeria in Kaduna alleged that Obasanjo was actively undermining the Church, stating, "It appears he is being used by the devil to destroy Nigeria" (Madugba, 2004).

Peacebuilding Approaches in Jos

Peacebuilding encompasses the cultivation of positive interrelationships across individual, communal, and governmental spheres, transcending divisions of ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, nationality, and race. Its purpose is to redress inequities through non-violent methodologies and to effect change in the foundational structural determinants of violent conflict (KROC Institute for International Peace Studies, 2021). Fundamentally, peacebuilding endeavours to confront the fundamental origins of conflict while simultaneously enabling communities to navigate variances and

disagreements without the implementation of violence (International Alert, 2021). Below are some of the approaches employed for peacebuilding in Jos.

Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA)

As noted by Darren (2021), in February 2016, Governor Simon Lalong instituted the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA), thereby establishing the inaugural subnational peacebuilding institution in Nigeria, shortly following his assumption of office. This entity is directly accountable to the governor and is periodically invited to collaborate with the Executive Council, functioning as the governor's cabinet, thus affording its director general a role akin to that of a cabinet member. The PPBA superseded the position of special advisor on peacebuilding and incorporated numerous responsibilities from pre-existing government departments. The legislative framework regulating the agency mandates the promotion of "a culture of peace" among the diverse ethnic and religious constituencies within the state; functioning as a central hub for civil society organisations and international bodies concerning peace initiatives; facilitation of conflict mediation; provision of aid for post-conflict recuperation; rehabilitation utilising various diplomatic approaches; and the assurance that governmental policies are conducive to the maintenance of peace and security.

Additionally, the agency is commissioned to formulate specialised peace strategies that actively incorporate the participation of women, youths, and other marginalised demographic groups (PPBA, 2018). Within its first half-decade of operation, the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA) made substantial progress in establishing a sustainable framework for peace. It operated with a primary focus on developing governmental structures and collaborative networks designed to proactively manage and resolve conflicts within the state. In partnership with the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, the PPBA facilitated the creation of peace committees in all seventeen local government areas (LGAs). These committees served as critical instruments for early conflict resolution at the community level, mitigating the potential for escalation and integrating local leaders into broader peace-building initiatives (Darren, 2021).

Furthermore, the agency fostered collaborative relationships with various local civil society organisations (CSOs) focused on peace-related endeavours, facilitating monthly dialogues to address pertinent conflict issues through the Peace Architecture Dialogue. CSOs also played an integral role in the formulation of the agency's five-year strategic plan, which delineates a comprehensive approach to peace initiatives across Plateau State, centred on five key pillars: research, coordination, and partnerships; natural resource management; peace education; youth and gender considerations; and post-conflict rehabilitation. Consistent with its strategic objectives, the PPBA initiated and participated in numerous dialogues and peace-building interventions throughout Plateau State.

Addressing the intensifying conflict between farmers and herders, the agency implemented a range of strategies, including multi-level dialogues concerning proposed ranching policies, stakeholders engagements focused on early warning detection of conflict in selected LGAs, and mediation efforts between the Berom and Fulani communities in the Bachit district of Riyom LGA. Notably, the PPBA participated in a seven-month dialogue, spearheaded by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in the southern senatorial zone of Plateau, which culminated in a formal peace accord in December 2016, signed by representatives from fifty-six distinct ethnic communities. During the 2019 general elections, the agency conducted deliberations with local stakeholders to minimise election-related violence, particularly in the vulnerable Riyom and Barkin Ladi regions. Subsequently, the Network of Nigerian Facilitators and Justice and Security Dialogues facilitated a series of inter- and intra-community discussions to assess the lessons learned from the electoral process and explore avenues for strengthening civil-military relations (PPBA, 2018).

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) provided support for several of these initiatives. Moreover, the Plateau Peace Building Agency cultivated a substantial media presence within Plateau State, utilising radio and television channels, including Jay FM, Unity FM, and Silver Bird. To engage affected communities, the agency employed a multi-faceted communication approach encompassing town hall meetings, market square assemblies, community outreach programmes, broadcast media announcements, print advertisements, talk show appearances, promotional materials, traditional

leaders, religious bodies, educational institutions, demographic groups, women's organisations, familial representatives, on-site assessments, theatrical performances, direct interpersonal communication, and social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

To disseminate the principles of sustainable peace across the state, the agency conducted numerous media engagements across various social and traditional (radio and television) outlets. Agency personnel frequently participated in platforms like Good Morning Plateau, PTV Express, The Baroness, Unity Train, Light House Chat, news commentaries, press releases, interviews, and interactive media sessions (Bernard & Michael, 2022). Further strengthening its approach, the agency also fostered collaborative relationships with local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) specialising in peace and conflict resolution, functioning as strategic allies to encourage the acceptance of peacebuilding principles within conflict-affected regions.

The PPBA could not ensure long-lasting peace as a result of its inability to bring the ethnic and religious groups together under one umbrella as the conflict persists. This may be as a result of inadequate funding from the government and political interest by some groups of individuals who saw it as a way of achieving their goals. This stance is justified because ethno-religious issues are used to achieve political or individual interests in Nigeria (Oladipo and Offor, 2021).

The Role of Faith-Based Organisations on Peace-Building Processes in Jos

Various organisations are actively engaged in the peace-building process within the region, including the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Jama'atul Nasril Islam (JNI), Jama'atul Izalatul Bidi'a Wa-Iqamatul Sunnah (JIBWIZ), the TEKAN Peace Desk, Coventry Cathedral International, and the Inter-faith Mediation Centre in Kaduna, among others. A notable initiative is the Centre for Peace Initiative and Development (CEPID), which has implemented "radio and television announcements to foster peaceful co-existence, supported by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives" (Krause, 2010:51) in Plateau State.

Additionally, CEPID, alongside the Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO), the Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN), and the Institute of Governance and Social Research (IGSR), has conducted numerous workshops and training sessions focused on peace and tolerance for youth leaders from diverse faiths and community members. Organisations such as the CLO also engaged with security agencies to enhance communication between grassroots communities and law enforcement personnel. The Inter-Faith Mediation Centre, based in Kaduna, made repeated visits to Jos and other towns in Plateau State, including Yelwa, where they sought to establish a peace declaration (Smock, 2006).

Furthermore, the Canadian High Commission, in collaboration with the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and Young Ambassadors for Community Peace and Inter-Faith Foundation (YACPIF), hosted a dialogue forum on peace-building and conflict mediation in Jos, Plateau State, on February 29, 2012. Approximately "thirty religious leaders, community leaders, and representatives from NGOs dedicated to peace in Jos convened to discuss the underlying factors of the ongoing crisis as well as strategies to break the cycle of violence" (Weekly Trust, 2012).

Moreover, YACPIF organised a football peace tournament that attracted "two hundred and sixty players competing across eight venues in Plateau State, including Jos North, Jos South, Barkin Ladi, and Riyom local government areas" (*Daily Trust*, 2012). The chosen venues, previously labelled as 'no-go areas' due to their susceptibility to conflict, hosted twenty-four carefully selected teams. Jerseys were provided free of charge, all aimed at alleviating tension and fostering a spirit of brotherhood synonymous with sporting events.

However, these initiatives were unable to ensure long-lasting peace in Jos as a result of the inability of the organisations to start carrying out their activities from the grassroots, which is necessary to achieve sustainable peace. The lower individual institutions need to be addressed properly before reaching the top level. These organisations engaged the higher level while neglecting the lower levels.

Gambo, Mashal, et al.

Commissions of Enquiry and Security Forces on the Violence

Joshua and Jegede (2013) argue that since April 1994, numerous commissions of inquiry have been established to examine both the underlying and immediate causes of violent conflict in Jos. Notable among these are: The Justice Aribiton Fiberesima Judicial Commission, which investigated the crisis of April 1994; the Justice Niki Tobi Judicial Commission, which looked into the events of September 2010; the Presidential Peace Initiative Committee for Plateau State, chaired by Shehu Idris of Zazzau in May 2004; the Plateau Peace Conference, known as "Plateau Resolves," held from August 18 to September 21, 2004; and the Presidential Advisory Committee on the Jos crisis, which convened from March to April 2010 (ICG, 2012)), and Abisoye Presidential Panel in 2008, Ajibola Gubernatorial Panel in 2008, and the Lar-Kwande Presidential Committee in 2010 (David, Odoh & Fidelis, 2015).

In addition to these peace initiatives, the government has deployed the Joint Task Force (JTF) and police forces to combat the ongoing violence in the area. However, the effectiveness of the military Task Force has been compromised by entrenched ethnic and religious animosities among the parties involved. Members of the JTF, predominantly Hausa/Fulani, are perceived to be allied with the suspected Fulani herdsmen, who have been accused of attacking local indigenous populations. This perception arises from instances where assaults by Fulani herdsmen occurred close to JTF positions without any intervention (Suleiman, 2011).

Furthermore, the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2012) noted that the government's failure to curb the cycle of violence is largely due to its tendency to issue strong statements in response to outbreaks of violence, which are not accompanied by decisive political measures against identified offenders of communal violence, as confirmed by security and intelligence agencies as well as local communities. It was reported that several individuals implicated in the 2008 crisis were released soon after their arrests, and security agencies often neglect to investigate those accused of making inflammatory and provocative statements. This lack of accountability suggests an absence of effective deterrents to discourage the reckless behaviour and impunity of violent offenders (Joshua & Jegede, 2013).

Operation Rainbow (OR) is a collaborative effort that has been underway since June 2010, involving the Federal Government, the Plateau State government, and support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This initiative is viewed as a comprehensive approach to addressing the ongoing crisis (ICG, 2012). Although OR is still in its early stages, it shows promise for effectiveness; however, this will largely depend on its ability to gain the trust of both parties involved. To ensure successful implementation, OR must be promoted at the grassroots level, thereby enabling the local population to take ownership of the initiative.

Conclusion

The underlying cause of the crisis has persisted, rooted in the dichotomy between indigenous populations and settlers, as well as the ongoing competition for supremacy among ethno-religious groups that assert their superiority over one another. Specifically, elements including poverty, socio-economic marginalisation, inadequate state capacity, and poor governance were all significant contributors to the conflicts in Jos. These factors have played a substantial role in the politicisation of ethnic, religious, and citizenship identities, resulting in the dependence of these identities on the political system's allocation of power and resources. Such identities can become contentious when access to certain ethnic or religious groups is restricted, particularly in contexts where the state lacks the capability to safeguard its citizens and ensure their well-being. It is conceivable that the objectives and motivations behind patronage and clientelism can only be achieved through the utilisation of state apparatus. In this context, the privatisation of violence and the strategic manipulation and mobilisation of ethnic, religious, and citizenship sentiments that various groups in Jos engage in are fundamentally linked to their pursuit of power and access to opportunities. Such sentiments are frequently exploited by the competing factions.

Recommendations

    i.   The government ought to disqualify and prevent any politician found to be advocating violence, encouraging substance abuse, or facilitating the provision of weapons from engaging in the political sphere while contesting for or occupying public office.

Gambo, Mashal, et al.

ii.   It is imperative for the government to create a State Tribunal aimed at addressing the violent conflicts arising within the state. This Tribunal should include an investigative body that works in close partnership with the Human Rights Commission to guarantee that justice is administered both efficiently and effectively.
iii. Religious and ethnic organisations ought to take an active role in establishing opportunities for regular interactions among themselves, and with other groups. This engagement is essential for fostering stronger relationships, which can subsequently enhance other methods of uniting their congregants.
iv.   Government should create employment opportunities and empowerment programmes for the youths so they won't be tools in the hands of desperate politicians or religious zealots.

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