

# **Movement as Mediation: Envisioning a Divided Nigerian City\*<sup>1</sup>**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since its establishment in the beginning of the twentieth century, the inhabitants of the ethnically and religiously diverse Nigerian city of Jos have inhabited very different places and travelled along opposite trails – patterns that in recent years, with an escalation of violence, have gained new dimensions. By bringing people’s movements into focus, this article highlights how movement comes in different ways to mediate between people and a city in flux. Brought to light is how movement in several different modalities – fast, slow, in total arrest; clothed in Christian or Muslim attires; by car, on foot, or on horseback; assertive or explorative, in triumph as well as in fear – by mediating between people and the city, brings forth a metaphysical landscape that otherwise is hard to get hold of. In this vein, movement as a medium has become a form of ‘social envisioning’ – a tool for understanding and foretelling the city.

**Keywords:** *movement, mediation, Nigeria, conflict, urban studies.*

## **1. MOVEMENT IN A CITY IN FLUX**

Since its establishment in the beginning of the twentieth century, the inhabitants of the ethnically and religiously diverse Nigerian city of Jos have inhabited very different places and travelled along opposite trails (Andersson 2010). Today a city of over one million, Jos is an urban landscape in which places continually are shaped by the absence as much as the presence of certain people – patterns that in recent years, with an escalation of violence, have gained new dimensions. Though neither the first nor the last violent outbreaks in the city,<sup>2</sup> ‘the Crisis’, as the clashes of 2001 came to be known, became a turning point that in fundamental

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\* This work was supported in part by the Swedish Research Council (grant number 2012–752).

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on extensive fieldwork conducted in Jos by the authors over three decades.

<sup>2</sup> See Adetula (2005), Andersson Trovalla (2011: 31–40), Higazi (2007), Mwakwun (2001), and Plotnicov (1971, 1972).

ways introduced a reshaping of the urban landscape. In the wake of thousands of lives being lost and homes being burnt down, existing borders in the city have been reinforced and an already schismatic urban landscape congealed into Muslim- and Christian-‘controlled zones’ (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002: 253). As a landscape of fear and ownership claims emerged, Christian-dominated areas received informal names like ‘New Jerusalem’, ‘Jesus Zone’, and ‘Promised Land’, while Muslim-dominated areas were named ‘Sharia Line’, ‘Angwan Musulmi’, ‘Afghanistan’, ‘Jihad Zone’, ‘Saudi Arabia’, and ‘Seat of [bin] Laden’ (see Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002: 253; Harnischfeger 2004: 446; Murray 2007).

All over the city an ever-present fear has come to shape people’s movements, movements that in turn have come to rewrite the urban landscape. Today, places that were possible to live in before no longer are so. Areas and times that were previously experienced as safe no longer are so. In places where one felt at home, one is now a stranger or even an intruder. It is a landscape in which it is not easy to foresee where and when boundaries will be activated, or what it means when they are. As new no-go areas and no-go times continually emerge, walls in the different neighbourhoods are decorated with graffiti messages such as ‘Jos for Jesus’, or Arabic writing declaring Jos city as ‘Allah’s gift’. While cell phone ringtones with carefully selected verses from the Holy Bible and Holy Koran regularly fill the air, the very same cell phones have come to transmit warnings and announcements of attacks that are imminent, and which areas are safe or should be avoided.

By bringing people’s movements into focus, this article highlights how movement comes in different ways to *mediate* between people and a city in flux. Mediation, as an analytical tool, is explored here as the process in which these separate elements are ‘brought into articulation’ through movement that works as ‘the vehicle or medium of communication’ (Parmentier 1994: 24). What is brought to light is how movement in several different modalities – fast, slow, in total arrest; clothed in Christian or Muslim attires; by car, on foot, or on horseback; assertive or explorative, in triumph as well as in fear – by mediating between people and the city, brings forth a metaphysical landscape that otherwise is hard to get hold of. Through movement, added dimensions of the urban landscape emerge as very real: mythical domains, religious realms, and a fear of capricious and malevolent powers that seem to animate the city. In much the same way as other media – including newspapers, statistics, or fiction, movement helps to conceptualise forces that shape the world – it is a practice of ‘social envisioning’ (Peters 1997: 78–79), a tool for understanding an unpredictable city. As a medium, movement ‘makes society imaginable and intelligible to itself’ (Mazzarella 2004: 346).

Taking as a starting point the competing origin myths of the city, all emphasising different groups’ first movements on the land of Jos, the article opens with an exploration into how the myths are emplaced through an increasingly significant practice of invention and re-invention of traditions. By articulating the relationship between the bodies of the participants and the city, the new movement

of festivals, parades, and bodily remains through the conflict-ridden streets of Jos has brought forth opposing mythological landscapes. After that follows an analysis of how clothes with religious connotations have come to shape movement by instilling, erasing, and transforming borders, and how these ‘clothed’ movements, by mediating between citizens and their city, bring into view a religious landscape with continually changing force fields. Next, the article moves on to explore how the fear of being stopped at illegal roadblocks that might appear at any time, where people are being interrogated about their religious belonging, has become fundamental to the way the landscape is being read and understood. The highly charged interaction between movement and non-movement comes to mediate between travellers and an urban landscape which, in the process, becomes imbued with what appears like a destructive and erratic force. Even if, since its establishment, Jos has been a deeply divided and segregated city, the article’s three different cases bring forth in their own ways how the significance of people’s movements and non-movements since the Crisis has gained new dimensions in Jos – communicating novel messages across the city.

## 2. MOVING MYTHS

The Crisis, as well as succeeding bouts of violence that have followed, have gained much of their momentum from a specific fusion of ethnicity and religion in the concept of ‘indigeneity’ (see Suberu 2001: 17). On one side of the conflict are Christians belonging to ethnic groups perceiving themselves as indigenous to the area, and on the other are Muslims, labelled as ‘settlers’, and belonging to ethnic groups often clustered together as Hausa-Fulani. With increasing waves of conflicts, both the largely Christian ‘indigene’ groups (Afizere, Anaguta, and Berom) and the Muslim Hausa-Fulani identity groups have begun to invent and re-invent traditions (see Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), religious rituals, and cultural festivals, which in turn, through their emplacement – their movement along the streets of Jos – have become mediating agents, infusing the urban space with mythological dimensions. Marches, parades, dances, as well as the movement and relocation of symbolically charged matter, have become media of envisioning very different mythological landscapes.

Vying for recognition, different groups in Jos try bringing forth the source of their own connection to the physical space of the city (see Adetula 2005: 222f.). Searching their oral history, carefully crafting origin myths, they all emphasise the significance of their first movements on the land.<sup>3</sup> The Afizere, Anaguta, and

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<sup>3</sup> There are also several different origin myths on how the name ‘Jos’ came about. These myths, in a similar manner, focus on how the land was named, and in a way called into existence, by the people who first set foot there. For descriptions of these different myths, see for example Andersson Trovalla (2011: 188ff.), Bingel (1978: 2f.), Danfulani & Fwatshak (2002: 246), Egwu (2004: 263f.), Laws (1954: 117), Smedley (2004: 18), Taylor (1993: 27), and Zangabadt (1983: 9–12).

Berom construct their tales projecting themselves as ‘firstcomers’ and therefore ‘the owners of the land’. They all see themselves as the earliest communities to settle in Jos, and recognise each other as ‘cousins’ with whom they share the city of Jos as historical inheritance. In the case of the Berom, one of the popular versions of their early history and settlement pattern maintains that they originated from outside the Jos Plateau and on arrival on the Plateau, settled originally in Riyom – today a town and local government area to the south of Jos – from where they spread out across present-day Jos and its environs.

The Afizere, Anaguta, and Berom narratives point at the similarities in their religious rituals and cultural activities as evidence of their common heritage, which they take to support their assertion of being the earliest occupants of Jos, while presenting the Hausa-Fulani as coming from ‘outside’ and therefore not having any legitimate claim to Jos. In their narratives, their affinity is also bolstered by accounts of how Usmanu Dan Fodiyo, the nineteenth-century Islamic jihadist and founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, which came to encompass large swathes of present-day Nigeria, failed to expand the Islamic jihad to the present location of the Jos metropolis. Among the Berom, Afizere, and Anaguta, the story of fierce and successful resistance to Usmanu Dan Fodiyo and his army is usually told with embellishments, essentially to portray themselves as unconquerable. The narratives by these and some other groups on the Jos Plateau, who are mostly Christian, show serious bitterness towards Islam and indeed the Sokoto Caliphate. Thus, in addition to the preaching about the salvation of souls, the practice of Christianity among the indigenes becomes an expression of the historical resistance to Islam and its social values.

The Hausa-Fulani community (who refer to themselves as the ‘Jassawa’, ‘the people of Jos’), on the other hand, gives prominence to its advanced political and social organisation in its mythical narratives. While the members of the Jassawa group do not question that their forebears came to Jos later, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they claim that Jos was not then inhabited by any groups with a developed form of organisation. In this narrative, the Jassawa community was largely responsible for the development of the city of Jos. For the Hausa-Fulani, the widespread use of the Hausa language in the Jos metropolis is an index of its hegemonic influence, as are the many old streets in the city named after notable Hausa-Fulani personalities such as Ali Kazaure, Jenta Adamu, Jenta Makeri, Delimi, Sarki, Gadan Bako, Zololo, etc. Thus the situation in Jos echoes the recurring dynamics in Africa between firstcomers and latecomers, described by Igor Kopytoff, in which only firstcomers can claim authority as ‘the owners of the land’. A way for latecomers to deal with this is to redefine ‘primacy of occupation’ as who introduced social order – who ‘civilised’ the previous ‘savagery’. Inherent in this relationship is an authority conflict between when a land was first settled and when a currently existing society was founded (1987: 53–61).

While the myths of origin by the indigenes overtly ascribe the role of the founders of Jos to the so-called indigene groups, the Jassawa narratives make similar claims. One of the narratives points out that the creation by the British

colonial administration of the traditional institution of ‘Sarkin Hausawa Jos’, to which it attached authority over the other groups, was recognition of the unique position of the Jassawa in Jos. The narrative has it that the Berom protested, and the authority was transferred to them in the title of the ‘Gwong gwon of Jos’, which was created in 1947. But while the Berom usually discuss the Gwong gwon of Jos as the symbol of their supremacy as a group and entitlement to the land, the Jassawa make regular reference to the period of the reign of Sarkin Hausawa Jos (1902–1947) as a period of peace and tranquillity.

With the increasing fears of losing out in the contest for the city, both the Berom and Hausa-Fulani groups have come to take a deep interest in narrating these mythological pasts, and also in grafting elements of the myths back into physical space. The stool of Gwong gwon of Jos was institutionalised at the palace in the city centre. The Jos North Local Government Area – within which the palace is located – has a high concentration of Hausa-Fulani and, importantly, the palace is close to the main Mosque in Jos. This institutionalisation stepped up the political profile of indigenes and projected them as the ‘owners of Jos’, and the Berom have recently invented new religious rituals around the institution of Gwong gwom to enforce their mythical authority over the city. Whereas the body of the first Gwong gwom, Rwang Pam was buried in Riyom – the ‘original home’ of the Berom – when the third Gwong gwom, Da Victor Pam, died in March 2009, the Berom began to give thought to the idea of burying their traditional rulers in their palace rather than in a public cemetery. In conjunction with the burial of Da Victor Pam, the remains of the second Gwong gwom, Dr. Fom Bot, who was originally interred in a public cemetery in Jos, were also moved to the palace. This did not go down well with the Jassawa, however, who, as adherents of Islam, did not approve of having burial places of non-Muslims close to their abodes and main worship places.

In addition, the Berom have also elevated the occasion of the official enthronement of a new Gwong gwom. The official enthronements of the late Da Victor Pam and the current Gwong gwom, Da Jacob Buba Gyang, threw the city of Jos into an deployment of cultural instruments. With fierce looking Berom men mounted on horses, dressed in traditional war costumes and brandishing their spears and swords as they formed circles of protection around the Gwong gwom, the unspoken message was simple and clear: ‘We own the land!’ Similarly, the movement of the robust and extravagant celebration of ‘Nzem Berom’ – the Berom annual festival – through the city usually takes the form of a cultural dance across the major streets in the city of Jos with a number of Berom men and women in their traditional costumes and attires, singing war songs, marching and brandishing ancient war weapons, and posing symbolically as the ‘true owners’ of Jos. Similar ‘cultural days’ are also arranged by the Afrizere and Anaguta communities. During all of these occasions, members of the Hausa-Fulani community are usually the easy targets of bottled anger that is packaged as part of the festival entertainments.

The continual invention and movement of cultural-religious festivals through the city is not limited to the indigene groups. The Jassawa have also recently introduced a festival that echoes their tales of origin and ownership of Jos. After successful battles or military campaigns during the days of the Islamic Jihad of the nineteenth century in northern Nigeria, military parades were organised to pledge their loyalty to the Sokoto Caliphate, or its designated representatives, who would receive them and accord them appropriate honour and recognition. This is the origin of the Durbar which today is celebrated in many parts of northern Nigeria during Muslim festivals (especially at Id el-Fitr and Id el-Kabir festivals). Modern-day Durbar festivals mostly take place in public squares in front of the Emir's palace with processions of horsemen displaying their mastery of horse riding.<sup>4</sup> In Jos the Jassawa have developed a mini 'Jos Durbar', which, although less elaborate than its counterparts in core northern cities like Kano, Katsina, Zaria, and Bauchi, projects Jos as one of the territories under the control of the Emirate System.<sup>5</sup> It has thereby become very common during Muslim festivals in Jos to see young Hausa-Fulani, colourfully dressed and mounted on horses, riding through major streets through areas with high concentrations of Hausa-Fulani, like Bauchi Road, Ali-Kazaure, and Moshalashi Jimoh. There was also a recent move to further develop the Durbar culture in the city when the Jassawa made an attempt to institutionalise it by 'taking over' one of the old race courses near Bauchi Ring Road, which is close to neighbourhoods mainly populated by Christians. This was, however, vehemently resisted by the indigene groups.

The mythical dimensions of the city of Jos are coming into being through the movement of rituals and festivals along its streets. References to history and culture denote the longevity of each party's claims to Jos, and the act of moving the demonstrations out into the streets inserts the respective narratives into the physical spaces of the city where people lead their everyday life. The power that is exerted over space through these performances does not evaporate as the street returns to its normal comings and goings; some of the characteristics of the performance are absorbed into the body of meanings that is attached to the place (Andersson Trovalla 2011: 68; Mitchell 2006: 394). The practice of ostentatious movement, although marked as exceptional by the display of antiquated clothes and customs, does not just re-enact mythical pasts but creates a sense of synchronicity and realness. By mediating, in a powerful way, the relationship

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<sup>4</sup> For the conquest of substantial parts of northern Nigeria by the Othman Dan Fodio jihadists and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, see Adeleye (1971), Balogun (1975), Dugate (1985), and Hogben and Kirk-Greene (1966).

<sup>5</sup> The present-day city of Jos and most parts of the Jos Plateau were not conquered by the jihadists. However, at the onset of the British colonial rule a system of indirect rule was introduced which allowed the use of the traditional system of administration at the local level (see Lugard 1965). The system was operated essentially through the Emirate system in northern Nigeria. It was under this arrangement that Jos became part of the Bauchi Province at the instance of the British colonial administration.

between the participants and the land, these movements make a mythical city imaginable to its inhabitants.

### 3. CLOTHED MOVEMENT

It was a Monday towards the end of June 2004 in the university grounds; Labaran was very agitated and talked about there having been problems. As he hurried towards the office of the university security guards, he tried to tell a story of how he had been not only humiliated but also discriminated against because he had been dressed as a Muslim. The incident to which Labaran referred had occurred the previous Friday. At six o'clock in the evening, after taking part in the Friday prayer, he had gone to a place outside the university wall to pick herbs to give to one of the professors in the pharmacology department. A security guard working for the university had passed by and told him that he was not allowed to be there. Labaran felt very humiliated at being mistreated because, as he said, he had been wearing a gown, which had implied to the security guard that he was a Muslim crossing a Christian border on a Friday.

For Christians, the mosque was a threatening place, especially on Fridays, where people were thought to go to talk and secretly make plans, and for Muslims, the church and Sundays were similarly intimidating places and times. Consequently, Fridays and Sundays had come to add new dimensions to Jos's urban landscape. On those days, certain places would be avoided, and movements and actions normally tolerated would be impossible. With emerging and constantly mutating no-go areas and no-go times, it is not only a new awareness of being able or not able to move that is brought to the surface in Jos, but also an awareness of matters that shape, enable, and block movement. Before entering places, people have started to check themselves and what they are wearing. Are there any outer signs that might reveal that they do not belong? People who usually wear what are perceived as Western and Christian clothes, or as traditional Muslim clothes, have started changing their attire depending on the place they are going to visit. All of this highlights a new form of knowledge production around how one's right to access can be questioned or one's life can be put in danger by not dressing in accordance with a place or time.

While the 'others' were seen in the past in terms of ethnic belonging and were identified through such signs as dress, facial features, language, or residence, today they are viewed rather in relation to religious belonging. The diagnostic tools are still the same, but 'tribalism' is out and 'faith' is in (Last 2007: 606; see also Plotnicov 1969: 61). Sara, a Berom woman in her forties who has lived her whole life in the Jos area, described how Berom girls 'traditionally', up to the 1960s at least, used to wear garments of soft, braided grass; one part had covered the bottom and the other the front. The men, on the other hand, had worn only a penis sleeve (see Morrison 1975: 417; Smedley 2004: 19). With respect to 'tribe', she went on to argue that today you could no longer tell by their clothes where somebody came

from. She thought and modified her answer. One could still tell if someone was from the South of Nigeria or from the North, but in reality what you could see by the way people dressed, she concluded, was whether they were Christians or Muslims.

Even if it has always been part of the character of the city, what has increasingly come to define areas and borders in Jos is the movement or non-movement of different people – or, rather, of people wearing particular clothes. Clothes have come to add meaning to the movements, making them safe or dangerous, threatening or benign. The following account of Labaran’s struggle to move between Angwan Rogo and the University of Jos – two places that have come to be placed in opposition to each other – highlights how clothes, in a very palpable way, have come to structure movement: flow and non-flow, free paths, impassable paths, obstructions, detours, turned corners, avoided corners, and so on. But in turn, by articulating the relationship between people and their city, *clothed movement* has become a medium bringing to the surface a religious landscape with constantly mutating borders and zones, which otherwise remains invisible or obscured.

The neighbourhood of Angwan Rogo and the grounds of the University of Jos are both located in the northern part of Jos and are today separated only by the wall surrounding the university. During the Crisis in 2001, Angwan Rogo became the scene of some of the worst violence against Christians, and from there, violence spread into the university and turned the university gates into one of the ‘fiercest battlegrounds’ of the Crisis (HRW 2001: 13, 15f.). In the wall that surrounds the university are a number of gates, all of which used to be open. People would move between Angwan Rogo and the university grounds through the gates in the back, but with the Crisis, the back gates were closed and have remained so. The religious borders have become very clear. On one side of the university wall is the ‘Muslim ghetto’ and on the other the university compound, which has increasingly come to be understood as part of the Christian territory in Jos (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002: 249f.; see also HRW 2001: 15).

For years, the University of Jos had been a place of importance for the members of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners (NUMHP), Plateau State Branch – a meeting point for practitioners of traditional medicine with different ethnic and religious backgrounds ever since the university gave the union an office at the pharmacology department in 1984. With the Crisis in 2001, a new reality arose; new divisions and borders emerged among the union’s members, and just as in the landscape of Jos, it split into two factions. For Labaran, who had been part of the union’s inner circle since its establishment in the early 1980s, things became far more indeterminate. He found himself without a firm position in the union, and with the materialisation of new frontiers it became increasingly difficult for him, like many other Muslim members, to gain access to the university grounds. Most of them no longer even entered.

Labaran was known for his ability to transcend boundaries – to read and navigate a social environment that was in constant motion (Vigh 2009: 419f.).

According to the professor at the pharmacology department, Labaran was unusual in this way. He was Muslim, but he still entered the university grounds. The professor thought for a while and added that Labaran, unlike many other Muslim practitioners, who only spoke Hausa, also spoke English. Born into a Muslim indigene family in the 1940s, Labaran crossed the stereotypical distinction between the indigene Christian and the Muslim settler, as he did linguistic barriers. At an early age, at the same time his father and grandfather started to teach him medicines, he also went to school and learned how to speak, read, and write in English. Speaking Hausa and English as well as Ankwai, his own local language, Labaran was able to understand a lot of what was going on in Jos as a whole.

Even though Hausa is a lingua franca of Jos, along with English and Pidgin to certain degrees – given that people have continually been moving to Jos from all over Nigeria – not all people can communicate with each other directly or understand what people are talking about in different places. In union contexts, discussions were often translated for different members, and because all union documents were written in English, it was often necessary to read and translate letters, invitations, minutes, and membership certificates, etc. for members who did not understand English or could not read. Within in the union environment the talents of a secretary were a very potent force. Labaran, who had been the union's only legitimate elected secretary before the Crisis tore it in two, possessed the skills to move back and forth, communicating written and oral messages not only between specific practitioners of traditional medicine and different factions in the union, but also between the union and the university's pharmacology department.

In a way similar to his ability to move between his own local language, Hausa, and English, and between what was written and spoken, he was able to cross borders and feel at home in many of Jos's directly oppositional areas. In conversation along with Labaran, Bayo, another of Jos's herbal practitioners, described how, when the Crisis started, Labaran had changed clothes in his home. Labaran had been dressed like a Christian when he entered the house, and when, some hours later, he left Bayo's home in a mainly Muslim area in the city centre to try to reach his own village outside Jos, he had been dressed like a Muslim. This time, Bayo observed, Labaran was looking like a Christian, with his yellow corduroy pants, shirt, and jacket. The following day, Labaran was going to put a white gown over his corduroys and wear a small flat hat, his attire now appropriate for attending the Friday prayer at the main Mosque in Jos.

Labaran had a talent for play that Achille Mbembe suggested is characteristic of the postcolonial subject. In the midst of a 'chaotic plurality' of arenas with often conflicting logics, people have learned how to improvise and bargain, a talent that makes it possible for people to relentlessly keep changing their persona – to continually undergo 'mitosis' (Mbembe 1992: 5f., 11). The level of Labaran's versatility with language and appearance brought with it an exceptional ability to move in Jos, a fact that even led people to refer to him as a spirit or *iska*, a Hausa word that also refers to the wind or the air. People who were likened to spirits

were seen as very fluid, unsettled, and unpredictable, but also very skilful in their ability to move, change, and adapt to different contexts. Isaac, another herbal practitioner, explained that being like an *iska*,<sup>6</sup> Labaran had an ability to elude all attempts to locate him. When you arrived at the place where you had heard he was, he would have just left and gone to another place. If you then followed his footsteps to the next place, you would hear the same story again.

But despite the fact that Labaran's talents in these areas exceeded those of most people, even for him it had become harder to move in Jos. Walking briskly towards the security guards' office, he continued his story. He had tried, he recounted, to explain to the guard what he was doing there, but the guard had not listened. To prove what he was saying, he had shown the guard the 'ID card' he had received from the pharmacology department. This was a laminated letter bearing the emblem and address of the pharmacology department. The document certified that the bearer worked for the medical herbal union and for research purposes supplied herbal medicines to the department of pharmacology and clinical pharmacy. The guard had reacted by confiscating it and insisting that he was in very big trouble.

Clothes, just like documents, could open places up or close them down – what they actually did was highly relational and contextual. Even with all his skills, Labaran had failed to predict possible actions and their consequences. Clothed movement was just as unpredictable as the city itself. If it was going to be like this, he said angrily, he would leave Jos. Last Friday outside the university wall, Labaran had been questioned. He had been out of place, and all his efforts to become part of the place had come to alienate him even more. Today, however, he was dressed like a Christian, wearing a grey jacket and his yellow corduroys. As he approached the security guards' office, it was clear that the new clothes brought forth a very different place – a place he was part of. At the office Labaran started to recount what had happened last Friday, and stressed the fact that he was associated with the university's department of pharmacology. After some minutes, one of the security guards succeeded in locating the ID card that had been confiscated.

Labaran, now in command of the situation, made the security guard follow him to the union office. While Labaran settled down behind the desk inside the union office, the security guard sat down on the other side, looking down, ashamed, at the ID card in his hand. Labaran took the union's notebook out of one of the drawers and started to write. He explained that he was writing a report on the incident. Further manifesting his reclaimed authority, he praised the guard and told him that he was sorry he had no money to give him. Then he asked for the name of the security guard from last Friday as well as the name of the guard who

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<sup>6</sup> In Jos it is not uncommon to mix Hausa and English when speaking, as in the case referred to above. In Hausa, the usages of the word *iska* in relation to humans are in no way neutral; *dan iska* refers to an idle person and *iskananci* means immoral living, while *sha iska* means to go for a walk (Awde 1996: 70).

was presently here. Labaran took great care to get the names right, and the security guard had to spell them out several times.

Time forms places, and the university grounds were not the same place on a Monday as they were on a Friday. But it was more than that; even at a particular moment in time, the place was not the same for everyone engaging with it. As places act back, they greet people very differently. 'We make time and place, just as we are made by them,' Barbara Bender noted (2001: 4). When Labaran entered with Muslim clothes, a very different place emerged from when he entered with Christian clothes. Labaran's clothed movements literally changed the place; having the power to instil, erase, and transform borders, they brought forth features in the landscape which otherwise were dormant. Mediating between people's bodies and a landscape in flux, the many daily clothed movements, in a very palpable way, convey images of a religiously divided city with constantly mutating borders. Materialising Muslim and Christian realms in the urban landscape, clothed movement has become a medium – a practice of social envisioning out of which the torn city becomes imaginable to its inhabitants.

#### 4. MOVEMENT APPREHENDED

The conflict has turned a once familiar city into a landscape riddled with fear and bewilderment which defies all loud claims of mastery and requires everyone to re-learn its terms. In search of insight into the state of the city, people keep an eye on the rhythm of the traffic. Silence on otherwise busy streets may signal unrest in another part of the city. Remarkably many, or unusually few, green and yellow taxi vehicles plying a certain street may likewise indicate that they have changed itinerary because their usual route has suddenly become unsafe. Reading the landscape of movement and non-movement has become essential to survival in the city, as the limited overview from inside a vehicle, or, for that matter, on foot on crowded streets, has come to mean that very suddenly you can find yourself caught in lethal danger. An unexpected traffic jam, a flat tire, a minor fender-bender, or sometimes just turning a corner, tend to set off alarm bells in a traveller's mind, because along with the momentum, a frail sense of predictability is also lost.

Movement makes possible a variety of ways to imagine the city from each traveller's own point of view. It is a great storyteller, as it spells out the nature of the relationships between people and places. But in a city like Jos, a great part of what movement means is its potential of being blocked. This to the point that the fear of being stopped has become fundamental to the way the urban landscape is being read and understood. At the root of this anxiety are the illegal roadblocks which have been playing a large part in the violence since the current string of clashes began in 2001. They are normally encountered in the form of vigilante initiatives intended to protect neighbourhoods, but whenever trouble breaks out in the city, they appear not only inside residential areas, but anywhere near the

flash points. At makeshift barriers of logs, rocks, or tires, youths on either side of the conflict stop drivers and try to determine to which camp they belong based on the clothes they wear or by requiring them to recite passages from the Bible or verses from the Koran. Failure to satisfy such interrogators regarding religious belonging has resulted in the brutal end to hundreds of lives (see Higazi 2007: 82f.; HRW 2001: 9). These roadblocks appearing haphazardly in the city have given rise to the notion that the enemy is in permanent readiness to appear without warning or reason, as from behind a curtain. Travelling through the streets of Jos has become inseparable from this urban dramaturgy and people constantly re-read the shifting intensities of movement and non-movement in the search for safe paths. In this way, movement in its different modalities has become an indispensable medium for imagining an urban landscape imbued with highly unpredictable evil forces.

In July 2012, where it was barely visible between some papers in a compartment next to the gear lever, Tafawa kept a rosary made of white pearls and adorned with a white metal crucifix. A few years back, crucifixes or amulets with Koran verses hung from the rear-view mirror in many cars. However, after the violent scenes from 2001 had been repeated in 2008 and 2010, many drivers were no longer comfortable displaying such outright tokens of belonging. Tafawa, who had grown up in Jos and was now in his forties, explained that since he moved around quite a bit inside the city, having a crucifix plainly visible did not feel safe anymore, in case he ran into a roadblock manned by Muslim youths. On the other hand, he continued, the plates indicated that his car was registered in Kano, a large city in the mainly Muslim north of Nigeria. Moreover, despite his being a Christian, his parents had, in the spirit of national unity after independence, named him after one of the nation's founding fathers, who were Muslim. In addition to this he wore a beard and was of rather light complexion, the latter being a trait popularly associated with the Fulani people. All these things could lead Christians into believing he was Muslim. So if he ended up in a Christian roadblock, he wanted to have his rosary handy.

Although perhaps occupying an especially vulnerable position in relation to the increasingly manifest borders in Jos, Tafawa was not alone in feeling that the interaction in a roadblock was characterised by acute unpredictability. James, a man in his seventies living in a village outside Jos, described how he was once caught in a roadblock and asked to recite passages from the Bible, while young men circled around the car and started to beat on the roof and bonnet with sticks. He soon realised that the person interrogating him had nothing but the most basic knowledge on religious matters, which meant that answering correctly would not necessarily buy him safe passage. He got out of the situation by trying to display a precise measure of humility and assertiveness, thus acting in the way he knew that the youth would expect from a church elder. Accordingly, he made use of *gestures* (Elyachar 2011) – an embodied skill set which allowed him to project an air of Christianity in a way that got through to the young men much more effectively than his biblical learning did. As is made clear in Labaran's, Tafawa's,

and James's experiences, the significance of movement lies not only in who is travelling, or when or where, but also in the manner in which it is done. How you comport yourself, what you project, is often what determines whether crossing a border is interpreted as a harmless passage or a transgression. Part of dealing with the unpredictability in being stopped is to keep an inventory of objects and skills which may open avenues of escape.

Similar to the impromptu roadblocks, and likewise illegal, is the common practice of closing off streets outside mosques and churches around the times of service. At barriers guarded by youths who either greet visitors on their way to the service, or dismiss 'intruders' (Andersson Trovalla 2011: 65f.; see also Danfulani 1998: 345f.; Mwadkwon 2001: 60), passers-by are required to make gestures of unequivocal respect, as passing by is in itself proof of non-participation and therefore a sign of dubious allegiance, as well as a potential challenge to the power and legitimacy of the congregation and their beliefs. Although more predictable than the vigilante roadblocks in where and when they appear, and mostly less belligerent, roadblocks of this kind increase the tensions and can be very dangerous. In fact, the Crisis in 2001 was sparked off by the altercation that ensued when a young woman was prevented from passing by a mosque in the Christian area called Congo Russia during the Friday prayer.

Jos has come to be known in large part through the interaction between movement and intermission. Mediating between travellers and their environment, this continuum of mobility has brought forth new depths and layers of the city. In this manner, roadblocks reveal how movement mediates in a highly charged exchange. Through the interrupted movement, each barrier becomes the site of scrutiny, approval, and dismissal, and *place* is firmly engraved into notions of friends and enemies, power and legitimacy, Christianity and Islam. In the same way, being stopped in traffic – or just the prospect of it – turns fear into an essential quality of the spatial dimension. As people brush against shifting power spheres and boundaries on their journeys, the city turns into a shifting force field of anxiety. When the traffic unexpectedly slows down, it frequently begets the notion that enemy aggression is lurking around the next bend in the road, and in the overwhelming sense of randomness and vulnerability that is so easily awakened, a landscape appears which seems animated by capricious and malevolent forces.

## 5. MOVEMENT AS SOCIAL ENVISIONING

In a very clear manner, Jos has in novel ways become intelligible through movement – the everyday footsteps made or not made by its inhabitants. Coloured by the profound experience, carried to the surface by years of tensions and violence, of a city often beyond any form of prediction, movement as a medium has become a form of social envisioning – a tool for understanding and foretelling the city. Movement translates experience into new forms, as McLuhan suggests

is common to all media (1994: 57). When myths are enacted in the form of rituals and festivals that move through the streets of the city, grand narratives are being inscribed into the spaces of everyday life. When religiously distinguishing clothes activate borders in the city which otherwise are dormant, clothed movement make visible an invisible force field created by the zones in the landscape where the rivalling power spheres intersect. Travelling through Jos, sensing the fluctuations in the flow of traffic, notions of a random and destructive force inhabiting the city are manifested in the fear that that somewhere down the road lies one of the dreaded, arbitrarily appearing roadblocks. Mediating between citizens and a city in flux, the significance of people's movements and non-movement with the Crisis has gained new dimensions in Jos, bringing forth a metaphysical landscape in which layers that otherwise are hard to get hold of are made real. But more than this, movement as a medium has come to convey meaning and information increasingly fundamental to life in a volatile city that continually is re-emerging along uncertain paths.

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