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9/11 in Nigeria: Translating Local into Global Conflicts

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Introduction

<1>

Many Nigerians saw 9/11 as part of a global confrontation between Muslims and Christians. As a religious event that involved worldwide communities, it could be replicated by actors in Nigeria. When news of the attacks in New York and Washington reached the citizens of Jos, Muslims and Christians engaged in a confrontation that may have claimed as many casualties as the 'original' events. According to the police, more than 3,000 lives were lost in the course of the riot and its suppression by police and army units.[1] Yet news about the Jos catastrophe did not find their way into Western media. Let us take a closer look at this local conflict, exploring particularly in which ways the rival parties imagined it. Why did they identify with actors in North America and the Arab world? How did they appropriate the images of a global drama and make them reflect their own African realities? And how did these images reshape local antagonisms?

Understanding 9/11

<2>

In his essays on the Spirit of Terrorism, Jean Baudrillard reflected on our attitudes towards the main target of the 9/11 attack. The collapsing twin towers fascinated many intellectuals in Europe. The buildings not only looked like "perfect embodiments" of the "dominant world power" and its "omnipotence", "they were in a sense its brain, and in striking there the terrorists have struck at the brain, the nerve-centre of the system".[2] Against a "technocratic machinery", a totalising "network" that strove to get everything under control, the terrorist act "restore[d] an irreducible singularity", thus challenging the homogenizing forces of "globalization".[3] The assault on the World Trade Center came from the periphery, from "scattered" militants, who articulated individual and cultural "singularities". Despite this rootedness in a peripheral milieu of resistance, the spirit of terrorism was not alien to those living in the metropolis: "terroristic imagination […] dwells in all of us. The fact that we have dreamt of this event that everyone without exception has dreamt of it – because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree – is unacceptable to the Western moral conscience".[4] We did not act out these aggressive fantasies, and most of us did not even talk about them, but the sight of the glittering skyscrapers inevitably evoked "a secret desire to see them disappear".[5] In their "perfect symmetry" the two clones were "architectural monsters" that betrayed the inhumanity of these control towers: "the horror for the 4,000 victims of dying in those towers was inseparable from the horror of living in them – the horror of living and working in sarcophagi of concrete and steel".[6]

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1 Haz Iwendi (a police spokesman) in *Tell*, Oct. 1st, 2001, 'The fallout of a carnage, p.64.' Danfulani & Fwatshak (2002:243, 249) have adopted this figure, while a report by Human Rights Watch (2001:2,10) talks of "more than 1000" casualties.

2 Baudrillard (2002:6, 7, 51, 45)

3 Baudrillard (2002:9, 8, 11)

4 Baudrillard (2002:12, 9, 5)

5 Baudrillard (2002:46)

6 Baudrillard (2002:46, 45)

<3>
In texts written by Nigerian journalists and intellectuals I did not come across such reflections on 9/11. The confrontation was not perceived in terms of a fundamental asymmetry between the antagonists. The attackers and their foes stood both for global forces which were seen as equal in the sense that both vied for supremacy. What divided them was, above all, their religious affiliation. For many, if not most observers in Nigeria, 9/11 highlighted the fight between a secular-Christian West and Islamic forces associated with Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Iran or Afghanistan. When reflecting this antagonism Nigerians took a keen interest in understanding the inner forces that motivated the conflicting parties. These forces were sometimes personified, for instance by popular artists producing posters (sold as calendars in the markets) which juxtaposed photos of George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden, both surrounded by objects illustrating the antagonists' powers and their ways of life.[7] In this context, pictures of the twin towers appeared as icons of America's might and vulnerability. However, the monumental buildings were not interpreted as something monstrous or inherently evil and intimidating. Gigantic bank and business buildings, be they in New York, Dubai or Riyadh, are rather connoted with the idea of progress and development. Muslims, for instance, who have visited Saudi Arabia appreciate its (post)modern architecture which promises to the faithful an "alternative modernity",[8] as affluent as the West but without its permissiveness and moral decadence.

<4>
Nigerians responded to 9/11 in many different ways. In the Muslim north, a film team produced the movie *Ibro Usama*, in which Osama bin Laden is mimed by Rabilu Musa, a well-known comedian.[9] However, films, posters and other artistic media reflecting the events in New York are not the topic of this article. I will discuss a more immediate appropriation of the attack in Manhattan: its "replica"[10] in the city of Jos, located in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, between the Muslim north and the Christian south of the country. Just a few days before 9/11, Jos had been shaken by a communal conflict which police and army units had quelled by imposing a curfew. When images of the terrorist attack spread in town they emitted a strong mimetic impulse. People took to the streets again and created "our version of the American 9/11".[11] However, re-staging the clash in an African environment meant that its targets shifted. In cities like Jos there were no icons of global financial powers except local branches of Western Union or Barclays Bank, and these institutions did not attract noticeable hostility. Since the confrontation was interpreted in terms of a religious antagonism, embodiments of globalisation, such as the World Trade Center, did not possess much symbolic value. Instead, churches and mosques became the focus of aggression.[12]

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The idea of a universal clash between Islam and Christianity helped translating a global event into a local Nigerian context. By assuming that the same religious forces were at work in New York as in Jos, people could relate their personal experiences to remote forces that were out of reach and unfathomable for most Nigerians but had a strong influence on their lives. Those who picked up the fight identified with the sufferings, achievements and aspirations of foreign people and felt their anguish and pride, up to the point of risking their lives for a common cause. These trans-African links, however imaginary, seemed to give them some power over the outside world. Activists had the impression of participating in a global drama whose out-

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7 The encounter of Bush and bin Laden in Nigerian media is analysed in Krings (2004).

8 Kane (2003:88(

9 Krings (2004:262-264)

10 Appadurai (2006:100)

11 Gotan (2004:69)

12 I visited Jos in March and April 2002, talked with Muslims and Christians about the September events and was shown some of the sites where the fighting had taken place. Later visits were in January 2007 and March 2011. In order to illustrate how various actors in Jos perceived the crisis and its causes, I will refer to articles in Nigerian newspapers and political magazines.

come they could influence. They only had to act with strength and determination. However, engaging in a global confrontation had its risks. While the actors in Jos remodelled 9/11 to make it suit their local needs and expectations, 9/11 also remodelled them. News about the attacks in New York prompted the conflicting parties in Jos to reassess their identity and redefine their opponents, with the result that they transformed and escalated a communal conflict which had been conceived, until then, as mainly ethnic.

<6>
9/11 had a polarizing effect. In the clashes that followed on September 12 in the streets of Jos, it looked as if two camps – Muslims and Christians – were at war with each other. However, the idea of a religious confrontation, which dominated newspaper reports in Nigeria, eclipsed the fact that the participants were driven by very divergent motives and that many of them used the riot to settle old scores. A good number of militants were members of youth gangs with little interest in religion and a penchant for plunder.[13] I will not look at gang violence but focus on another phenomenon: the interplay of ethnicity and religion. Ethnicity was often adduced by my interlocutors in Jos when explaining the genesis of the crisis. As the ethnic situation in in the city is complex, I will start be introducing the major actors. Since its foundation as a settlement in the tin mining region, Jos has attracted people from diverse parts of Nigeria. No ethnic group is numerically dominant, so the power structure has been unstable, and contest over the control of the local administration led to ethnic conflicts already in colonial times. Much of these conflicts revolved around the question of autochthony. The Berom and some dozen other 'indigenous' peoples see themselves as the owners of the Jos Plateau and of the city, which the British administration established on their ancestral land. Most of the 'indigenes' are Christians, and their common faith has made it easier for them to cooperate in defending 'their' territory. Yet when they claim ownership of the land and the political-administrative structures erected on it, they do it on the basis of their ancestral rights, not in the name of God.[14]

<7>
Their main rivals, the Hausa, whose traditional settlement area is in the far north of Nigeria, tend to reject ethnic prerogatives. Most Hausa have migrated to the Middle Belt since the 1970s, so they cannot argue that they inherited the land from their forefathers. For them, religion is a better means of political mobilisation. This is one of the reasons why the Sharia campaign, which started in 1999 with the end of military rule, found much support among Hausa 'settlers' in the Middle Belt. By calling for the introduction of Sharia, they claimed a divine mandate to take over the state apparatus from the 'infidels' and introduce God's law. In Jos, however, where Muslims were clearly outnumbered by Christians, they had been reluctant, until 9/11, to join the Sharia campaign that had swept most states in northern Nigeria.

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Another group of 'migrants' are the Igbo whose homeland is in southeast Nigeria. Nearly all of them are Christians, and they tend to see themselves, more than other Nigerian peoples, as exponents of a Western way of life. To them it would make sense to identify with the Christian-secular West and join those who fight Muslim 'fanatics'. Yet they have been reluctant to take sides. As members of a vast diaspora of traders and artisans who have suffered persecution in many parts of the north, they are cautious not to be implicated in any major conflict. Moreover, many of them feel a strong resentment towards the indigenous Christians in Jos, and their relationship towards Western powers is quite ambivalent. A study on religious violence by Freedom House, which sought to raise sympathy for the Christian minorities, pointed out that Muslims on their protest marches in north Nigerian cities carried posters of Osama bin Laden, while Christian demonstrators waved American flags.[15] However, enthusiasm for the

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[13] Conerly Casey (2007) has analysed the role of such gangs in communal violence, taking the case of the *Yan Daba* in the city of Kano where similar clashes took place.

[14] League for Human Rights (2004:82–108); Omotola (2006:756-759)

[15] Freedom House (2002:4, 16, 32)

West has usually been lukewarm. Among the Igbo, the biggest group of Christians in Nigeria, there is a stronger attachment to Israel than to the US and to European countries.

Globalising a Local Conflict

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The tension that erupted in three days of street fighting had its roots in local hostilities. Since the 1980s, clashes between Muslims and Christians, often overlapping with ethnic antagonisms, had claimed thousands of lives in northern Nigeria. Religious violence had escalated with the introduction of democracy in 1999, when the newly elected parliaments of twelve northern states had introduced Sharia laws. The worst clashes, with about 2,000 dead, had occurred in February and May 2000 in Kaduna, where the state parliament had passed Islamic laws although nearly half of the population were Christians.[16] These 'Sharia clashes', however, had not spread to Jos which was the centre of Christianity in the largely Muslim north.[17] Since Muslims in Jos formed just a third or a quarter of the population, they had no chance of bringing Islamic laws through parliament and thus had not risked a confrontation over Sharia. Given the clear Christian majority in Jos and the surrounding Plateau State, nobody expected a major religious crisis, though in September 2001, just four days before 9/11, some quarters of town were afflicted by violence which claimed hundreds of lives. This conflict was perceived, however, less as a religious than an ethnic conflict. It pitted Hausa and Fulani 'settlers' from the north, who had migrated to the Jos Plateau since colonial times, against the 'indigenous' Berom, Anaguta and Afisare, on whose ancestral land the city had been founded in 1915.[18] Moreover, this conflict had already abated by September 10, after the army had enforced a curfew. A 'second round' of fighting, however, started on Wednesday, September 12, when Muslims took to the streets and celebrated the victory over the world power USA. Their demonstration turned violent, when some of the protestors called for the introduction of Sharia and attacked the shops of Igbo traders and other Christians from the south who had not been involved in the dispute so far.[19]

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News of the events in New York did not just trigger more violence; they structured the urban conflict in Jos in a new, more dangerous way. Despite the fact that the Hausa were Muslims while most of the 'indigenes' were Christians, religious affiliations did not play a central role before 9/11. The dispute revolved around a local issue and had a rather ethnic colouring. Members of the Hausa community, which was concentrated in Jos North, vied for administrative control over the northern part of the city, accusing the chairman of the local government, a Christian Anaguta, of discriminating against them. The chairmen had declined, among

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16 Harnischfeger (2008)

17 The Middle Belt has been administered most of the time as part of the Northern Provinces or the Northern Region which encompassed three quarters of Nigeria's land mass. Therefore, Jos is often called a northern city.

18 The largely Muslim Hausa-Fulani are Nigeria's biggest ethnic conglomerate with roughly 30 percent of the country's population. In the nineteenth century, the Fulani formed a distinct stratum of conquerors, but most of them gradually adopted the language and often the culture of the numerically dominant Hausa. Thus it has become common to talk about the 'Hausa-Fulani', though on the Jos Plateau and some other areas Hausa and Fulani often prefer to live in separate settlements.

19 Guardian, Sept. 13, 2001: 'Jos boils again'; Danfulani and Fwatshak (2002:251). Demonstrations which celebrated the humiliation of the United States were reported from other Nigerian cities as well, yet it is difficult to assess to which extent the militants in the streets expressed widespread sentiments among Nigerian Muslims. Most Islamic authorities condemned the 'terrorist' attacks, though some commentators indicated that official declarations of sympathy with the American people were just one side of the coin: The "spontaneous feelings" were a "huge wave of joy, accompanied by disbelief, that was felt by everyone in the Islamic world" (Weekly Trust, Sept. 11, 2001: 'A Message from a Learned Scholar', http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/557193/posts, (accessed 21.04.2012)). For surveys on anti-Americanism in Africa see Seesemann 2006, for attitudes in Nigeria see Back 2004).

others, to issue them certificates of indigeneship though some Hausa families have been living in town for generations.[20] The 'natives', on the other hand, complained that an important administrative post, the directorship of the Poverty Alleviation Programme, had been given to a Hausa who allegedly favoured his ethnic group. In September 2001, both sides were preparing for a violent clash. A member of the local Igbo diaspora, which had kept out of the dispute over indigeneship, told me how the conflict in Jos had been designed initially. According to him, representatives of the Igbo community had been contacted by Hausa leaders who had briefed them about the upcoming confrontation and urged them to keep out of it: Igbo Christians would not be affected; the affair only concerned the Hausa and their Anaguta, Afisare and Berom adversaries. But things changed with 9/11, when the attacks against the financial and military nerve centres in the US highlighted a seemingly global conflict. Now Hausa youths turned their aggression against all Christian communities, particularly against the Igbo who have played a prominent role in the business community of Jos.[21]

<11>
By bringing in religion, more actors were drawn into the conflict, and violence spread to all parts of town. In addition, the confrontation became more intractable. As long as it was framed as a conflict between ethnic communities that fought over local government jobs and public funds, the parties involved stood a better chance of settling their dispute. They could have reached a compromise by sharing the contested resources, though, admittedly, the demographic situation in Jos made it difficult to find a lasting solution. Since more and more Muslims from the increasingly arid and overpopulated Sahel zone have been moving southwards into the Middle Belt, the ethnic and religious composition of Jos is shifting, tilting the balance of power in favour of the newcomers. Those who are gaining in strength have little incentives to stick to the terms of earlier bargains. Time is on their side, while their opponents fear that they are losing out if they allow this trend to continue.[22] As in other regions of the Middle Belt where 'indigenous' Christians still form a majority, the 'autochthonous' population of the Jos Plateau is afraid that Muslim 'settlers' will eventually outnumber them. Things have been made worse by the introduction of the Sharia in some neighbouring states where Christian members of parliament strongly opposed the dismantling of secular safeguards but were outvoted by the Muslim majority. With the gradual Islamisation of state institutions, Christian minorities in Kaduna, Bauchi or Gome State saw their influence waning, and with the loss of political control they feared losing control over their most precious resources: their ancestral land, the very basis of their existence.[23]

<12>
Given these anxieties among the 'native' population in Jos, it came to them as a shock when some Hausa residents celebrated the assault on infidels and called for the introduction of Islamic law. Calling for Sharia meant that they intended to take control not only of the local government in Jos North but of the parliament and the state apparatus, which are the crucial institutions to implement an Islamic legal system. Up to this moment, nobody had expected that the Hausa 'migrants' would openly challenge the Christian hegemony in Plateau State. As

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[20] Higazi 2007: 74. – In colonial times the Hausa used to dominate the 'native' part of town. Refering to this tradition, the Muslim community leader claimed that "we are the indigenes […] we are the ones that established the town. […] the Muslims own the city of Jos" (Weekly Trust, Sept 14. 2001, 'It Was a Religious Crisis'; cf. Aliyu 2004:90). However, Muslims did not form the majority of the population of Jos (Plotnicov 1967:45). It was only due to "the clear bias of Englishmen for Muslims, especially Hausa" that the administration appointed Hausa chiefs as 'traditional rulers' of the Native Town: "Administration records are full of the dismisssals of these chiefs for inefficiency, bribery, graft, and corruption, but a tradition had been established to which the Hausa community clung tenaciously. […] In 1954, to ease the growing tensions between Birom and Hausa, […] the chief of the Birom became Chief of Jos" (Plotnicov 1967:45, 47)

[21] Danfulani & Fwatshak (2002:247-251); Higazi (2007:84)

[22] Rothchild (1999:330-331); (Fearon 1998:118)

[23] Harnischfeger (2004)

the bulwark of Middle Belt Christianity, the state capital Jos seemed to be a place where Christians could feel safe. Just a year ago, when Sharia clashes had erupted in Kaduna, Kano and other northern cities and thousands of Christians had fled in panic, many had taken refuge in Jos.[24] But with 9/11, religious violence caught up with them. Some of the refugees simply left the Middle Belt and fled further south to their home areas in Igbo- or Yorubaland or in the Nigerdelta, while others who decided to stay put up a fierce resistance to what they interpreted as a Muslim (or Hausa) encroachment on a Christian stronghold.

<13>
The religious polarisation which 9/11 created radically altered mutual perceptions. By identifying with militants in Palestine, Afghanistan and New York, Muslims and Christians shed the restraint that used to characterise everyday life. To all groups involved, the explosion of violence made it clear that they could not trust each other. The relatively peaceful behaviour shown in daily routines had concealed an abyss of aggression. Thus the global crisis and its echo in the streets of Jos appeared like a moment of truth that brought to the fore hidden loyalties and intentions. In a situation of emergency when ethnic and religious affiliations decided over life and death, it looked as if people dropped their masks and revealed their 'true' identities. What became visible in this sudden transformation could be understood by linking it to the images that had been circulated by CNN and Al Jazeera. Alien actors came to signify people's 'real' selves. A Muslim neighbour or brother-in-law would turn into a religious warrior, not much different from a mujahideen of Hamas or Al Qaida. And Christian citizens metamorphosed into crusaders, involved in a worldwide conspiracy to weaken Islam.[25]

<14>
By staging a "clash of civilisations",[26] the inhabitants of Jos shattered the little trust that had existed among them. The religious polarisation affected state institutions as well, revealing cracks in the police and the army. Christian police officers complained that the Police Commissioner in charge of Plateau State, Mohammed Abubakar, had made sure that they were only armed with batons to contain the riot, while Muslim officers were given guns which they used to guard mosques and other Muslim property.[27] Similar allegations were levelled against members of the army. Muslims reported that an Igbo officer gathered a few fellow soldiers under his command and hounded Muslims, while Christians told the case of a Muslim soldier who went on a killing spree: When encountering Muslim demonstrators he fired into the air, but when sighting Christians he immediately shot at them. So far, soldiers have not turned their guns against each other, but mutual suspicion has increased. Muslims and Christians in the army are monitoring each other, anticipating a situation where ethnic and religious antagonisms may gain the upper hand, overriding military discipline and professional loyalty. This is not an unlikely scenario. After all, Nigeria's descent into civil war, in May 1967, began with the disintegration of the army when high-ranking officers killed each other.

Christians and the West

<15>
Switching from an ethnic to a religious confrontation had severe consequences for the security forces and other state institutions. Moreover, it accelerated segregation among the inhabitants of Jos and divided the city in two religious halves. Districts in which Christians drove out the Muslim inhabitants were given new names such as Jesus Zone, New Jerusalem or Promised Land, while Muslims renamed their quarters Jihad Zone, Saudi Arabia or Seat of [bin]

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[24] Sharia "triggered an avalanche of immigrants […] pouring into Jos" (Danfulani & Fwatshak (2002:244); Human Rights Watch (2001:5)

[25] Appadurai (2006:88-92)

[26] Maduagwu (2005:24)

[27] Tell, Oct. 1, 2001, 'The Fallout of a carnage', p.62, 64-65; Newswatch, Sept. 24. 2001: 'Mayhem in Tin City' p.33

Laden.[28] All parties involved made use of mass-mediated identities. They defined themselves and others by referring to global images of 'Arabs', 'Americans' and 'Jews'. However, some groups, like the Igbo, were reluctant to play their part in the clash of global forces, because they have been a major target whenever ethno-religious clashes erupted in the north. As their homeland in southeast Nigeria is very densely populated, with little industry to offer employment, millions of them have moved away to other parts of the country and beyond. In Kano, Zaria and other cities of the north they form the most numerous Christian ethnic group. As traders, artisans and hotel owners they have often been quite successful in their new environment, yet also vulnerable to attacks. In 1945, when for the first time riots erupted in Jos, Igbo were the prime target.

<16>
For Igbo living in the north, discrimination and the threat of being attacked have become a regular feature of life: "Any time there is crisis in the Northern part of the country, the first target is Igbo".[29] In recent years, many riots have been triggered by global events. When the US army attacked Afghanistan and Iraq, Muslim militants in Kano marched into the Christian quarter of town, shouted anti-US slogans and burned the churches and stores of Christians, most of them Igbo.[30] When a Danish newspaper published caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed, the Christian minority anticipated trouble and distanced itself from the event. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), speaking on behalf of all churches, was the first to denounce the 'blasphemy' committed by Danish artists, but this did not calm Muslim anger. In the city of Maiduguri, 56 church buildings were razed and dozens of Christians were killed.[31] Another occasion for attacks on the Igbo diaspora has been the annual celebration of Al Quds Day (Jerusalem Day), instituted by the Iranian government as a worldwide day of protest against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Each year at the end of Ramadan, when Shiite militants take to the streets chanting anti-Israel slogans, Igbo traders in Kano or Zaria fear for their life. The governors of the five Igbo states in southeast Nigeria have condemned the "institutionalised kind of violence against the Igbo race".[32] Their kith and kin are fed up with serving as scapegoats who have to suffer for the deeds of others. As a minority of traders and small-scale businessmen, who enjoy little protection from state authorities, they are anxious not to be drawn into local conflicts. In Jos they stood aloof and watched how Berom and Hausa descended on each other. It was only after 9/11, when their shops were looted, that they took up arms and defended themselves.

<17>
It is not in the interest of the Igbo diaspora to be seen as representatives of American and European 'crusaders'. Their role as stooges of the West has been imposed on them by their adversaries, in an attempt to discredit them. Muslim newspapers cast them in the role of traitors who allow themselves to be used as instruments of the erstwhile colonial masters and their American successors: "Nigerian Christians are […] doing their own part of the work as stipulated by the American New World Order".[33] The Igbo are indeed more Western-oriented than other peoples in Nigeria, but their relationship with the West is fraught with bitter experiences. In the late 1960s, when they suffered from pogroms and ethnic cleansing, Western states did not come to their aid. Even at the height of the Biafra crisis, when hundreds of

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28 Tell, Oct. 15, 2001, 'To their tents', p.36

29 Newscap, Vol. 2,40 (2001), 'Igbo threaten war, if …', p.4

30 According to Newswatch (Oct. 29., 2001, 'Harvest of death', p.36) the "Osama bin Laden riots" in Kano, following the US attack on Afghanistan, claimed 200 lives.

31 Christian Association of Nigeria (2006:109); *Africa Research Bulletin*, Feb. 2006, p.16549

32 The News, March 27, 2000 'On the brink', p.12

33 Hotline, March 12, 2000, 'Shari'ah has come to stay', p.31. Igbo newspapers, in turn, have portrayed their opponents as stooges of Arab interests: "Nigerian and African Muslim communities […] serve as foot soldiers and cheerleaders for the Middle Eastern fraternity of terror" (New Republic, March 4, 2006, 'Osama Bin-Laden', p.11).

thousands were starved to death by a food blockade imposed on the encircled Igbo, the British government remained Nigeria's main supplier of arms.[34]

<18>
The pact between Nigerian Christians and the West, based on their common religion, is largely fictitious. Why do Muslims in the north implicate their foes in a religious conspiracy? The idea that local conflicts are associated with a global opposition between Muslims and the West is propagated by Islamic clerics, and it appeals to many faithful. Since the attempt to modernise themselves along European models has failed, it makes sense to revalue their Islamic heritage and seek a stronger identification with the Arab world whose inhabitants seem to share a similar disappointment about Western promises. Rejecting the values of a "morally degenerate"[35] West finds support in all strata of society, not the least among ordinary Muslims, who may see the introduction of Sharia as the only remedy for the moral decay and corruption that has penetrated all spheres of life. Purging themselves from these alien influences is a collective endeavour. It requires fighting immorality in their midst by confronting all those who are not willing to go along with the project of a moral renewal: "With Sharia, […] [a]ll those unwanted customs that are not in our blood, are going to go away".[36] What the faithful reject has been personified, above all, in the Igbo. Like the distant West with its secular-Christian culture, the Igbo have become the embodiment of depravity: "the general belief in the North is that 'every Igbo man is a criminal'. […] These people (southerners) have lowered our moral standards, debased our value system and introduced vices that were hitherto unknown to us […]. I cannot wait to see them carry back with them the only things they brought to us. These are: armed robbery, prostitution, cultism".[37]

<19>
Localizing evil in some part of the population may raise passions that are difficult to control. In Jos, religious enthusiasm developed unintended consequences. Fired by the triumph over the world power USA, militants escalated the conflict in a way that harmed the interests of the local Hausa community. By turning an ethnic into a religious conflict they provoked the whole range of local Christian communities and stiffened their determination to resist. Christian Igbo, Anaguta and Berom, who had often been divided over local issues, united and launched fierce counter-attacks while the Muslim minority suffered heavy casualties. It seems the images of the glistening twin towers, collapsing at the onslaught of a few determined fighters, blinded Muslim militants. They lost sight of local realities and were lured into a confrontation they could not win, at least not for the time being. They may have planned for long to capture the Plateau – as their opponents suspected – but they had never avowed such an aim and openly fought for it. Dropping this caution created fear of a Muslim take-over that has not abated since. When conflicts erupted again in November 2008 and in January 2010, they followed the religious pattern that had emerged with 9/11, dividing the city in two hostile halves.[38] Members of the 'indigenous' ethnic groups, who had occasionally clashed over ownership of land, put their differences behind and fought side by side, as they had done in September 2001. Christian migrants from the south, such as the Igbo, found themselves almost automatically in the same Christian camp. However, members of the Igbo diaspora told me that this alliance, based on a common antagonism towards Muslims or Hausa, was fragile. Though the Igbo were afraid of Muslims assuming control over the whole of Plateau State, they did not trust the 'indigenous' Christians either.[39]

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[34] St. Jorre (1972); Cronje (1972)

[35] J. A. Amoloye (1986) in Falola (1998:85)

[36] BBC. Focus on Africa, Oct. – Dec. 2000, 'Sharia Marches On', p.53; Krings (2008:61)

[37] Hotline, 3 April 2000, 'Enough of the blackmail', pp.17, 20

[38] Higazi (2011)

[39] The level of cooperation among Christians has, of course, increased. A few years before 9/11, an Igbo lecturer at the university told me that the Igbo in Jos had only superficial contacts with members of other ethnic groups, including Christian Berom (Jos, Sept. 22, 1995).

Epilogue

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Reflecting the mediation of 9/11, a Muslim newspaper in northern Nigeria lamented Western domination of the global information industry: "the Muslim world is almost totally swamped by a global media, which is essentially hostile to its values".[40] Such a hostile monopoly – it was assumed – had severe consequences because it enabled the West to manipulate public opinion by defining who is a terrorist.[41] The fear of the manipulative power of Western media seems to corroborate the optimistic assumptions of American analysts who propagated 'soft power' as the best means to defend American hegemony. Since the United States controlled a huge part of global information flows, they seemed to have good chances of preserving their influence: "America's mass culture exercises a magnetic appeal […]. American television programs and films account for about three-fourths of the global market2".[42] However, this view does not take into consideration how global news and images are appropriated. Many Muslims in Nigeria did not embrace the Western credo that Osama bin Laden is a terrorist. In the weeks following 9/11, stickers and posters of bin Laden were to be seen all over northern Nigeria, and 'Osama' became the most popular name for newborn sons, just like 'Saddam' became popular at the time of the Iraq war.[43] Attitudes towards the US, however, could change unpredictably, as in 2008 during the presidential campaign of Barack Obama, when stickers of the future American president sold in places like Kano.[44]

<21>

Africans are largely free when assessing global events. Though most of the information gleaned from newspapers, television or the internet originates in the West it is integrated into local discourses and often transmitted in a personal form, by word of mouth, mixed with rumours and speculations.[45] How people relate to world events depends – as the case of Igbo nationalism has shown – on a complex history of encounters with local and transnational forces. This makes it difficult for outside powers to manipulate local opinion – contrary to the assumption of American experts that the US government can "adopt a set of policies that ensure that significant numbers of Muslims – not Muslim regimes but Muslims – identify their own interests with those of the United States".[46] It is unlikely that Muslims in Iraq or Nigeria will reassess their attitudes in accordance with American or Western interests. Part of the problem is that these interests are far from clear. Though the United States are a media democracy, with journalists who cover every public event, nobody knows why their government has attacked Iraq and what it hoped to achieve in Afghanistan.[47]

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The identification with foreign people is shaped by a long and intricate interplay of global and local forces. This process, I guess, is far too complex to be manipulated by a hegemonic power like the United States whose government has tried to forge a worldwide coalition against terrorism. Powers in the West may have much influence on the flow of global information, but people in the periphery, when reacting to world events, pick up what they find significant and make sense out of it. However, this is not a matter of conscious decisions which can be understood in terms of rational choice. As the re-enactment of 9/11 in Jos reminds us, collective reactions to global phenomena can be as unpredictable as acts of spirit possession, when persons may be seized by alien forces and feel a strong urge to act them out.

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40 Weekly Trust July 12, 2001, 'Conspiracy or monopoly: The Muslim and the global media'

41 Weekly Trust, Dec. 7, 2001

42 Brzeziniski (1997:25)

43 Krings (2004:255–258); Vanguard, Nov. 11, 2001: 'Gusau in the Grip of Extremists', p.14.

44 According to Nura Ibrahim, a lecturer at Bayero-University Kano (speaking on Nov. 20, 2009 at a workshop on 9/11 in Cologne) Hausa Muslims identified with Obama not because he is black but because he was seen as a Muslim.

45 Ellis & ter Haar (2004:30)

46 Doran (2002:41); Chalk (2004:414, 430)

47 Van Creveld (2006:246)

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