

Understanding the Variable Dispositions to ‘Friendly Violence’ during Interethnic Conflict: Evidence from Nigeria

Abstract:

Why are some everyday people disposed to violent actions against their outgroup friends and neighbours during interethnic conflict, while others are not? Variable conflict behaviours in intra-state conflicts have received significant attention. However, these undertakings have generally focused on the variations between the behaviours towards proximate and distant ethnic others and the role of external pressure. In contrast, the variable conflict behaviours of everyday people living in proximity, without formal militia affiliations, have been under-researched. Yet, qualitative inferences on the individual-level dynamics accounting for the variable dispositions among neighbours are significant as they broaden our understanding of when friends may or may not attack their outgroup neighbours during interethnic strife. Therefore, this paper examines this issue drawing on extensive qualitative data on everyday people’s conflict-time experiences of intergroup relations in Nigeria’s ethnic conflict hotbed, Jos. The analysis indicates that not only did past friendships motivate information sharing between ingroup and outgroup members who sought to protect their friends, it also facilitated the conflict as other ingroup members exploited past friendships to advance their killing objectives or to furnish their ethnic armies with intel on their outgroup friends. It concludes that the central mechanism explaining cooperative or aggressive dispositions is the degree of threat perception among everyday people.

Introduction

Previous analyses of participation drivers tended to focus on social influence, the spatial proximity thesis, and coercion. While some studies explore how the nature of individuals' social network shapes their involvement in violence (Uvin, 1999; Takacs, 2007; McDoom, 2013; Eck, 2014), others examine how distance from potential targets conditions people's decision to engage in violence (Campbell, 2010; Hewstone et al., 2009; Acharya & Muldoon, 2017). Within this literature, the phenomenon of 'friendly violence' is explained based on external factors, such as ethnic entrepreneurs, coercion by warlords, peer pressure, etc., which inadvertently downplay individuals' psychosocial motivation to participate or abstain from interethnic violence. Drawing on insights from experimental studies on threat perception in the context of intergroup conflict and new qualitative data on the phenomenon of friendly violence, I examine the underlying drivers of individuals' disposition or indisposition to aggressive attitudes during episodes of localized violence in a conflict-prone Nigerian region.

I conceptualize friendly violence as involving not only actual violence against outgroup friends but also the willingness to harm outgroup friends during interethnic conflict. My analysis of this phenomenon derives from a comparative qualitative study that examined everyday people's experiences of intergroup conflict in the summer of 2019. To produce the deep insights needed to support a qualitative analysis of individuals' disposition, I relied on narrative interviews to uncover participants' experiences of intergroup relations from childhood through conflict-time. In furtherance of this objective, also, my study sample comprised members of the conflicting ethnoreligious groups in Jos, Nigeria, different genders, and individuals aged 30 and over. The participants' narratives are presented with pseudonyms to conceal their identity. The thematic analysis of the data shows that the variation of individuals' dispositions to friendly violence is

driven by an element of security dilemma, which is typically used to explain the variability of ethnic unmixing outcomes. In this study, the nature of individuals' disposition to friendly violence stems not so much from what outgroup friends did or did not do, but rather from people's perception of what their outgroup friends are disposed to doing.

The paper unfolds in five parts. Following this introduction, I provide some background information on the study area, including its sociocultural and political situations, to contextualize the data on variable dispositions to friendly violence. Next, I outline the conceptual basis of the analysis: individuals' threat perception. Subsequently, I examine the literature on variable conflict behaviour in intra-state war to underscore the relevance of examining why some individuals retain their positive evaluations of outgroup friends and neighbours during interethnic conflict while others do not. After that, I describe the data from the study area, which shows a relationship between threat perception levels and divergent dispositions to friendly violence. I further illuminate this finding with prior experimental data on the relationship between perceived threat and individuals' conflict behaviour. Lastly, I state the main implications of my findings and their relationship to past research.

Site of the Research

In this section, I provide some geographic, sociocultural, and political-economic facts about the study area, the city of Jos in Nigeria.

Demographic Landscape

The study reported in this paper was undertaken in Jos, a Middle Belt Nigerian city, commonly described as the heartland of ethnoreligious conflicts in the country. Jos, a former tin-mining hub during the British Colonial Administration, is located in Plateau State in the Middle Belt, a

uniquely situated region that geographically separates Nigeria into the predominantly Christian southern region and the Muslim-dominated northern region (Ambe-Uva, 2010). The Middle Belt is home to 296 ethnic groups, while approximately 58 of them are in Plateau state. This makes them Nigeria's most diverse region and state, respectively (Danfulani, 2006). Jos is microcosmic of the wider Plateau in terms of diversity, which stems from the city's temperate climate and fertile lands (Orji, 2011). The ethnic groups in Jos that hail originally from different parts of Nigeria, such as the Hausa, Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Tiv, Urhobo, etc., are unofficially labelled settlers, while the Anaguta, Afizere and Berom are the officially recognized native tribes (Ambe-Uva, 2010; Orji, 2011).

In addition to its ethnic structure, Jos is home to the two major religions in the country. As a result of historical migration from the Muslim-dominated north and Christian-dominated south, both Islam (35%) and Christianity (65%) have a large group of adherents in the city (Milligan, 2013). Despite the migratory roots of religious diversity in Jos, the ethnic groups in the city are not religiously homogenous. For instance, although the Hausa and Fulani are generally perceived as Muslims because of their ancestral roots and the Berom are viewed as Christians, each of them consists of both religions (Ambe-Uva, 2010; Emelonye, 2011).

The Historical Origins of Jos' Ethnoreligious Diversity

The ethnoreligious diversity of Jos transcends its location and climatic profile given that the British colonial economic activities in the city in the early 20th century was a major attraction for most of the earlier arrivals from northern and southern Nigeria as well as several West African states. From its initial modest status as a service point, the British-owned tin mining industry in Jos developed into the hub of tin mining in the whole of the country within ten years of its establishment in 1905 (Plotnikov, 1972; Bonkat, 2014). This industry grew due to the influx of migrant workers who the

British desperately needed because the native tribes were opposed to the concept of wage labour, which was unfamiliar to them (Tambo, 1978). So, from the south came the Igbo, Yoruba, and other national ethnic minorities (Plotnikov, 1972), while the Fulani and Hausa came from the north (Bonkat, 2014).

The refusal of the native tribes to work in the mines eventually made them economically disadvantaged vis-à-vis the migrant workers, especially the Hausa who dominated the industry owing to their early arrival and wholesome involvement in the sector. This situation resulted in the resentment of non-native tribes by Jos natives (Plotnikov, 1972; Krause, 2011). Today, the main fault lines in Jos exist between the mostly Christian Berom and the predominantly Muslim Hausa, who now claim indigeneity like the native tribes – Afizere, Anaguta and Berom (Orji, 2011).

Overview of the Jos Conflict

At the epicentre of the Jos conflict is ethnicized electoral politics, which through the channel of political manipulation, has given rise to identity insecurity. One of the manifestations of the outcome of this form of electoral politics is the rejection of the constitutional designation of the wider region as the north-central zone and its supplanting with the locally preferred name, the Middle Belt. The extra-constitutional construction of this regional identity stems from the fear that having “north” in their name will make them associated with the broader northern region within which the predominantly Muslim Hausa and Fulani are the dominant ethnic groups (Krause, 2011). These contestations have increased the salience of ethnicity throughout Plateau state, and particularly in its capital city of Jos. As a result, every political situation is viewed through an ethnic lens. For instance, the military’s appointment of a Hausa man to chair the city council in the mid-1990s sparked riots and counter-riots by native and settler youths, respectively (Segun & Jegede, 2013).

This pattern continued into the County's Fourth Republic in which the stakes with regards to who controls political-economic power are much higher. For example, when the then President Olusegun Obasanjo tapped Mukhtar Muhammad, a Hausa and Muslim, to coordinate a federal poverty alleviation scheme in the state, the native tribes protested, leading to deadly clashes between native and settler youths (Higazi, 2011). In other instances, this sort of interethnic clashes stemmed from rumours of election rigging which triggered native protests, and because of the salience of ethnicity, dovetailed into interethnic conflicts. A case in point is the 2008 local council election between a Hausa and a Berom politician, which, due to the suspicion of planned election rigging, resulted in political violence and escalated into an interethnic conflict for the same abovementioned reason (Polgreen, 2008). Additionally, as evidenced by the 1998 conflict in the city, interpersonal disputes also quickly expand to group-level violence (Segun & Jegede, 2013).

The Conflict Environment: Insiders' Account

Although similar to those captured in the relevant case-specific literature, the roots of the Jos conflict gleaned from the narratives of the study participants provide important nuances that contextualize the variable conflict behaviours examined in the latter parts of this paper. Three factors – religion, land, and politics – are significant in the causal milieu, but they manifest differently. Although the rights of access to land and political power are contested, not everyone believes that religion influences the behaviour of the outgroup. For instance, the native Berom claim that Jos is their hometown and that the Hausa settlers ought to respect that “landlord” status, accept their place as “tenants”, “guests”, “strangers” or “visitors”, and stop their appropriation of native lands. The Hausa push back on these assertions. At the minimum, they claim rightful

ownership of their landholdings because they were lawfully purchased, and at the extreme, they suggest earlier arrival in Jos to claim true autochthony.¹

Furthermore, each side's position on the land issue corresponds with their views on political rights and their perception of the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. For example, the Berom contend that as "strangers", the Hausa are not entitled to hold positions in government. The fear is that if the Hausa gain access to power as they do federally, they would rewrite the local laws that prioritize the land rights of natives. This explains the violent responses of native youths to news of potential Hausa political victories. Expectedly, the Hausa reject these assertions, noting that they are, as one participant claims, "just as indigenous as the natives," hence should be able to aspire for public office too.²

While the participants expressed rigid views that support the ingroup's claims around land and politics, views on the outgroup's religious motives differ even within the ingroup. For instance, some Berom Christians believe that the Hausa seek to Islamize their state. Others view the Hausa as intent on furthering the Islamization agenda of their progenitor, Usman Dan Fodio, across Nigeria. Yet, some Berom natives reject such beliefs based on the deep social bonds between Christians and Muslims that engendered intermarriages, ethnically mixed Christian missionary schools, and joint celebration of religious festivals in the past. The significance of this is that whereas the Berom natives are anxious about the political and economic activities of Hausa settlers, threat perception levels vary since views diverge on the religious variable. I will return to the variation in threat perception levels later and highlight its significance for understanding variable dispositions/attitudes towards outgroup friends and neighbours in Jos, Nigeria.

¹ This is a summary of the theme on contested homeland which was derived from the stories of participants from two Jos communities, Angwan Doki and Dadin Kowa, in May 2019.

² Cued from the theme on ethnicized electoral politics which was developed based on interview data from Angwan Doki and Dadin Kowa communities, May 2019.

Conceptual Framework: Perceived Threat

The analysis in this paper stems primarily from the literature on perceived threat because its focus on the psychological underpinnings of individuals' conflict behaviour provides the best avenue for a comparative analysis of the dispositions of friends and neighbours during interethnic conflict. According to this literature, personal and collective threats tend to produce aggressive dispositions in individuals. However, these psychological experiments indicate that variations can be expected, depending on the level of ingroup-outgroup differentiation (Fritzsche, Jonas & Kessler, 2011; McDoom, 2012; Cakal et al. 2016), salient values (Garcia-Retamero, Muller & Rousseau, 2012; Jonas & Fritzsche 2013; Rovenpor et al., 2016), and the perceptions about peace potentials (Jonas & Fritzsche, 2013; Halperin, Porat & Wohl, 2013; Hirschberger et al., 2016).

When threatened, people's identification with the ingroup intensifies not only because of the perception that the underlying conflict is between distinctive social groups but also due to the need to distinguish friends from foe (McDoom, 2012, p. 122). As Fritzsche, Jonas and Kessler (2011, p. 101) note, people emphasize group membership and "highlight established social bonds" amid personal and societal crises because it creates a sense of control, which minimizes their threat perception. Boundary activation, according to McDoom (2012, p. 122), is accompanied by the denigration of the outgroup, which intensifies as the threat level grows. This assessment of the progression from boundary activation to outgroup denigration is consistent with the experimental study of Cakal et al. (2016, p. 743), in which "stronger identification with the ingroup predicted higher levels of perceived threats which, in turn, negatively predicted positive outgroup evaluations."

Based on these analyses of individuals' responses to threat, we can expect that the behaviours of friends during interethnic conflict will vary. For instance, while some ingroup

members will have more established social bonds with co-ethnics, others may have stronger ties with their outgroup neighbours and friends. Similarly, the positive correlation between threat level and outgroup denigration indicates that less threatened individuals will be less disposed to aggression than highly threatened individuals. Therefore, people who have stronger social ties with their outgroup friends than the ingroup will feel less threatened during interethnic conflicts, and, by extension, less inclined to adopt an aggressive posture towards them.

However, the likelihood of that situation playing out as outlined will still depend on other factors, such as norm salience (Jonas & Fritzsche, 2013), perception of value similarities (Garcia-Retamero, Muller & Rousseau, 2012), and the value framework of individuals (Rovenpor et al., 2016). As noted, threat generally tends towards aggressive behaviours through the channel of outgroup denigration, yet, as Jonas & Fritzsche, (2013, p. 547) show, people's worldview and their concomitant self-categorization may inspire more cooperative attitudes. As threats arise, individuals cognitively estimate the value similarities between them and the outgroup and perceive them as threatening only if shared values are not identified (Garcia-Retamero, Muller & Rousseau, 2012, p. 182). Additionally, the pre-existing value frameworks of individuals may remain activated amid interethnic conflict such that prosocial individuals or low ingroup glorifiers will adopt a peaceful posture, while antisocial individuals or high ingroup glorifiers will display aggressive tendencies (Rovenpor et al., 2016, p. 545).

The behavioural responses to threat will also vary depending on people's perception of the existence of non-violent means for change. For example, although mortality salience or death awareness creates anxiety and aggressive tendencies in some individuals, others are less aggravated by it if they can establish a sense of control over their lives through their connection to a higher being (Jonas & Fritzsche, 2013, p. 548). In some instances, also, people may respond to

existential threat non-violently if they believe that a benign posture will induce a similar response by the outgroup (Halperin, Porat & Wohl, 2013, p. 790). In other cases, individuals may feel that the threat can be eliminated only through violent action, in which case they will support an attack against the source of the threat – the outgroup (Hirschberger et al., 2016, p. 5).

Given their primary emphasis on the individual, the above analyses of perceived threat provide a more lucid path to understanding why some individuals are aggressive towards their outgroup neighbours and friends during interethnic conflict, while others are not.

Dominant Explanations of Participation and Avoidance in Intra-State Conflict

Although the analysis in this paper stems primarily from the concept of perceived threat, I also draw on the broader literature on variable conflict behaviour to examine the attitudinal patterns of the study participants. The dominant analyses in the relevant literature can be grouped into social influence, the spatial proximity thesis, and psychological manipulation.

Social Influence

In addition to individuals' psychic dispositions, the micro-level dynamics of their social network can shape their decision to participate in violence. As interethnic tensions develop and evolve, demonizing narratives about the outgroup are disseminated, so participation in the ensuing violence will depend on the influence of the peddlers and the personalities that are reached. For instance, narratives about Rwanda's Tutsi being ruthless oppressors contributed to their genocidal massacre by the Hutu (Uvin, 1999, p. 267). Also, during the Nepalese civil war, people were convinced by their friends to join the rebels despite the disapproval of their immediate family. In this instance, the decision to participate began progressively from normal civilian engagement to being sympathetic towards their cause and then voluntarily electing to participate (Acharya &

Muldoon, 2017, pp. 1007,1021). This incremental process of social entrapment, according to Eck (2014, p. 382), was evident in the recruitment of Tamil Tiger rebels in Sri Lanka.

Similarly, McDoom (2013, p. 465) shows that people also tend to lean towards violence when their social network includes more participants than non-participants, suggesting that their dispositions are shaped by the nature of their social interactions. Social interactions, according to Takacs (2007), shape people's participation in conflict through two channels: confirmative and normative pressures. In essence, the desire to be liked by ingroup members (confirmative) and for conformity with ingroup behavioural expectations (normative) drive people's participation in interethnic violence (Takacs, 2007, p. 60). However, if people are surrounded by more participants than non-participants, and are indisposed to aggression, avoidance is still possible depending on their relational mobility (Moncrieff & Lienard, 2018, p. 1). In other words, one's ability to restructure their social network could shape their adherence to ingroup standards and behavioural expectations.

Spatial Proximity Thesis

Participation in violence also stems from the degree of spatial distance between individuals and their potential targets. In their exploration of genocidal behaviour, for example, Campbell (2010, p. 309) found that it "varies directly with killing and inversely with rescuing." However, it should be noted that it is the quality of interethnic contact that determines one outcome or the other. Hewstone et al. (2009, p. 83) get at this point in their claim that "where the presence of outgroup members leads to more actual intergroup contact, and that contact is positive (e.g., cross-group friendships), its effects will be positive, promoting more positive outgroup attitudes." But this too is limited because the mere existence of positive cross-group friendships is an insufficient reason to violate ingroup standards during an ongoing conflict. The willingness to disregard ingroup

behavioural expectations and to risk denunciation will most likely stem from whether those relationships with the outgroup are internalized or not (Dumitri & Johnson, 2011, pp. 35-36).

So, as social contact reduces and spatial distance increases, individuals become more disposed to killing, as Campbell (2010) surmises. One simplistic explanation of this tendency is that cruelty towards familiar others is less daunting than when the target is unknown others (Bauman, 1989, 155 cited in Campbell, 2010, p. 300). Hence, young actors in the Nepalese civil war mostly perpetrated violence outside their communities (Acharyaa & Muldoon, 2017, p. 1017). This pattern of behaviour may also stem from perpetrators' strategic calculations, such as the need to minimize the social and legal risks associated with participating in violence. This is consistent with Luft's (2015, p. 165) analysis of genocidal behaviour in Rwanda which shows that some Hutu were only inclined to violently attack the Tutsi where there were no witnesses that could potentially identify them in the future.

Psychological Manipulation

While individuals' social situation and perceptions may influence their participation in interethnic violence, in some other cases, compliance with "ingroup behavioural standards" requires the exertion of overt pressure. These psychological interventions, mostly undertaken by ingroup extremists, often entail activities that are aimed at transforming loyalties and individuals' attitudes towards violence. For instance, in Uganda, one of these "conversion tactics" involved forcing recruits to kill members of their family for them to become more disposed to killing ethnic others (Beber & Blattman, 2013, p. 86). Similarly, the killing of Muslims in Serbia was used to solidify the social bonds of all Serbians (Hewstone et al., 2009, p. 74). Also, as was the case with some Hutu civilians in Rwanda, the fear of punishment by ingroup extremists increases the willingness to violently attack the outgroup (Mueller, 2000, p. 60). And, as the frequency of individuals'

participation in the Rwandan genocide increased, so did the effacement of the psychological barriers to violence (Luft, 2015, p. 166). In other contexts, such as in Uganda, rebel commanders brainwashed recruits into believing that they have spiritual control over their destinies to ensure loyalty to the warlord, rather than their original social network (Beber & Blattman, 2013, p. 87).

Case Study: Jos, Nigeria

The attitudes and dispositions of the study participants follow the broad trends in existing scholarship. However, the dominant theme that weaves through these attitudinal/behavioural patterns is the influence of threat perception, given that people who felt less threatened directly by the outgroup tended to be less disposed to violence or displayed more cooperative dispositions than the more threatened individuals. In some situations, past friendships facilitated killings by hardliners as unsuspecting individuals became easy prey for their outgroup friends. I demonstrate this through a series of quotes in the first sub-section below, while the next explains the phenomenon of friendly violence beyond the mediatory effect of past friendships.

Divergent Cross-Ethnic Friendship Outcomes

Two categories of cross-ethnic friendship outcomes are discernible in the data on the conflict behaviour of Jos residents. While one group seemed to have maintained its positive assessment of outgroup friends when conflict broke out, the other rallied around the cause of the ingroup. To varying degrees, this trend of divergent conflict-time attitudes is reflected in quotes 1 – 5 below.

Quote 1: Alheri narrates how her nephew and his wife were shot and killed by an outgroup friend during the Jos conflict:

On the second day of the conflict, my nephew and his wife were escorting a visitor, and some people came in army uniform to where they were at the last gate area and

started shooting at them. Their bullets first hit my nephew's pregnant wife. He recognized one of the shooters as one of his Muslim friends.

So, he called the person's name and said, "you shot my wife?" He thought he was talking with someone who would sympathize with him for shooting at his wife. But the guy moved closer and shot and killed my nephew too.

He shot him three times. After the first shot, my nephew fell on his wife, then his friend used his leg to push both of them into the sewer.

Quote 2: Wase describes how unsuspecting neighbours were ambushed by their outgroup friends:

We were all in mixed compounds because we were peaceful. In a compound, the Hausa Fulani would be there with their families and Christian families would be in the same compound.

So, eventually that day we heard that the Hausa-Fulani would knock on their Christian neighbours' doors and ask them to come out, and the people thought it was just a friendly invitation but when they went out, they were slaughtered by the Hausa-Fulani.

Quote 3: Kareng explains why the conflict behaviour of her outgroup neighbours transformed her perception of them:

I look at them as very dangerous people no matter how close they may be to you. Actually, during the crisis the people that burnt our house were our neighbours. We moved out of the house, so we didn't see this happen first-hand.

However, the people that stayed back took photos and videotaped our neighbours burning my family house. So, we saw the people. Some were our neighbours, so that's why I know that no matter how close you're to them, they can change at any time.

Quote 4: Bocos shows how the sudden onset of interethnic conflict instantly transformed friends to foes:

When the conflict starts, people forget about who is or is not their neighbour. They only know religion at that point. There was a case the last time, of two friends who ate together a few hours before conflict broke out in another community.

One of the boys was murdered and we later heard that he was killed by the same friend who had just had lunch in his house. So, this is why people run away from their friends when the conflict starts. You'll find out that some of these your neighbours took part in burning your home or killing your children or family.

From that point, hatred and mistrust came in. People no longer trusted their neighbours who are of a different religion. After that point, people started to assess you to see whether you are their tribesman? If not your tribe, you'll be suspicious of them and scared of living with such a person.

Quote 5: Yakubu narrates his daring trip to his friends' and their mother's anxiety over his safety due to her perception of her sons' susceptibility to the influence of ingroup extremists:

I continued relating with all my friends. In fact, I remember something that happened during the 2010 conflict. The mum of my Berom friends had an appendix removal surgery. So, I went to their home in a Christian area in a public bus, which most people considered risky. I walked up to 3 kilometres to get to their home, walking through bush paths.

I knew the situation was tense, but I could not just stay at home without visiting my friend's mom who was recovering from a medical procedure. This was during the 2010 conflict, which was worse than in 2001. People kept staring at me as I headed for their house.

When I got there, my friends told their mum that I was around, and she said that it cannot be possible. She was surprised when she came out of her room and saw that it was true. She said I had to return home immediately.

She asked her oldest 2 sons to escort me back home and call her on the phone when we reached my doorstep. I swear to God, they escorted me home and called their mum when I was already inside our compound.

Two days later, she called to confirm that I reached home safely since she did not hear directly from me. I said, *haba* {ah} mummy, they are my brothers and she said that "while that may be true, friends can manipulate them into harming you."

Yakubu's story shows that social pressure potentially influenced friendly violence as his friend's mother would not be concerned about his safety around her children, except she was aware of cases of ingroup peers instigating friendly violence. Although this study did not unearth any specific cases of successful peer influence in friendly violence, it is not for lack of effort by ingroup extremists. In fact, participants from Dadin Kowa, the only known low-income neighbourhood that has remained conflict-free since 2001, reported such pressures from co-ethnics in neighbouring Anglo Jos, a conflict-affected area. While some participants were called women by these individuals to suggest that they are weak, other participants were told that their outgroup neighbours will eventually turn on them as the conflict progressed.³ Mortality salience has been proven to inspire aggression. Yet, as these stories show, variation is inevitable given that different

³ Multiple interviews in Jos, May – June 2019.

individuals will process death awareness differently due to their different social contexts. Therefore, Yakubu, who considered his outgroup friends as brothers, could maintain a positive attitude towards them and risk his life just to pay their mother a courtesy visit.

Apart from the general theme of violence, the other four quotes are bound by their references to two categories of people: one perceiving their outgroup neighbours as friends, while the other viewed their neighbours as targets. Despite the existence of interethnic conflict, the former expected that their relationships with the outgroup will transcend the ensuing group-level troubles. This explains why Alheri's late nephew thought that his outgroup friend would be remorseful for fatally shooting his wife; an expectation that ultimately cost him his own life. It also explains why the victims in Wase's story opened their doors at the calls of their outgroup friends, only to be ambushed and hacked to death. Similarly, Kareng's new perception of the outgroup is not rooted in some historical demonizing narratives but in unmet behavioural expectations. As Bocos' story highlights, this transformation of attitude was widespread, reinforcing the claim that while some neighbours maintained their positive evaluations of the outgroup despite the outbreak of interethnic conflict, others viewed the outgroup as enemies. Those individuals with a worldview like Alheri's nephew and the other above-referenced victims of interethnic violence became susceptible to attacks, while those with a different perception took advantage of the former.

Yet, there were instances where positive evaluations of outgroup friends neither proved fatal nor turned out to be a misjudgement of character. For instance, some participants in this study were comfortable enough with their outgroup friends that they leveraged their insider knowledge to keep themselves safe during the fighting. One of such participants was Lalong, who made the following remark:

We remained friends during the conflict as we shared information on the security of our respective neighbourhoods. They will call me and ask, "how far now? How are

things in your area? Is everything safe? Is everything okay?” And me too, I called to ask the same question.

In addition to leveraging access to information, there were cases of unsolicited information sharing that was driven more by the desire to protect outgroup friends than the need for personal safety.

For instance, Davou reflected on his conflict-time experience as follows:

We have interacted, blended, sinned against God together both in hidden and open circumstances, so I will not want any of those people to be harmed by any member of my community. So, to protect my friends, I will pick up my phone and tell them whenever there’s tension in our area so that they can stay away. The next time when the Berom are hatching their own plans, this same friend would call me and say that we should be careful about where we visit as tensions were rising. So, there are those community members who want to protect the sanctity of humanity.

Davou’s conflict behaviour was not unique as another participant, Lyop, discussed receiving one of such unsolicited calls when she explained her rationale for maintaining a positive view of her outgroup friends. She noted as follows:

You know, there are good Muslims too who like me and like other Christians. So, they would call us if a part of their community is dangerous. They will tell us where criminals are located and warn us against going there as people are being killed in that area. We also shared such information with the good Muslims that we know.

In most of these cases, cross-ethnic friends had a mutual need for safety advisory and trusted the source of this information. Despite widespread interethnic animosity, people reached out to their outgroup friends for information, and these individuals obliged. In some situations, and as evidenced by Davou and Lyop’s stories, existing social bonds between cross-ethnic friends inspired information sharing that probably saved their lives. However, as reflected in quotes 1 – 4 above and accounted for below, not all intergroup friendships stood the test of interethnic animosity.

Threat Perception and Changing Attitudes towards Outgroup Friends and Strangers

The main determinant of individuals' dispositions during the Jos conflict, which accounts for the variation in the behaviour towards outgroup friends was the perception of, as one participant puts it, "what the other side was planning." While this mindset was implicit in most people's conflict narratives, it was explicitly stated in some interviews, as shown in the conversation between a middle-aged participant, Gyang, and I:

Interviewer: That's sad to hear but thank you for sharing those stories with us. How about during the conflict? How was the relationship between you and your Hausa and Fulani friends?

Participant: {Cuts in and starts answering before I finished talking}. Ahn {he exclaims}, there was no relationship. When we met, we could discuss but what is in the heart is in the heart.

Interviewer: And what do you think is in the heart?

Participant: {Cuts in quickly again} To harm him, of course, because if he gets me somewhere, he too will want to harm me.

To ensure that Gyang did not simply misspeak, I subtly probed his statement, but he insisted that he was serious about attacking his outgroup friend at the slightest opportunity not because of the underlying causes of the conflict but because he believes that his friend is similarly inclined.

Generally, even people who were indisposed to violence themselves were apprehensive around their outgroup friends. There was the perception that when faced with a choice between conforming with the ingroup's behavioural standards and sustaining social bonds with outgroup friends, people would ultimately align with their group.⁴ For instance, Boko justified his conflict-time recalibration of relationships with the outgroup as follows: "when the conflict starts, people forget about who is or is not their neighbour. They only know religion at that point." Pam, a Berom Christian echoed the same sentiment, noting that "*one* may sit with a Fulani man today and give

⁴ Interview with several Berom Christian and Hausa Muslim participants, April – June 2019.

him your kunu {a local beverage} and he will drink but sill turnaround and attack you tomorrow.” This same perception motivated Chundung to acquire spiritual powers that helped him to, as the participant puts it, “scan his immediate surroundings” whenever he was with an outgroup friend during the conflict. Other participants suspected that their friends were in tacit support of their ethnic militia because they were never alerted about imminent attacks, which is another unmet behavioural expectation.

Social distance also shaped the conflict behaviour of Jos residents, but mostly through the channel of threat perception like the unmet behavioural expectations dynamic, rather than the psychological ease/difficulty of killing as depicted in existing scholarship. As interethnic violence raged across Jos, many of the study participants maintained their outgroup relationships but these intergroup friendships were severely strained and cross-ethnic friends became spatially distanced. However, hostility towards this category of participants mostly emanated from members of the outgroup with whom they had no prior relations.⁵ Idris’ reflection on his conflict-time relations with outgroup friends encapsulates this experience:

My friends and I remained friends, but our friendship went cold. Everybody was afraid to go into the other person’s area. The relationship with neighbours who were not our friends before the conflict was quite hostile. Our friends were not hostile towards us even though they withdrew from us.

Idris’ experience was disorienting, but a hostile attitude by outgroup strangers was among the least troubling experiences of people who maintained their outgroup friendships during the conflict. For instance, individuals who innocently ventured out to visit their outgroup friends were later declared missing as they never returned home. Others who strayed into an outgroup enclave were later found dead and abandoned on main roads.⁶

⁵ Interview with several Berom Christian and Hausa Muslim participants, April – June 2019

⁶ Interview with several Berom Christian and Hausa Muslim participants, May 2019.

These killings, as some participants reported, stemmed from the perception of the victims as spies sent by the outgroup to gather intel for future violent attacks. For instance, while commenting on his decision to avoid the outgroup's settlement following the ethnic unmixing that accompanied rising interethnic tensions, Ephraim noted as follows: "they do not know that I am not a troublesome person. They will notice you if you are a stranger and can do anything to harm you if they do not feel comfortable with your presence." The hostility towards strangers, which was in sharp contrast to pre-conflict social relations,⁷ also featured in the neighbourhoods that avoided the violence. For instance, Ibrahim, a Hausa Muslim participant, commented on his conflict-time experience as follows: "Generally, we lived in peace. There was no problem apart from when we noticed a stranger in the community. One of the protective measures we had was that Christian and Muslim families were not allowed to receive visitors." This directive from community elders was enforced by a vigilante group that was tasked with night-time security and apprehending youths whose parents or guardians were non-residents.⁸ The transformation of people's attitude towards strangers derived from the belief that they were the main source of threat given that they lacked the incentives to abstain from the conflict.

However, individuals also had reason to suspect that people, such as their outgroup friends, who possessed such incentives had either wittingly or unwittingly compromised their safety. This perspective stems from the conflict experience of several participants, including Kangyang's. "We could not believe it," she exclaimed as she narrated her conflict-time experience. Continuing, she remarked as follows:

⁷ Almost every participant in this study either directly or indirectly spoke about the hospitality towards strangers before the outbreak of the first major conflict in 2001, which is consistent with their broader narratives around the depth of integration pre-2001.

⁸ Interviews with multiple participants between April and June 2019 in Dadin Kowa, the only low-income neighbourhood that avoided the decade-long Jos conflict.

We could not believe that our neighbours could do this to us. To be frank, it was not the neighbours that we grew up with that attacked us. The people that attacked us were different. The people we grew up together will not have the guts to do such a thing. We believe that some of them {*attackers*} came from elsewhere. We could not recognize them. So, that was how it {*the conflict*} started.

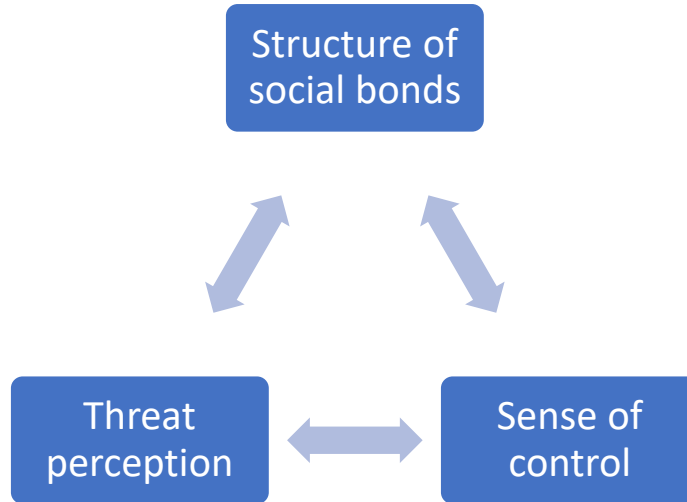
Kangyang was commenting on the burning of Berom-owned properties, including her parents' during the conflict and is honest about her views on who the perpetrators were. But her story begs the question of how outgroup outsiders knew which houses to target in her neighbourhood, which suggests intelligence sharing by outgroup neighbours to their external co-ethnics or ethnic militia.

In an environment with a high degree of mutual suspicion, targeted attacks by unknown assailants will suggest collusion by outgroup neighbours even if none of them was an observed participant. And, unlike Kangyang, most aggrieved individuals would blame their outgroup friends and outgroup neighbours because they know which houses are inhabited by the different ethnoreligious groups. The point is that while actual cases of friendly violence, such as the killing of Alheri's nephew, may lead individuals within such a neighbourhood to pre-emptively harm their outgroup friends, other cases of friendly violence may be inspired by events without clear links to outgroup friends, such as the one reported by Kangyang.

Threat Perception and Variable Dispositions to Friendly Violence

The variation of individuals' disposition to outgroup neighbours and friends in Jos stems from their divergent levels of threat perception, which is shaped by the prevalent structure of social bonds and observable in how individuals established a sense of control.

Figure 1: Graphic Illustration of the Mechanism of Influence



To begin unpacking this mechanism of influence, I return to the correlational results in Cakal et al. (2016) which shows that negative evaluations of the outgroup results from strong ingroup identification induced by heightened threat perception. An earlier study (McDoom, 2012) also shows that boundary activation, which culminates in high ingroup identification, indicates the existence of a threat that needs to be addressed. In the case of an ongoing conflict, this threat is existential, a situation that individuals cope with by establishing a sense of control (Jonas & Fritsche, 2013). Given that ingroup members are embedded in different social contexts, the way threat is perceived, and, by extension, how individuals create a sense of control will also differ.

This variation is evident in the conflict behaviours exhibited in Jos. For instance, some individuals responded to threat by eliminating their outgroup friends and neighbours, the nearest threat to their physical security. For some others, hostility towards unfamiliar outgroup members was their way of warding off potential assailants. Yet some individuals chose to establish a sense of control by soliciting or relying on information from their outgroup friends to ensure their safety. So, in the same ethnic group, some perceived their outgroup friends as a source of threat, and, consequently, legitimate targets, while others viewed theirs as capable of facilitating their survival.

The varied ways these individuals sought control derive from their divergent levels of threat perception. An individual that believes that his / her friend will adhere to the behavioural expectations of their group amid interethnic violence will be disposed to eliminating them because their survival depends on it. In contrast, it is a person who expects their friend to violate the same outgroup behavioural standards that will be comfortable relying on them for security information and not be worried about receiving spurious and potentially harmful intel.

While threat perception levels determined how people attempted to establish control in Jos, the prevalent structure of social bonds shaped individuals' perception of threat. As mentioned above, Takacs (2007) notes that groups overcome the collective action problem through confirmative and normative pressure or the desire to be liked by the ingroup and to conform to ingroup behavioural norms. The implication is that ingroup members are expected to toe the "group line" during interethnic conflict. The idea of boundary activation and strong ingroup identification (McDoom, 2012; Cakal et al., 2016) supports this perspective because it shows that the need to establish a sense of control through ethnic attachment makes individuals more susceptible to the abovementioned pressures. However, the Jos case demonstrates that the relational environment within which a sense of control is achieved need not be ethnically homogenous. For example, as Fritzsche, Jonas and Kessler (2011) note, individuals create a sense of control by emphasizing established social bonds, which exist between individuals with similar worldviews and shared values (Garcia-Retamero, Muller & Rousseau, 2012; Jonas & Fritzsche, 2013). Given that these similarities can emerge out of structures other than ethnicity and religion, it is not surprising that when confronted with fears about their safety, some Jos residents turned to their outgroup friends for the information needed to establish a sense of control.

The recipients and senders of safety information were driven by the friendship ties between them and their outgroup friends, which withstood the pressures of interethnic tension. For instance, a participant rationalized tipping off his outgroup friends as follows: “We have interacted, blended, and sinned against God together both in hidden and open circumstances, so I will not want any of those people to be harmed by any member of my community.” These ties were forged in pre-conflict social relations that involved intermixed schooling, residency, and joint commemoration of significant religious events. For instance, the individuals that expressed more benign views of their outgroup friends also noted that they established their relationships while schooling together. This category of individuals will not only estimate that their values are similar to their outgroup friends’ but will also view them as less threatening as a result of that perception. This view is reinforced by experimental studies that show that individuals are more inclined to cooperate with people with a similar worldview (Jonas & Fritzsche, 2013) and feel less threatened by those who share their values (Garcia-Retamero, Muller & Rousseau, 2012). Having said that, individuals may estimate that they have the same worldview as their outgroup friends but still exhibit aggressive tendencies or express negative perceptions of the outgroup if they believe that these individuals are more committed to advancing their group’s agenda than living by those shared values. This is consistent with the basic premise of this paper which is that the disposition of individuals towards outgroup friends and neighbours vary amid interethnic conflict because individuals’ threat perception levels differ.

Concluding Remarks

When ethnic conflict breaks out, an individual is expected to withdraw from the wider society to their default setting to create a sense of safety. This process is referred to as boundary activation and the heightening of ingroup identification in McDoom (2012) and Cakal et al. (2016). In

contrast, the Jos study indicates that this default setting need not be conceptualized in the conventional sense of a homogenous sociocultural or other identity groups, rather it should be viewed as existing in two forms, one geographic and the other relational. On the one hand, factors of mobility permitting, most individuals will withdraw to a homogenous geographic setting because it is the most effective protection against unfamiliar ethnic others. On the other hand, however, individuals will withdraw to a relational bubble that may or may not be heterogenous, depending on their threat perception. Individuals who retain a positive assessment of their outgroup friends amid interethnic conflict will have a heterogeneous relational bubble, in which case, outgroup denigration (and a positive disposition to friendly violence) will not always be a natural consequence of withdrawal from the wider society.

The foregoing analysis is related to prior studies on threat perception (Ein-Dor, Perry-Paldi & Hirschberger, 2017) and the relationship between integration and variable conflict behaviour (Dumitri & Johnson, 2011). However, it differs from them in its explication of how past friendship shapes conflict behaviour through the channel of perceived threat. For instance, Ein-Dor, Perry-Paldi and Hirschberger's analysis of threat perception focused on target selection in combat situations. The authors found that individuals "high on attachment anxiety" are better at distinguishing militants from civilians while less anxious individuals are more prone to mistake civilians for militants (Ein-Dor, Perry-Paldi & Hirschberger, 2017, p. 783). In contrast, my analysis pertains to a different context and indicates a reverse causal pathway as it shows that individual's more anxious about their outgroup friends are more disposed to friendly violence. Also, Dumitri and Johnson (2011, pp. 35-36) contend that individuals will be unwilling to attack the outgroup if their sense of integration is internalized. In contrast, the Jos study reveals that even internalized friendships can be destabilized if outgroup friends become perceived as a source of threat.

Nevertheless, my findings also demonstrate that increasing avenues for integration, especially in conflict-prone areas, could minimize the degree of localized violence if interethnic conflict does eventually break out.

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