Medicine for Uncertain Futures
Abstract

The Nigerian city of Jos used to be seen as a peaceful place, but in 2001 it was struck by clashes that arose from what was largely understood as issues of ethnic and religious belonging. The event, which would become known as ‘the crisis’, was experienced as a rupture and a loss of what the city had once been, and as the starting point of a spiral of violence that has continued up to today. With the crisis, Jos changed. Former friends became enemies, and places that had been felt to be safe no longer were so. Previous truths were thrown into confusion, and Jos’s inhabitants found themselves more and more having to manoeuvre in an unstable world coloured by fear and anger. Life in Jos became increasingly hard to predict, and people searched for different ways forward, constantly trying out new interpretations of the world. This book, which is inspired by pragmatism, analyses the processes that were shaping the emergent city of Jos and its inhabitants in the aftermath of the crisis. At its core are some of Jos’s practitioners of traditional medicine. As healers, diviners, and providers of spells to protect from enemies or solve conflicts, they had special skills to influence futures that were becoming more and more unpredictable. Still, the medical practitioners were as vulnerable to the changing circumstances as everyone else. Their everyday lives and struggles to find their footing and ways forward under the changing circumstances are used as a point of departure to explore larger wholes: life during times characterised by feelings of uncertainty, fragmentation, fear, and conflict – in Jos as a city and Nigeria as a nation.

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Contents

Acknowledgements 7
1. Matters of ‘Coincidence’ 11
2. A Home of Peace 29
3. Competing Prayers 43
4. Poisonous Movements 79
5. The Court System as Counter-Medicine 111
6. To be Part of a Place 133
7. Making Things Real 147
8. Wishful Doing 167
9. ‘The End of the End Time’ 185
Short Biographies of Selected Informants 193
References 197
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1. Matters of ‘Coincidence’

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

With this quote from William Butler Yeats’s poem ‘The Second Coming’, the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (1986) opened his first, now classic, novel Things Fall Apart, and it could serve just as well here. Just as Achebe’s novel dealt with uncertainty, incomprehensible presents, and unpredictable futures, so, too, does this work. The violence that broke out in the Nigerian city of Jos on Friday, 7 September 2001, and which came to be known as ‘the crisis’, threw a once-familiar city into disarray and confusion.

In comparison with other cities in Nigeria, Jos has often been depicted as relatively peaceful, a place where all of Nigeria’s different religious and ethnic groups live together in harmony. Tellingly, Plateau State – one of Nigeria’s thirty-six states – of which Jos is the capital, bears the motto ‘Home of Peace and Tourism’. The inhabitants of Jos experienced the crisis as a rupture of this peaceful past. With time, ‘the crisis’ came to be viewed as a turning point in the state, the start of a cycle of escalating violence that to date has brought with it repeatedly renewed violent hostilities and, in 2004, the declaration of a state of emergency that lasted six months.

On that Friday in 2001, a cleansing from within began as Muslims in mainly Christian areas and Christians in mainly Muslim areas were targeted. By the next Thursday, when the fighting ceased, thousands of homes, businesses, churches, mosques, and other buildings had been destroyed. There were estimates that between 1,000 and 3,000 people had been killed, and many others were missing (see Bawa & Nwogwu 2002:110; Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:249; HRW 2001:10; IRIN 2004).

The crisis left the inhabitants of Jos not only with a landscape scattered with burnt-down houses, lost family members, and missing friends, but
also with new neighbours. A pattern of moving was established in which the religious predominance in different areas was strengthened as members of the majority religion moved in while the others moved out. Jos came to be redefined into Muslim- and Christian-‘controlled zones’ (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:253). A landscape of fear and ownership claims emerged in which 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).

As a ‘critical event’, the crisis brought new modes of action into being at the same time that these very actions came to redefine what had before been taken for granted (Das 1995:6). Places that had been possible to live in before no longer were so. Areas and times that had previously been experienced as safe no longer were so. New no-go areas and no-go times emerged. In places where one had felt at home before, one was now a stranger or even an intruder. Former friends became enemies. These were times when previous rules were thrown into confusion. What a place was and how to behave to gain entry to it, which gates were secure to pass, which roads were safe to walk down, or whom to trust appeared as highly unpredictable issues. As life in Jos became increasingly hard to predict, people searched for different ways forward. They constantly tried out new interpretations of the world. What was held true yesterday was quickly discarded and replaced by today’s truths, only to be rewritten with the truths of tomorrow. The world was experienced as moving with increasingly speed, and Jos’s inhabitants found themselves more and more having to manoeuvre in unpredictable environs coloured by fear and anger.

At the time, I was working with some of Jos’s practitioners of what was perceived as ‘traditional’ medicine relative to the more ‘modern’ Western medicine, and like the rest of the city’s inhabitants, they often had to deal with a lack of discernible logic behind unfolding events. On the other hand, the skills and tools that the practitioners possessed were becoming increasingly valuable for the inhabitants of Jos as a whole. As diviners, they had special skills to predict futures that were becoming more and more obscure. They possessed incantations and spells to influence futures that were ever more dreaded. At the same time, with fears of and hostility against the others turning into daily companions of life in Jos, the practitioners’ expertise in healing relationships that had taken a wrong turn, creating invisible poisonous forces that could act at a dis-
tance, and composing protective medicines against threats generally seen as uncontrollable, grew in importance.

Medicine was a means to grasp the obscure and intangible – that which otherwise was hard to get a grip on. This was a rewarding entry when it came to understanding life in the Nigerian city of Jos, because it brought to the forefront issues and processes that would otherwise have remained in the background. The practitioners’ work concretised processes, and their struggles magnified questions, of importance for the city as well as the Nigerian nation as a whole. As anthropologists Sjaak van der Geest and Susan Reynolds Whyte wrote, paraphrasing Claude Lévi-Strauss, medicines were “good to think with” in both a metaphoric and a metonymic sense (1989:345).

When I returned to Jos after the crisis of 2001, it was evident how deeply the clashes had affected the practitioners of traditional medicine, like everybody else. Family members, friends, and homes had been lost, and many of them found themselves forced to move to less hostile neighbourhoods. The problems they tackled were the same as those of all people in Jos, but their line of work forced them to deal with those problems even more directly than others had to. In this work I will use the daily lives and work of the practitioners of traditional medicine whom I have come to know during my fieldwork in Jos as a starting point to decipher life in Jos in the aftermath of the crisis in 2001, and also to explore larger wholes: life during times characterised by feelings of uncertainty, fragmentation, fear, and conflict – in Jos as a city and Nigeria as a nation.

At the core of the thesis are the processes that were forming the emergent city of Jos and its inhabitants. Its theoretical inspiration is pragmatism. At its heart lies the interaction between the individual and his or her surroundings. In the words of the pragmatist John Dewey: ‘The processes of living are enacted by the environment as truly as by the organism; for they are an integration’ (1938:25). Importance is placed on what people, places, events, rumours, myths, names, roadblocks, violence, laws, medicine, poison, mobile phones, photographs, documents, clothes, etc. did rather than what they were.

Through this work run two principal theoretical ideas – firstly, that life is a constant becoming. The world as a whole is on the move; it is an unfolding affair that emerges out of interaction. As soon as a specific moment emerges, it disappears; it is forever moved into the past, never to be repeated again. ‘For that which marks a present is its becoming and its disappearing’, wrote the pragmatist George Herbert Mead (1932:1). While the world was experienced as moving faster and faster, the practi-
tioners I accompanied on their daily movements through Jos were continually re-interpreting the world – what it had been, what it was, and what it was going to be. In his work *The Philosophy of the Present*, Mead’s basic argument was that reality always exists in a present, and with every new emergent present a new reality comes into being, with its own unique past and future. Hence, new images of the past and the future as well as the present are made anew out of what is there in every emergent present (1932:1, 23, 29, 48).

The second idea is a corollary of the first, namely that life is fundamentally *uncertain*. The scars left by the Jos crisis of 2001 brought uncertainty to the forefront, and in people’s stories the notion that things could no longer be understood and predicted was continually repeated. Dewey’s basic argument in *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* was that scholarly thinking has been obsessed with a quest for certainty. Since outcomes of practical actions are always uncertain, this meant that theory was privileged in relation to practice and knowledge in relation to actions (1930:10, 26ff., 30).

The situation in Jos made these predicaments especially poignant. The world emerged in all its uncertainty and fearfulness. With uncertainty, ambiguities, inconsistencies, and confusion being a basic part of life for the practitioners as well as for the inhabitants of Jos in general, an approach that assumed certainty, stability, and coherence appeared to be at risk of concealing more than it clarified. To understand how people’s lives unfolded in their daily struggles and movements, uncertainty rather than certainty was a more rewarding starting point (see Jackson 1989:3; Wi-ikan 1990:33f.).

**The Union**

Many of the approximately two hundred practitioners of traditional medicine I have worked with in Jos have been members of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners (NUMHP), Plateau State Branch. Even if things changed to a certain degree with internal conflicts in the union and the arrival of new, competing associations on the scene, this was unquestionably the group that organised most practitioners in the Jos area before the crisis of 2001. On the other hand, the union’s functions were not particularly clear. Although it was argued that membership in the union guaranteed the quality of a practitioner’s work, no tests or evaluations were performed before anyone was accepted as a member. The union’s most important work seemed to be calling meetings and collecting mem-
bership fees. The union did not function in any strict way as a trade union – in the sense of working for its members’ greater common interests. It appeared more as a place of individual interests – a place to gain knowledge of other practitioners’ medicines, to obtain membership certificates that could be put on the wall at home for increased prestige, to find allies in constantly ongoing power struggles, and to facilitate access to external cooperation partners such as the Ministry of Art and Culture, the Ministry of Health, and the Pharmacology Department of the University of Jos.

As an official association – the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners – the union in Jos was presently registered at the Ministry of Sport and Culture. Since its founding at the beginning of the 1980s, the union had moved from emphasising ‘tradition’ to ‘medicine’. When it was first established, the NUMHP had been connected to the Ministry of Art and Culture, which gave the members an office at the Cultural Centre in Jos. One member described the centre as a place were people doing traditional things were brought together, and since the union was doing just that, the ministry had asked that the union be represented in the cultural centre. During this period, the union had an elected leadership and the members regularly held meetings at the office. Its cooperation with the Ministry of Art and Culture ended in 1985 when that ministry was moved under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

From the perspective of medicine, collaboration between the University of Jos and the NUMHP had begun back in 1982 with a psychology professor who was interested in traditional cures for psychological illnesses. He soon realised that his own area of interest was only a small part of all the work that the practitioners carried out and encouraged one of the professors in the pharmacology department to look into the herbal aspects of the medicine. At the time, the practitioners still had an office at the cultural centre, but when they lost it they were given an office at the pharmacology department. Over the years, the collaboration with the pharmacology department has developed: practitioners are being economically compensated for delivering herbs for analysis, and there are several series of published scientific articles to show for it.¹

¹ Published studies have been done, for example, on seeds used by practitioners of traditional medicine as contraceptive remedies (Das et al. 2000; Isichei et al. 2000; Okwuasaba et al. 1997; Viola & Anekwe 2001), leaves used for family planning in and around Jos (Nwafor & Okwuasaba 2001), bark traditionally used for treatment of liver diseases (Ladeji & Okoye 1996), seeds traditionally used as prophylactic medicine against the effects of snakebites (Aguiyi et al. 2001; Uguru et al. 1997), leaves used by traditional midwives for inducing labour and menstruation (Uguru et al. 1995; Uguru et al. 1998; Uguru et al. 1999), roots used for family planning and for their anti-inflammatory properties (Nwafor & Okwuasaba
Since the mid-1980s, then, the members of the NUMHP in Jos have had an office at the University of Jos. Although there was competition between members over access, the office became a meeting point for practitioners with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Weekly union meetings were held and members participated in large numbers – sometimes the office was totally full with as many as thirty or forty members. The motto of the union in Plateau, stated on all letterheads of official union documents, was ‘United to Cure and to Protect’, and its constitution stated that it is ‘non-political or religious and is not at all interested in partisan politics or religious dogmas and beliefs of its members, and therefore matters of politics and religion are strictly banned from being discussed at its meetings and in all its deliberations’ (NUMHP 1981:4).

With the crisis in 2001, issues of both politics and religion were given increasing prominence within the union in Jos, and new divisions and borders emerged among its members, just as in the landscape of Jos. The Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners, Plateau State Branch, split into two factions. What had been a meeting point for people became marked by distrust. Former friends became enemies. As a result, the weekly Tuesday meetings rarely took place, and if people were called to a meeting it was not uncommon that not a single person, including the one who had called the meeting, showed up. There was nothing regular about the weekly meetings anymore.

A Divided Nation, City, and Union

Like the borders in the landscape and the crisis itself, the emergence of the two factions of the union reflects an intermingling of ethnic and religious divisions, which in large part echoes national conditions. As early as Nigeria’s birth as a nation in 1914, an inherent split between the North and the South was present when the British Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was joined with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria to form the colonial Nigerian state. Through the idea of indirect rule – rule through native authorities – different areas and ethnic groups were ruled in very different ways (Mustapha 2002:157, 159), a factor that has had important consequences for the character of the Nigerian nation to this day. For example, while the Western system of schooling remained strikingly absent in the Muslim North, both schools and the missionary presence came to make

\(2003\), and leaves used for respiratory infections and abdominal disorders (Amos et al. 1998).
their marks clearly in the South. Such factors came to strengthen the dichotomy between a Muslim North and a Christian South (see Hackett 1999:539; 2003:53; Mustapha 2002:160; Ojo 2007:177f.).

In 1939, the southern part of Nigeria was divided into two units. Each of the three regions was tied to one of Nigeria’s three largest ethnic groupings – the Muslim Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Christian Igbo in the South-East, and the Christian and Muslim Yoruba in the South-West. These divisions eventually came to be viewed as natural divisions (Mustapha 2002:157, 160). Nigeria has subsequently come to develop along ‘a tri-tendential trajectory’: the North/South divide, the three colonial regions, and the multi-polarity played out by Nigeria’s hundreds of different ethnic groups (Ibrahim 2000:51).  

Being located almost in the geographical centre of Nigeria, Jos has in many ways become a meeting point for these trajectories. As a city, it has been depicted in terms of ‘extreme heterogeneity’ (Plotnicov 1969:61) – as a microcosm of Nigeria where all its ethnic groups are represented (Adetula 2005:212; Plotnicov 1969:268). Currently a city that might have over one million citizens, Jos was founded in 1915 after the British found tin in the area, and with the growing tin industry, Hausas from the north, followed by Yorubas and Igbos from southern Nigeria, migrated to the area. The groups perceived as local, on the other hand, were among the last to enter Jos as settled residents (Plotnicov 1972:4, 7). Even by the early 1960s, only 671 of the city’s total population of around 50,000 belonged to this category (Smedley 2004:18f.).

Although the term is used with varying content, the Middle Belt – often used to refer to the region in which Jos is located – has been constructed principally in opposition to conditions in southern and northern Nigeria (Sharpe 1986:35). It has been emphasised that this region is

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2 As there are no reliable statistics and no agreement on what criteria to use, estimations of the number of ethnic groups in Nigeria vary widely, but a figure commonly quoted is 250 (see Adebani 2009:352, 261; Gordon 2003:xv, 2; Mustapha 2003:2; Rotberg 2004:7, 15; Suberu 2001:3). There are, however, four major ethnic groups. The Yoruba are estimated to make up about 21%, the Hausa 21%, the Igbo 18%, and the Fulani 9% of Nigeria’s total population. (Gordon 2003:2).

3 Because the released results of the 2006 census – the most recent in Nigeria – only included figures from the national level down to the state level (NPC 2007:206f., 209), reliable statistics for the contemporary population of Jos are nonexistent. Hence, all recent estimations are highly unreliable as well as varied. A provisional census in 1990 put the population at 496,409 (Adetula 2005:212), and in 1993 it was estimated to be close to 650,000 (Taylor 1993:36). The official website of Plateau State puts the population of Jos at about 1,000,000 (Plateau State Government 2004a). During a visit to the Jos Metropolitan Development Board in 2007, I was told that the board had previously estimated that 1.5 million people lived in Jos but that there now might be over 2 million.
home to a vast number of ethnic minorities and is a place of great diversity (Ishaku 2002:224; Okpeh 2008:31), but also that its location between northern and southern Nigeria has brought with it that it is here that the tensions between Christianity and Islam acquire their most combustible force (see Alemika 2002:9f.; Best 2002:273f.; Okpeh 2008:31; Tyoden 1993:19, 103): ‘More than anywhere else in the Nigerian Federation, it is in the Middle Belt that the uneasy meeting of Islam and Christianity takes place’ (Best 2002:274).

The Middle Belt is one of the places in Nigeria where the fusion of ethnicity and religion can be seen most clearly. The two have become connected in the name of ‘indigeneity’ (Suberu 2001:17). Christianity and ethnic groups perceived to be ‘indigenes’ are on one side, and Islam and groups perceived as ‘settlers’ are on the other (Falola 2009:280; Yoroms 2002:27f.). In Jos the term settler has been used by perceived indigenes especially to refer to early Muslim Hausa-Fulani immigrants to the city, along with other derogatory terms like ‘non-indigene’, ‘stranger’, and ‘invader’ (Adetula 2005:216). These labels, in contrast to the term indigene, are not used by people to describe themselves but to describe others. No one wants to be a settler. On the other hand, the now entirely Christian Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere are the ethnic groups who regard their ‘traditional lands’ as converging in Jos (Danfulani & Fwatsi 2002:245f.), and the state has recognised as indigenes of the town (Higazi 2007:74).

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’ into 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 (Kopytoff 1987:53-61). While the Christian indigenes base their claim to Jos on the fact that they are the traditional owners of the land, the Muslim Hausa-Fulanis base their claim on the fact that they founded the city. These arguments form a basis for ‘dual ownership’ – one of land and one of properties (Zangabadt 1983:13; for an extended discussion, see Egwu 2004:251-274).

The crisis of 2001, with what reports and articles usually refer to as ‘Christian indigenes’ on one side of the violence and ‘Muslim Hausa-Fulani settlers’ on the other, is one of many expressions in Jos of the process in which religion and ethnicity have come together in the distinction between indigenes and settlers. The two groups are formed by a combina-
tion of characteristics, and there are many people in Jos who do not fit into these stereotypes, such as Christians who are not indigene or indigenes who are Muslims. However, this does not mean that the distinction has not also influenced their lives. It has been part of forming the emergent city of Jos as a whole and its inhabitants’ lives as well.

In this context, the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners, Plateau State Branch, was no exception. In 2003 – with my first return to Jos after the crisis – Jibril, a Muslim practitioner who was Ankwai, one of the smaller ethnic groups that were seen as indigene to Plateau State, explained that

there are now an indigene traditional herbalists, Plateau State and a Hausa traditional herbalists, Plateau State. There is only supposed to be one Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal practitioners in the State that is nationally recognised. However, because of the internal conflicts the Hausas have now brought themselves out and organised an election. This election is not recognised by the indigene herbal practitioners, so we now have two factions in the Union.

Especially in urban areas, the Hausa, Fulani, and other smaller northern ethnic groups have intermixed through the centuries to such a degree that the term Hausa-Fulani is used (Gordon 2003:13ff., 30-36). However, the man or woman on the street in Jos generally used the term Hausa, and not Hausa-Fulani, to refer to people who were Muslims, spoke Hausa, and were Hausa or Fulani or belonged to any of the other smaller ethnic groups that are regarded as having their origin further north in Nigeria. In other words, the fact that one of the factions was generally referred to as the ‘Hausa faction’ did not mean that it consisted only of people who were Hausas, but of people perceived to be Muslims from the north. As indicated in the names given to the two factions, it was common to refer to the two groups in terms of religion, ethnicity, or indigeneity alone – like ‘those Hausas’, ‘those Muslims’, ‘those settlers’, ‘those indigenes’, ‘those Beroms’, or ‘those Christians’ – rather than all three or any two characteristics (see also HRW 2005:21f.). These terms were used interchangeably to depict a world that was becoming increasingly divided according to the clustering of indigeneity, religion, and ethnicity.

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4 Information about practitioners who recur in several chapters can be found under ‘Short Biographies of Selected Informants Mentioned in the Text’.

5 Today there is a long list of ethnic groups that are officially perceived as indigene to Plateau State. Among them are Berom, Nges, Tarok, Geomal, Youm, Montol, Rukuba, Challra, Jarawa, Atem, as well as others (FMIC 2005).
The emergence of two different factions in the union told tales of larger wholes – of life in the Nigerian city of Jos, where divisions, tensions, conflicts, and fears were growing in importance. On one level, the union was broken up into a ‘Hausa faction’ and an ‘indigene faction’; on another level, Jos was comparably divided into Christian and Muslim areas. As there was a fight over ownership of the union, so was there over Jos between Christian indigene groups and Muslim settler groups.

The following story revolves around a union meeting that showed in a very direct way how Jos and life had changed for the city’s inhabitants. The story depicts how the world was experienced at the time and how people struggled to find ways forward in an environment where neither the past nor the present was easily deciphered and the future was equally hard to foretell.

A Union Meeting

As I upon my return to Jos in the beginning of 2004 walked towards the union’s office at the university, worried by people’s constant warnings about how the city had changed, I was hoping to find the members at their weekly Tuesday meeting. Going through the union had appeared to be a way of meeting a larger mixed group instead of selecting specific individuals, something that could create feelings of distrust. But as events unfolded it became clear that things had become far more complicated.

To my disappointment I found the building totally empty and the door of the union office locked. Still, I was glad to see that the union’s big metal signboard was still standing next to the door. Attached to the door was a sheet of A4 paper headed ‘Consultant Herbalists’, followed by the list of weekly consultant hours, which, I would later on learn, not a single practitioner was following at the time. At the bottom of the paper three familiar names – Hadiza, Jibril, and Mai Lafiya – were listed as ‘consultant herbalist doctors’. All three had been part of the inner circle of the union since its establishment. Mai Lafiya, a Muslim Hausa man in his eighties, had once been chairman of the union and Jibril, now a man in his sixties, had long been the union’s secretary. Hadiza, a Christian Rukuba (a group regarded as indigenes in Plateau State) woman in her sixties, who had initially inherited the skills of a midwife but with time had acquired cures for almost everything, had become the only practitioner who was regularly compensated by the pharmacology department as a consultant herbalist.
When I returned some days later, the door was open and Hadiza was there. Happy to see each other, we started talking in our own mixture of English, Pidgin English, Hausa, and body language. Since very early in Jos’s history, Hausa had been a lingua franca in the area (Isichei 1982:254; Tyoden 1993:26), and although it is still the most important language, English and Pidgin have also to some degree become lingua francas in the region (Plotnicov 1969:63). Even if Hadiza’s and my blending and switching of languages reached levels not attained in the general conversation in Jos, it was a common trait.

As we settled down in the union office, Hadiza told me that Ibrahim, the old chairman of the union who had been in office before the crisis in 2001, had left Plateau. Ibrahim, who was a Muslim Hausa man, had been greatly affected during the crises. His house had been burnt down and two of his sons had been killed. He had subsequently moved further north in Nigeria. He had enjoyed the support of different ethnic and religious groups in Plateau State, and when he held meetings at the union office members had participated in large numbers compared to the present, Hadiza explained, clarifying why not a single person had attended the last Tuesday meeting. She added that with Ibrahim gone, the union was left without a chairman but that they were soon going to hold a new election for their leadership.

Hadiza then suggested that we continue on to her home in Gada Biyu, one of the areas in Jos inhabited predominantly by indigene Christians and referred to as ‘New Jerusalem’ (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:253). She rented a room in a compound with ten rooms. In the inner courtyard she had a shed where she kept her herbs. Almost as soon as we had settled down in her room, which was furnished with a bed and a sofa, Jibril entered. He seemed to be really upset over something, but at first he did not mention what it was. Instead he told us that some weeks ago he had helped Houwa write a letter to me.

Houwa was a Muslim Fulani woman in her fifties, who as a girl had had a sickness in her stomach, believed to be caused by spirits. She had been cured through an initiation into bori, a group of practitioners who obtained medicines through spirit possession. Although she had not started working with the spirits and giving medicine until her menopause, she had become a very prominent practitioner and she carried the title bori queen of Jos. Under Ibrahim’s leadership of the union she had been the treasurer. Jibril explained that Houwa had wanted to contact me, but as she did not possess the skills of writing she had turned to him, who could read and write and was fluent in both Hausa and English. He concluded
by saying that Houwa would be very happy now that her friend had returned.

He then changed the subject and started recounting what had made him so upset. The day before, the ‘Hausa faction’ had held what according to him was an ‘illegal election’, to which none of the ‘indigenes’ had been invited. He showed me a paper with a list of people who had been elected. Since he had already been moving around showing it to a lot of different people, this paper was quite ragged. He commented, ‘See, they are all Muslims’ – a good example of how one characteristic of the opposing constellations in Jos at the time could be used to refer to the whole divide. In this case Jibril, himself a Muslim, referred to his opponents in terms of being Muslims.

To make things worse, Houwa, whom Jibril had just a few weeks ago helped write the letter, was listed as the state chairlady. Friends had made plans behind his back. Relations between people had become blurred. An election had taken place in the union without any notification or invitation to him – a person who had long been at the core of the union’s politics. He was no longer the unquestionably elected secretary of the NUMHP and, according to him, there had to be another election where the ‘indigenes’ were represented as well.

After listening very attentively to Jibril, Hadiza invited us both to a meeting the following morning at eleven o’clock in her home. We both agreed to attend and Jibril disappeared from the room at the same speed with which he had arrived.

In the morning the gathering people started organising chairs in a semicircle in Hadiza’s inner courtyard. People were seated and a small table was placed in front of Jibril, who took notes on single sheets of paper, but he had no official function as a secretary at this meeting. As it started, everybody was encouraged to introduce themselves and the woman sitting next to me wrote down our names in an exercise book that Hadiza had brought out. We were fourteen persons present. Jibril was the only one among us who had a Muslim name, and except for him all the other participants were Rukuba. It became clear that Jibril and I had been invited to participate in a meeting initially planned for Rukuba practitioners only.

An hour into the meeting, to my and Hadiza’s surprise, Houwa entered the compound and joined the meeting. Following some quite formal speeches by Jibril, Hadiza, and Houwa regarding their relationship to me, food was served. Everybody received a bowl of rice, vegetable soup, and a piece of meat on top, together with a lemonade. Afterwards we all gathered in the inner courtyard, since the photographer who had been
called for had arrived. We all arranged ourselves with the photographer’s help. Hadiza had invested a lot of energy and money, and it was apparent that this meeting was important to her. After the photo session, people started to disperse, and Houwa left as soon as she had arranged with Jibril and the photographer to receive her copies of the pictures.

Some days later it became apparent that the meeting had brought with it some quite severe and unexpected consequences for Jibril. ‘The visit of the queen took the issue out to the Hausa area’, he told me as he described how Houwa had gone, after the meeting, to inform the Hausa faction that he was trying to form a separate union in Plateau State. The Hausa faction in turn had reported it to the Police Force Criminal Investigation Department, which had requested that Jibril appear before it. The police had asked him why he was trying to split the NUMHP. He had responded by asking them who it was that had dissolved the union in the first place. He had argued that the old leadership of the NUMHP was still serving and questioned who had authorised this new election.

Confused about why Jibril had invited Houwa to the meeting in the first place, I asked him. A bit upset, he said, ‘I did not know that they were going to start an indigene group and were going to discuss it there in that very day’. When he met me in Hadiza’s house, he had understood that the letter he had written for Houwa was no longer of importance and had gone to inform her that I had arrived and that we had agreed to meet the next day at Hadiza’s house. He claimed that he had not known that it was going to be a big meeting:

If I had known, I had never invited her, because she is with the other faction. When she came for the meeting and met all the people, you know she left that meeting in a hurry, because this meeting was to gather funds so that they could swear in that other arm of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners. When she left she thought that I had organised the indigene people to a meeting in Hadiza’s house. So she told the others that I had established another faction and this was the message that they took to the police station.

What other people had been planning or doing had been hidden under a veil of obscurity. Jibril continued by asserting, ‘The whole thing was just a coincidence. I was trying to help her to meet you and when she came to see you she also met the other people’.

Jibril’s conclusion highlighted that life is as much about being ‘thwarted, conflicted and thrown by contingency and circumstance’ as having ‘intentions and purposes’, to quote Michael Jackson (2005a:xiii f.). He had not been able to decipher what was going on in the present and
foresee the consequences of his actions, but even afterwards he still had trouble understanding the logic behind all the events. The experienced reality no longer followed familiar causality patterns. There was no underlying logic to be deciphered – it was just a ‘coincidence’.

Methodological Choices: To Move with Others

The situation in the union echoed processes that were forming life in the Nigerian city at large – a life that emerged as ever more fearful, uncertain, unpredictable, and non-logical. After the crisis of 2001, ‘emergency’ and ‘disorganisation’ became two words that were used over and over among the practitioners I worked with to depict and deal with not just the union but also the city as a whole. People struggled to find their bearings. Rather than being stable, these were times when people’s interpretations and plans came forth as steadily shifting and things, people, and places appeared in their constant indeterminate becoming.

This work is based on three periods of fieldwork spent in Jos, all in all eighteen months between 2000 and 2007. The fieldwork was conducted from October 2000 to January 2001, December 2003 to September 2004, and February 2007 to August 2007. The approximately two hundred practitioners of traditional medicine with whom I have worked have almost exclusively lived in the city of Jos, the surrounding countryside, or nearby urban areas. Their ethnic and religious belonging have been as diverse as those of the city itself, a fact connected in large part to my having been introduced to the practitioners in Jos through the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners.

Accordingly, the languages the practitioners spoke varied just as much. In addition to the three lingua francas (English, Hausa, Pidgin), many other languages are spoken in Jos, such as Igbo, Yoruba, Fulani, Berom, and Rukuba, but these languages are generally understood or spoken only by people who are born into these ethnic groups. Since not all practitioners spoke the same lingua franca, several of them could not communicate directly with each other. It was therefore not unusual that discussions were translated as a natural part of the dialogue. During my work in the field, most conversations have been in English, but mixed with some Hausa and Pidgin words. While on some occasions I have used a translator, most of the time other people present – family members, neighbours, or other practitioners – have, when needed, become part of the conversations and translated between English and whatever other language was being spoken.
Before the crisis, during my first fieldwork, I had visited the practitioners in their homes, where more or less formalised interviews took place. When I returned to Jos in 2003 and experienced the very shifting and fluid field where ideas were persistently questioned and paths of actions were constantly redirected, that approach no longer appeared fitting. To understand what was important for people on their paths through Jos, it became imperative to strive towards becoming a participant – to move with people in the directions that they were heading. As Jo Lee and Tim Ingold argued, people ‘find their feet by walking with others, and not by reading over their shoulders’ (2006:83). To move with people on their daily business in Jos as events, actions, and interpretations unfolded became a way to gain an understanding of the very fluid and contradictory reality that people were experiencing (see Anderson 2004; Kusenbach 2003). The grounded movement brought forth the unimagined and the unplanned, since the accidental, incomprehensible, and fragmented were just as much a part of the walks as the planned and intended movement.

As these were times when conflicts between practitioners were intense, I inevitably became part of them. The practitioners had their own ideas and agendas. Their struggles for acknowledgment naturally came to involve me, both when it concerned their medicine and in relation to union positions and factions, as well as different organisations of traditional medicine – issues particularly touched upon in the chapter ‘Making Things Real’.

Still, accompanying people on their movements through Jos became a way to gain an entrance to their lived realities and to their paths, both in a physical sense and in the sense of their directions through life. Paths came to be connected with conflicts within the union. A newly elected chairman had to be visited, new disputes arose that had to be sorted out, important meetings came up, allies had to be created in the Ministry of Health or the university’s pharmacology department, and people were reported to the police and taken to court. Other times, someone had become ill and needed to visit the hospital, get advice from a spirit, obtain an amulet, or buy vitamin C. Life was in a constant unfolding, and moreover, actions and movements had directionality. Actions had to be seen in relation to the situations in which they were acted out, without which they made no sense. By moving with people in their directions, I came closer to understanding what was at stake for them in any given situation, and also, beyond that, what they were trying to do, what they were hoping for, and what they feared (see Whyte 2002:171f.; Wikan 1992:472f.).
The aim here is to bring forth Jos through the many complex and conflicting trajectories that were forming it as well as its inhabitants. By focusing on how the city shaped the actions of its inhabitants on the one hand, and how they shaped the city on the other, emphasis is placed on the world as an unfolding, uncertain, and contested affair. This interaction calls forth a city and its inhabitants on the move, and also the situatedness of the present – its uniqueness, its constant becoming and disappearing. It makes it clear that there can be no final depiction of the world. With every new footstep a new reality comes into being.

The ethnography presented in this work will alternate between describing general processes that were forming the city of Jos and stories of individuals’ paths through Jos. In this moving between large and small, the same processes are played out in the particular as well as in the larger wholes. The picture conveyed, I hope, is composed of situated unfolding events and struggles, placed within moving contexts.

Outline of the Work

The initial chapters of this work focus on the emergent city, and on processes that were forming it in the aftermath of the crisis of 2001.

Jos had a violent past, but contrary to this, the city’s inhabitants as well as researchers, policymakers, and journalists kept repeating a narrative of a peaceful land, climate, and people. The chapter ‘A Home of Peace’, focuses on how this narrative shaped people’s understanding of Jos’s past, present, and future, and also of the crisis in itself, by making certain histories visible and others invisible. Instead of being connected to previous violence, the crisis was experienced as a break with a peaceful past. The crisis brought with it a sense of loss and bewilderment. An experienced lack of peace and organisation came to characterise life in Jos, and disorder became the expected order of things.

With the Jos crisis of 2001, people’s patterns of movement changed drastically and so, too, did Jos. The chapter ‘Competing Prayers’ reflects upon how an increasingly religious and compartmentalised landscape emerged, in which religiously associated clothes, buildings, zones, no-go areas, and no-go times became more and more prominent. It brings out how a fight over Jos was going on through blocking and erasing movements, actions, and traces of the perceived others, using tools such as roadblocks, loudspeakers, and the burning of buildings. Thus it was a landscape that emerged out of non-movement as much as movement, absence as much as presence.
The chapter ‘Poisonous Movements’ continues to explore the significance of the absent. Charting the highly diversified medical landscape in Jos, the chapter revolves around a fear of harmful forces – poison, needles sent through the air, adulterated medicine and foodstuffs, evil phone numbers, infectious rumours, and violence – entities that crossed the borders which separated people. What they had in common was that their point of origin was veiled; the aggressor behind them was absent. They were felt to move uncontrollably, as though by their own agency, and to be impossible to detect before it was too late, when they had already reached and affected their victim. These moving forces were just as constitutive of the emergent landscape as the processes of compartmentalising outlined above.

At the time, people increasingly felt that they were caught in circumstances and threatened by forces beyond their own control. If the previous chapter focused on these forces, the following, ‘The Court System as Counter-Medicine’, brings out how people in Jos, and in the Nigerian nation as a whole, tried to deal with and protect themselves from these highly obscure poisonous forces that could cross borders and find you anywhere. In the chapter, which unfolds around the story of a court case between two practitioners in Jos, tools to counter these forces are sought in the law and the court system. In the end, these tools emerged as just as obscure as the forces in themselves.

As places were put in opposition to each other, it became increasingly hard to cross between them, and people became increasingly aware of how they needed to act if they entered the places of the other. The chapter ‘To be Part of a Place’ unfolds around how some of the practitioners struggled to preserve or regain access to the university grounds and the office the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners had there. In order to do that, they employed different tools. They modified the way they described their work, changed the clothes they were wearing, and tried to verify their connection to the place through documents. But as in the previous chapter, the tools yielded outcomes which proved to be ambiguous and unpredictable.

Among the practitioners there was a constant search for different tools that would bring forth desirable futures in the form of orderliness, success, health, peace, security, and the like. This quest is the focus of the last chapters. After the crisis, there were constant feelings of emergency and the sense that the world was not as ordered as it once had been. The union was no exception. The chapter ‘Making Things Real’ revolves around how practitioners tried not only to organise the union but also to bring
things into existence through the use of paper in various forms. No matter fake or real, documents and photographs appeared as very powerful tools to bring forth realities wished for.

The chapter ‘Wishful Doing’ comes together around an illness story and brings out how people’s relation to their surrounding was characterised rather by a tentative, explorative, experimental, and wishful doing than by well-informed and calculated actions. When previous cures failed, the past was reinterpreted in order to find new cures for the future. Rather than being absolute cures, medicines in this context emerged as incantations for futures hoped for.

The final chapter, ‘The End of the End Time’, brings forth how trust in the future was hanging on a thin thread, to the extent that people believed that the world literally was approaching its final days. To some, the fate of Jos lay in the hands of the practitioners of traditional medicine. If they could come together and perform the needed sacrifices and prayers, there was hope. But all the conflicts had made it difficult to unite. At the same time that its inhabitants were raising their voices for peace, Jos was a city split between deeply conflicting imaginaries.
2. A Home of Peace

Pam, a practitioner of traditional medicine and a Berom man in his sixties who had been born and lived his whole life in the Jos area, once told me that there was no place in Nigeria that had such a good climate as Jos. He added that this was why the white man liked Jos so much. Located on the Jos Plateau, the city enjoys a relatively cool and therefore favourable climate, and among researchers, too, this has been seen as one of the reasons so many people – both Africans and Europeans – have settled there or visited the city for recreational purposes (see Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:243; Plotnicov 1969:30ff., 298; 1970:272; Wulfhorst & Musa 2007:51f.). This notion about the weather echoes in many different voices. Plateau State’s official website, for example, claimed: ‘Plateau weather remains the coldest and this weather condition accounts for the concentration of expatriates in the State compared to other States of the federation’ (Plateau State Government 2004b).

Weather was a constitutive part of how Jos was perceived. Pam explained that in other places in Nigeria there is ‘all hotness’ and that it is only in Jos that the weather is this good for the human body. The cool weather makes women fertile and increases the number of red blood cells, he said: the count for a person living in Jos will be much higher compared to a person who lived in a hot place, because, in Pam’s words, ‘the hotness always tamper with the red blood corpuscle’. In a similar manner, the first Europeans who arrived on the Plateau called attention to its favourable climate: ‘Its bracing atmosphere led to the belief that it was one of the healthiest places in West Africa’ (Plotnicov 1969:30).

As Pam went on to narrate, he made it clear that the cool weather was not only good for people’s bodies, but it also made people cool and Jos a peaceful place. The land on the Plateau is ‘a good land; no earthquake, the land is hard’. But if you went further north in Nigeria, the inside of the land was soft and earthquakes easily occurred. The land of Jos was not prone to emotional outbursts. For Pam, the characteristics of the climate were reflected in the peaceful ways of the people and the land.
Pam’s depiction of Jos as a peaceful place with a peaceful population was just one of many versions of the same grand narrative of the city and the state that was retold by the person in the street, newspapers, the radio, researchers, and government organisations. A researcher at the University of Jos concluded: ‘It was against the backdrop of the peaceful nature of the over fifty-four ethnic groups [living in Plateau State] that the Nigerian Road Safety Commission gave the state the motto: “Home of Peace and Tourism”’ (Danfulani 2006:2).

To use a concept from M. M. Bakhtin, the idea of the home of peace functioned as a ‘chronotope’ – a focal point from which Jos’s past, land, and inhabitants were narrated – an organising centre that gave the narratives meaning. As in a novel, it served as the crucial point from which scenes unfolded (Bakhtin 1994:250). Through it, Jos’s past and present and Jos as a place were merged together in the notion of a peaceful land and a peaceful past – the ‘spatial and temporal’ were fused into one whole (ibid.:85). When the violence in 2001 broke out, it was given meaning in relation to the same notion of a home of peace. The crisis was experienced as a rupture of Jos’s past as a home of peace, a point of view that was expressed in such words as: ‘Unlike other parts of Nigeria, which have experienced inter-communal violence with tragic regularity, Jos, until September 2001, had always been viewed as a peaceful city’ (HRW 2001:5). It was concluded that ‘Plateau State, previously known as a rare haven of peace in Nigeria, has repeatedly flared up along religious and ethnic lines since then’ (Manby 2004:181). As violent outbreaks continued, the crisis of 2001 came to be viewed as turning point against which renewed hostilities were portrayed (Higazi 2007:69ff.; HRW 2005:6; Je’adayibe 2008:167ff.). Thus, after new clashes in 2008 the violence was described in these terms: ‘If antecedent are to go by, the present crisis may

All cars registered in Plateau had the state’s motto on their number plates. The word ‘peace’ was likewise echoed in many other contexts in Jos.
just be added to a number of crises’ (Achi & Nkwocha 2008:2); ‘Jos is known for ethno-religious crisis’ (Audu & Ajakaye 2008); and ‘Jos has seen repeated bouts of inter-communal violence’ (BBC 2008b).

Jos was no longer what it once was. After renewed violence in January 2010, Atiku Abubakar, the former vice-president, said in an interview that he ‘regretted that Jos, a city once known for its beauty, clement weather and peace, has become notorious for mindless bloodletting and chaos’ (Abimaje & Abuja 2010). Similarly, after violence in March the same year, a news article headed ‘Jos Crisis – When a Mining City Becomes an Eternal Killing Field’ concluded: ‘The once peaceful plateau has transformed into a battle zone, where human lives are slaughtered at irregular intervals. Time was when Jos was famous for its tin mines. But today it is notorious as killing field’ (Kumolu 2010).

Even if Plateau State experienced some of the bloodiest and most prolonged violence in its history since Nigeria’s move from years of military government to a civilian one in 1999 (Higazi 2007:69), and Jos became in many ways a hotspot for ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria (Adetula 2005:229; Last 2007:608), the image of the city remained connected to the same notion of a home of peace, although it did so by telling a story of an estrangement from such a past and place.

A History of Violence

The chronotope of a home of peace made certain aspects of Jos’s past, its land, and its inhabitants stand out, while others were relegated to the background. It highlighted how selecting one thread also means ignoring others that might possibly turn the story in another direction (Whyte 2008:98). As Christopher Tilley once observed: ‘Whatever we remember, and the manner in which we remember, we get a different past, a different sense of place, and a different landscape every time’ (2006:29). The no-
tion of the home of peace was connected to forgetting as much as it was to remembering. Despite popular claims, the violence that had struck Jos was not unprecedented in the city’s past (Higazi 2007:74) – there was a past of violence that was not narrated. The crisis of 2001, as well as people’s patterns of relocation that followed in its aftermath, were part of practices that were as old as Jos itself. Like the Nigerian nation, the city has been divided between a North and a South since its foundation, and tensions have flourished.

According to Leonard Plotnicov, who did fieldwork in Jos in the beginning of the 1960s, Jos even held ‘the dubious distinction of having provided the setting for the very first urban riot between ethnic groups in Nigeria’ (1972:6). He noted:

The politically explosive nature of Jos has been recognized and commented on by many observers and certainly by the colonial administration, which periodically reported on the situation from 1920 onward. Unfortunately for its victims, the history of Jos provides many instances of what we now euphemistically call ‘civil disturbances’, many of which can be directly attributed to the city’s combustible mix. (Plotnicov 1972:4)

Even during the city’s early history, the British colonial administration identified Jos as a potential trouble spot (Zangabadt 1983:5). Keeping different groups separate was believed to be important, since the idea was that their intermingling would create problems (Smedley 2004:24). In the 1930s, in her book Native Administration in Nigeria, Margery Perham observed that there were four ‘sharply divided’ classes of people in Jos: the Europeans, the southern Christians, the Hausa-Fulani Muslims, and lastly the ‘local pagans’, who only visited the city (Perham 1962:151).

With its very foundation, the urban centre of Jos was divided into two separate administrative units: the Native Town and the Township. The boundary between these two units was demarcated by the Bauchi Light Railway line, which was completed in 1917. In the Township, the Europeans and Asians settled in a ‘reservation’ apart from most Africans. The aim, however, was not only to keep Africans and non-Africans separate, but also to maintain a social as well as residential and administrative segregation between southern and northern Nigerians. With the different colonisation patterns bringing with them that southerners had received Western education and ‘modern’ occupational skills to a higher degree than northerners, the skilled workers and their families were defined by the British as alien and, as such, were residentially segregated in the southern part of Jos: the Township. The Hausas, on the other hand, who had been living in this area, had already been relocated by 1915 to the
northern part of Jos. This northern part had previously been known as the ‘Hausa settlement’ and was now officially designated as the Native Town. Through the divide between the Native Town and the Township, the illiterate northerners in the Native Town were kept separate from the educated southerners in the Township (see Bingel 1978:6, 8; Plotnicov 1969:41f., 50; Zangabadt 1983:2).

It was not until 1974, with the creation of the Jos Metropolitan Development Board (JMDB), that the administrative divide between a Township and a Native Town was formally dissolved (Fantur 2006:ii; JMDB 2005:4). Many have argued that the separation of different groups in Jos, which the British introduced in order to maintain the peace, instead came to form the basis for the recurring violence there. It enforced ethnic and religious animosities between southerners and northerners (Isichei 1982:267f.; Plotnicov 1969:269; Zangabadt 1983:1f.).

In 1945, the growing tensions came to manifest themselves in the first large riot in Jos. Hausas and Igbos fought each other for two days and at least two people were killed, many were injured, and a great deal of property was damaged. The Igbos, who arrived in Jos from the South during the Second World War, settled mostly in Sarkin Arab, a ward in the Native Town, to such a degree that it was occasionally referred to as the ‘Ibo Quarter’ at the time. As the Native Town had originally been a Hausa settlement, friction now arose between these two groups. Sarkin Arab also came to be the area where the greatest damage to houses could be seen after the 1945 riot, which started at the market near the railway station separating the Native Town from the Township (Plotnicov 1971:298-302).

After the riots of 1945, Igbos tried to protect themselves, and as a result many of them moved from the Native Town to the Township, a pattern that would intensify even more in 1953 as a reaction after the riots against Igbos in Kano, a city further north. From 1953 to 1959, the number of southerners living in the Township increased from around 6,000 to 13,000 (Bingel 1978:9, 11; Plotnicov 1971:305). With this growth, the Township area was extended and new plots were allocated. Of 200 plots that were allocated during 1956, 110 were given to Igbos (Bingel 1978:11f.).

During this time, many southerners living in other northern townships gravitated towards Jos, where they felt relatively safe (Bingel 1978:11).

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6 It should be noted that the British administration’s wish to keep groups perceived as natives and non-natives spatially segregated is nothing unique to Jos, but a pattern that appeared in cities all over Nigeria (Fourchard 2009).
Viewed as ‘the most cosmopolitan city of the Muslim North’, as one depiction had it, Jos became ‘a safe haven for Christians in the North’ (Taylor 1993:33). But this was not to last. In 1966 the ‘massacre’ of Igbos took place. According to Plotnicov, this was by far the worst and most tragic of all the occurrences in Jos (1972:4). He wrote: ‘Probably there will never be an accurate count of the number of people killed then; but in Jos the count was large enough to require the excavation of mass graves with bulldozers provided by local tin mining companies’ (ibid.:12). A conservative estimate put the number of people killed in Jos and Bukuru, a town thirteen kilometres south-west of Jos, at 1,500 (Anthony 2002:103). Others described how Igbo families were butchered at the Bukuru railway station (Steed 1991:19).

It all started with a military coup in January 1966 – six years after independence in 1960. The coup was considered mostly to benefit Igbos, and rumours about a planned all-Igbo rule of Nigeria circulated. In July a countercoup issued from northern Nigeria and after this coup, anti-Igbo violence escalated in cities all over the northern region. Jos and Bukuru were no exceptions to this (Anthony 2002:56-80, 86-113, 249; Plotnicov 1972:5, 10; Steed 1991:19). The violence would eventually push Nigeria into a civil war. The Republic of Biafra in the south-east, where most of Nigeria’s Igbo population lived, declared itself an independent state in May 1967. The Nigerian Civil War, or the Biafran War, between Biafra and Nigeria, started in July 1967 and lasted until January 1970, when the Republic of Biafra ceased to exist.

The main target of mob violence in Jos and elsewhere in the North at the time was the Igbos. They received the same treatment from their fellow Christians as from Muslims. Plotnicov emphasised that the people who rioted against Igbos in the North were always the locals. Thus in Hausa areas the aggressors were Hausas, and in other areas, such as Jos, they were Beroms and Hausas. In the case of Jos, the British administration’s basic idea had been that the town should be ruled by the ‘proper natives’, but since the absence of the perceived local groups was so marked until after the Second World War, the British had turned instead to the Hausas (Plotnicov 1972:4f., 7). In the Native Town, from 1914 to 1952, Hausas came to hold the most important administrative posts. Thereafter, however, the British administration started to transfer this power to the perceived ‘proper natives’, especially the Beroms (Plotnicov 1969:47f.; 1972:7; see also Adetula 2005:227; Higazi 2007:76). Although the Beroms had started to gain political control over Jos at the time of the Igbo pogroms, they still shared the power with the Hausas, with whom they had reached some mutual accommodations. One of the results of this
relationship was that Hausas and Beroms joined forces and attacked the Igbos in Jos in 1966 (Plotnicov 1972:9).

With the 1966 violence spreading over northern Nigeria and with the ensuing war, people started to relocate. At the beginning of October, after the attacks began in Jos, surviving Igbos tried to leave the town by airplane, train, road, and on foot (Anthony 2002:249). The period between 1966 and 1969 was marked by a decrease in both population and business. According to accounts, over 4,000 southerners, mainly Igbos – of a city population of about 100,000 – left the town (Bingel 1978:16). By mid-1971, it was estimated, 3,000 Igbos had returned to Jos (Anthony 2002:178), but for many of them, this return was not unproblematic. Many buildings in the Native Town that belonged to Igbos had been destroyed or were now illegally occupied (Bingel 1978:16). Of 1,446 houses abandoned by Igbos in 1966, only 74 had been returned to their owners by 1970 (West Africa 1970:658).

Places changed; many of the Igbos who had returned to Kano after the civil war left Kano for good after a dispute between Christians and Muslims in the city in 1991. A few relocated to Jos and other places in the more religiously mixed Middle Belt of Nigeria (Anthony 2002:10). Before the crisis in 2001, Jos was the fastest growing city in Nigeria, according to the National Electric Power Authority. Umar Danfulani and Sati Fwatshak, two scholars at the University of Jos, connected this increase to people once again seeking refuge in Jos from conflicts in the North (2002:244; see also Adetula 2005:229, 231; Harnischfeger 2008:129; HRW 2001:5).

At the same time that Jos was regarded a safe haven by some, tension was rising between perceived settlers (mainly Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba), who held the economic power, and perceived indigenes (Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere), who had the political control. In an article written just before the crisis of 2001, Simon Davou Mwadkwon of the University of Jos argued that the conflicts between these two groups had been the breeding ground for religious, ethnic, and political tension in the city for quite some time (2001:58f., 64). In a tone of surprise he noted: ‘Despite heightened tension, overt violence did not occur until April 12th, 1994’ (ibid.:67), when it was ignited by a fight over appointments of political positions in Jos North Local Government.

Plateau State is currently divided into seventeen different local governments, with Jos and surrounding areas divided into Jos North, South,

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7 For a detailed description of the economic domains in which the perceived settlers dominated, see Egwu (2004:221-236).
and East Local Governments. Jos North contains both the most populous areas and the most active business districts in the city. Thus it is an area that is of great importance to control (see Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:247; Higazi 2007:79; HRW 2001:5). As it is also the area of the city that counts the largest community of Hausa-Fulani (Adetula 2005:231), the division of Jos into Jos North and Jos South in 1991 was seen as favouring the Muslims. Their percentage of the population came to be much higher in Jos North than it had been in the preceding Jos Local Government Area (Higazi 2007:80). In his thesis, which used Jos as a case study, Samuel Gabriel Egwu concluded: ‘The “indigenous” ethnic groups perceived it as a ploy by the “settler” Hausa who, it was believed, had used their “connections” to carve out Jos North as an exclusive sphere of influence’ (Egwu 2004:11, see also 204-210).

In 1991, a Muslim became the first chairman of Jos North. Then, in 1994, another Muslim (once again belonging to an ethnic group perceived as settlers) was appointed to the post (Adetula 2005:227; Higazi 2007:80). Among the indigenes this was interpreted as a claim that Jos belonged to the settlers and that they wanted to turn it into an ‘Islamic centre’. On April 5, indigenes marched through Jos singing war songs, and besieged the scene of the swearing-in ceremony. As a result, the government stopped the newly appointed chairman from taking office. The Muslim community of Jos responded by organizing protests that eventually led to violence that resulted in loss of lives and a Jos on fire (Mwadkwon 2001:59, 67f.; see also Adetula 2005:227-228; Egwu 2004:10f., 244-251, 275; Higazi 2007:80). The violence of 1994 was later followed by new tensions after appointments in both 1996 and 1998 (HRW 2001:5).

The concept of indigeneity has been formally recognised by the Nigerian constitution since 1979 (Adebanwi 2009:254). A person is regarded as an indigene in the state from which his or her ethnic group is perceived to originate. At the same time that the present constitution, which dates from 1999, grants freedom from discrimination based on ethnicity and place of origin, it also states that the government should reflect the federal character of the country – official positions should be allocated according to the composition of the Nigerian nation’s population. The constitution

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8 The Nigerian federation has seen a long process by which more and smaller states have been created as ethnic minority and majority groups have sought political autonomy and access to resources and positions (Suberu 2001:81). In 1963 the then newly independent country went from a three-region to a four-region system. In 1967 this system was replaced by a division of the nation into twelve states; in 1976 they became nineteen, in 1987 twenty-one, in 1991 thirty, and in 1996 thirty-six (Ibrahim 2000:50; Suberu 2001:15).
says nothing about who is an indigene in a state, but the concept has been used in specific states to privilege certain groups over others (Adebanwi 2009:352ff.; Manby 2004:177f.). These privileges include such things as access to state schools, lower school fees, scholarships, government employment, and political positions (see Global IDP Project 2003:3f.; Higazi 2007:72; HRW 2005:8; Manby 2004:178; Suberu 2001:6, 109).

The distinction between ‘indigene’ and ‘non-indigene’ goes back to the British administration’s distinction between ‘natives’ and ‘strangers’ (Bach 1997:338). Although it has its own unique expression in Nigeria, the turning of ‘yesterday’s natives into postcolonial settlers and postcolonial natives’ is part of a pattern that reappears across Africa (Mamdani 2001:660). Democratisation processes have many times brought with them a renewed stress on ‘autochthony’ and ‘belonging’ (Geschiere & Gugler 1998:313; see also Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000). Since the return to democracy, it has become increasingly difficult for non-indigenes to attain political positions in Plateau State, while indigenes have been favoured (Higazi 2007:90; see also Ostien 2009:17). For many, it is almost inconceivable that someone other than a perceived indigene and Christian could become the governor of Plateau State or attain any other high democratically elected position. As important positions in both Plateau State and local governments have gravitated towards becoming dominated by Christian indigenes, this has brought with it experiences of marginalisation and feelings of bitterness (HRW 2005:7). Jos North has become ‘the hottest spot’ for these conflicts (Adetula 2005:231).

With the return to democracy, election campaigns have become interwoven with ethnic and religious conflicts – worsening already-present tensions (Reno 2004:219). The Jos crisis of 2001 has been seen as one of many expressions of this (see Adetula 2005:229; Manby 2004:181; Reno 2004:232). Like the most recent previous conflicts, it was connected to controversy over a political appointment in Jos North. In August 2001, before the crisis erupted in September, Mukhtar Muhammad – perceived as a Muslim settler – was appointed by the federal government as the poverty eradication coordinator in Jos North. His appointment was strongly opposed by groups of Christian indigenes (see Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:248; Egwu 2004; Je’adayibe 2008:166f.; Wulfhorst & Musa 2007:48), and a ‘war of words’ was launched (Adetula 2005:228).

Muhammad received several death threats from indigenes who demanded that he vacate his position (Bawa & Nwogwu 2002:111). As the tension in Jos continued to rise, the protests from the indigenes were
responded to and leaflets started to circulate under the name of Hausa-Fulani Youths, stating things like:

‘Yes, the loss of a few families wouldn’t bother us. After all for every single Anaguta’s [indigene] life and their allies; there are thousands of other Hausa-Fulanis. Let’s see who blinks first. ‘Death is the best friend of Hamas. Be rest assured that we will do it even better’. ‘The seat is dearer to us than our lives. In that case, do you have the monopoly of violence?’ ‘Blood for blood. We are ready’. (HRW 2001:5f.)

In a press conference that took place on 31 August, the (Christian) Plateau State Youth Council stated:

The constitution of Nigeria allows ‘any’ citizen of the country to live in any place of his/her choice, therefore any person or group of persons is/are welcome to stay in Plateau State. Equally the constitution recognizes the rights of the indigenes place as the owners of that given place. Funny and insulting that a Hausa/Fulani man from Bauchi, Kano, Katsina etc who is looking for pasture and trade ‘settled’ in Jos among the indigenes of Afizere, Anaguta and Berom only to wake up one day to lay claim to a place leased to them for peaceful co-existence. (HRW 2001:6)

In May 2002, violence between Christian indigenes and Muslim settlers once again broke out in Jos North in connection with the local primaries of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Over one hundred people at least were estimated to have been killed (HRW 2003:23f.). To the frustration of Muslim leaders, no local government elections were held in Jos North in 2003. The governor of Plateau State, Joshua Dariye, who was a Christian indigene, instead appointed an allied Christian indigene as administrator of the area (Higazi 2007:85; see also Ostien 2009:27). In 2004, certain groups in Jos argued for changing the electoral districts of Jos North to prevent the inhabitants from electing leaders in the future whom they saw as Muslim settlers. As a testimony to the atmosphere in Jos at the time, Dariye, in an interview less than two months before a state of emergency was declared in 2004, proclaimed:

From the on-set, let me say it again, as I have before that Jos, capital of Plateau State, is owned by the natives. Simple. Every Hausa-man in Jos is a settler whether he likes it or not. In the past, we might not have told them the home truth, but now we have… They are here with us, we are in one state but that does not change the landlord/settler equation, no matter how much we cherish peace… Our problem here today is that… the tenant [is] becoming very unruly. But the natural law here is simple: if your tenant is unruly, you serve him a quit notice! … This unruly group must know that
we are no longer willing to tolerate the rubbish they give us. The days of ‘over tolerance’ are gone forever. All of us must accept this home truth. (HRW 2006:45)

The tensions between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State reached a peak with the violence in Yelwa and Shendam in the southern part of the state in February through May 2004, during which hundreds of people were killed (see Higazi 2008:118; HRW 2005:1, 10). Olusegun Obasanjo, who had been elected president of Nigeria in May 1999 at the same time Dariye became governor of Plateau State, claimed that the situation was ‘near mutual-genocide’ (Obasanjo 2004). On 18 May he declared Plateau State in a state of emergency. Dariye and his deputy were suspended for six months, and retired General Chris Ali was appointed administrator of Plateau State.

In 2008, after governors having appointed a series of different indigens (mostly Beroms) as chairmen of Jos North Local Government, it was finally time for local government elections. While the Christian indigens largely supported the PDP, the perceived Muslim settlers chiefly backed the All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP). A description from one of the inhabitants of Jos stated:

The pastors were preaching in the churches that everyone should go out to vote, that they must not vote for any Muslim, the Muslims are infidels and we must not have them ruling over us. They want to Islamise the place. Don’t vote for any unbeliever. We have voted for them before, they have disappointed us. Everybody should pray, get out to vote. (Ostien 2009:30)

From the Muslim side, similar, yet opposite, calls could be heard. ‘Some Muslim preachers were saying: if you are in PDP or vote for PDP you are a pagan. Some would say: if you vote PDP who is not a Muslim you are a pagan’ (Ostien 2009:30).

As results of the ballot counting started to reach people on the streets, violence once again broke out in Jos. There was no consensus on why the trouble started or how, but it was connected to perceived ballot rigging and who was perceived to be winning. Later, as the violence spread, it was announced that PDP candidates had won chairmanships in all of the state’s seventeen local governments, including Jos North (see HRW 2008; 2009:7f.; Ostien 2009:31ff.).

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9 Dariye was criticised for this statement and later issued a statement saying that the reporters present had misquoted him (Murray 2007).
‘Competing claim over urban space and the claim to be indigenous of a locality are today again, as in the colonial past, strictly connected’ (Fourchard 2009:214). The Jos crisis of 2001, as well as the violence that followed in its wake, was connected to preceding events. Even if at certain periods people had sought refuge in Jos from turmoil in other parts of Nigeria, hostility between different groups was nothing new there. The separation of different ethnic and religious groups, the divide between the North and the South of Nigeria, and the divide between a north and south of Jos – as well as the violence and fear connected to these divisions – had been manifesting their presence since the very founding of Jos at the beginning of the twentieth century. But despite these patterns, this was not the history that was narrated or invoked in Jos.

An Absence of Peace

With the violent aspect of Jos’s past not spoken of, and the inability of the peace narrative to make sense of the changes, the only fixed point to refer to was the crisis itself. It became its own reason; nothing outside it could serve to explain how it had come about. The crisis in 2001 was experienced as a rupture without previous warning. People’s shock was underlined in depictions such as ‘Violence suddenly erupted between Christians and Muslims in a city where diverse communities had coexisted peacefully for years’ (HRW 2001:2). ‘The case of violence in Plateau State came as a surprise to most Nigerians since it has traditionally been known as a peaceful area’ (Doyle 2004). The crisis did not make any sense; it was reduced to being a singularity outside any logic.

Emanuel’s mother and father moved to Jos from the south of Nigeria back in the 1920s. Their move was connected to Emanuel’s father’s work as an interpreter in the local court. They settled down and built a house in Jos, and all their children were born there. In 1966 – the year before the civil war started in Nigeria – Emanuel was supposed to start secondary school. But the plans changed because his parents no longer felt it was safe to stay in Jos. As a result, Emanuel spent almost three years without any schooling. Still annoyed, he told me how his classmates had gone far ahead of him by the time he and his family returned to Jos in 1970; while his friends were finishing secondary school, he was still in form one. The forced relocation had strained the family’s economy, and there had been no funds to support further academic studies, and Emanuel described with disappointment in his voice how, with his certificate in his hand, he
had left secondary school with no other option than continuing with the herbal work he had inherited from his mother.

When I met Emanuel, he was married and had five children who were all living with him in Jos and were going either to school or to the university. He had been practicing medicine for twenty-three years and referred to himself as a Chief Doctor, and he saw himself as the leader of all the Igbo practitioners in Plateau State. What occupied Emanuel’s mind in 2004, even if he still lived the losses that the violence in the 1960s had brought him, was the difference between before and after the crisis in 2001. He emphasised the discrepancy between the peace that had reigned before and the state that Jos was left in now.

Under Ibrahim, the former chairman, Emanuel had been the Igbo chairman of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners (NUMHP), Plateau State Branch. However, with the two new factions emerging on the scene after the crisis and different elections taking place, things were no longer so clear. Annoyed at the ‘illegal election’ that had been carried out by the ‘Hausa faction’, Emanuel tried to sort out when an election in the union was supposed to take place. As the last election had been in November 1999, and as one was meant to be held every fourth year, he concluded that there should have been one in November 2003. But because the crisis had affected so many things it was not yet possible to have an election. The former Hausa chairman had barely escaped death, for instance, and too many others had also left town. Referring to the ‘illegal election’, Emanuel concluded that they had to make sure there was ‘peace in the house’ before they could start to elect people.

He went on to describe how the union, compared to now, had previously been a place without discrimination and conflicts. They had met regularly at the university and had different workshops. People from the Hausa group, the Igbo group, the Yoruba group, and the indigene group had all taken part, but now no one came. The union was no longer organised. What Emanuel described was the difference between before and after the crisis. For him it was the crisis that had shattered the peace and introduced all these factions and the lack of trust and peace.
For him, as for many others in Jos, the crisis came to be understood in relation to its consequences rather than its causes. Instead of an interest in identifying what had brought about the crisis, there was much discussion about its effects. Jos became the kind of place where people made sense of events ‘not by constructing an explanation of what happened but by offering accounts of its impacts, traces, and signs’ (Stewart 1996:158).

For many of Jos’s inhabitants, things emerged as mere ‘coincidences’, and the expected order of things became disorder. Crisis became ‘a frame of action’ – a social fact, a point of departure for understanding the world (Vigh 2008:11f., 15). Henrik Vigh has argued for a move from focusing on crises as singular events that people cope through, to viewing them as pervasive contexts, an ongoing experience that people cope in. Rather than placing an event of ‘crisis in context’ it becomes a matter of seeing ‘crisis as context’ – seeing it as a condition, a state of affairs, a persistent circumstance of fragmentation (ibid.:8ff.).

For Emanuel, meetings, elections, and other events – or the lack of them – were made sense of in relation to a disorganised world, a world of lack. As crisis became context, the previous world of peace that had been taken for granted was thrown into doubt, which in turn brought forth feelings of loss (Vigh 2008:16). The peace messages of the local radio station, ‘Peace 90.5 FM stereo’, that were incessantly broadcast out over Jos echoed with feelings of a peace that was not there. Streets sprinkled with stores, clinics, and posters with ‘peace’ in their names, filled with cars with the state motto ‘Home of Peace and Tourism’ on their number plates and bumper stickers spelling out different peace messages, called to mind a peace that had disappeared. It was a city that was marked by something it was lacking. For people in Jos it was the current situation – the felt absence of peace and organisation – that needed to be dealt with, not the decades of recurring conflict that had marked the city’s past.
3. Competing Prayers

Idris’s shop consisted of one room, which was part of a row of connected shops. The store was quite small and his stock of second-hand mattresses filled nearly the whole space. Idris was a Muslim Fulani man in his sixties who had been born further north and was just passing through Jos to stay for a week in the 1960s but ended up settling down in the city. Besides his business in the centre of Jos, he also practiced traditional medicine. He described himself as a mallam, a person who works with the Koran when making medicines. Looking out from the doorway of his shop on this day in 2004, we could see not only Enugu Street, one of the busiest streets in Jos, but also the Friday Mosque, the town’s main mosque. Idris reflected that presently only Muslims were living here in the centre. He and three visiting friends all agreed that from Terminus – the roundabout in the centre of Jos – to Angwan Rogo, a ward in the northern part Jos, the inhabitants were predominantly Muslim. On the south side of Terminus, however, chiefly Christians resided.

With the crisis of 2001, many of the people I knew either moved away from Jos, like Ibrahim, the former chairman of the union, or within Jos, to areas where they felt safer. Idris was one of the latter. Before the crisis he had lived in Jenta Adamu, a mainly Christian area to the west of central Jos. During the crisis his house was destroyed and he moved to Angwan Rogo, where he rented part of a house. The new place was conveniently close to his business, but considerations of safety had been decisive. There were still some Christians who had their businesses here, but they would come during the day and leave before nightfall. As part of this trend, many Igbos in Jos who used to live where they had their business were choosing instead to live in areas where they were in the majority (Higazi 2007:84).

While Idris had moved to Angwan Rogo, other practitioners I knew had moved away from Angwan Rogo after the crisis; Isaac was one of these. He had been born in a village in southern Nigeria in the 1940s and moved to Jos in 1997. Newly arrived in the city, he settled in Angwan
The main mosque along Enugu Street.
Rogo. I found it a bit strange that he – a newly arrived Igbo and Christian – had ended up in a mainly Muslim area. Nevertheless, his business as a traditional medicine practitioner had been going well and he had many customers in the neighbourhood. But during the crisis, Isaac’s house was burnt down and he moved to the south-western outskirts of Jos, an area inhabited mostly by Christians. In 2004 he explained that he felt safer there but that business was not going well at all. When I returned to Jos in 2007, Isaac had left the city and moved his business elsewhere.

With the crisis of 2001 the Red Cross estimated that 60,000 people had been displaced (IRIN WA 2001). A week after the violence subsided, the number of displaced people had decreased and was estimated to be around 15,000 (Global IDP Project 2002:76). In its footsteps a new housing market emerged in which Christians and Muslims traded houses with each other to be able to live in safer areas. As Muslims who had lived in Christian-dominated areas moved to areas perceived as Muslim, and vice versa, the homogeneity of different areas was strengthened (see also Egwu 2004:32; Je’adayibe 2008:171). Just like the previous conflicts in the city, the crisis of 2001 did not create patterns of movement that challenged previous segregations of people but, rather, reinforced them.

‘The Taskscape Made Visible’

The landscape is ‘the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them’, wrote Ingold (1993:156). It is through engagement with the environment that the world becomes known to its inhabitants, but this engagement also structures the world; people’s dealings and journeys are part of the world’s becoming as a whole (ibid.:164). To refer to the entire ensemble of these movements and activities, Ingold used the concept of ‘taskscape’. The landscape and the taskscape emerge within the same current of activities. The landscape is the taskscape in embodied form: ‘a pattern of activities “collapsed” into an array of features’ (ibid.:162). ‘Just as the landscape is an array of related features, so – by analogy – the taskscape is an array of related activities’ (ibid.:158). The network of paths and tracks in the landscape is, in other words, ‘the taskscape made visible’ (ibid.:167).

Throughout the entire history of Jos different people have inhabited very different places and have had very different patterns of movement
within Jos. As a city, it has essentially been formed by who is – and who is not – living in a particular area or walking down a certain street. It is an urban landscape in which places have continually been shaped by the absence as much as the presence of certain activities, people, and buildings. It is the relationship between the taskscape and the landscape that I want to bring forth here – people’s patterns of movement: their daily activities and a landscape that with every new footstep emerged as increasingly contested.

Located on the Jos Plateau, stretched out in a north-south direction in the basin of the Delimi River, Jos has been, since its foundation in the beginning of the twentieth century, divided in two religiously, just like the Nigerian nation. As Jos was divided into the Native Town and the Township, there was a separation in Jos between a Muslim North and a Christian South. In 1952, over 84 per cent of the African population in the Township were Christian, in contrast to the Native Town where over 63 per cent of the population were Muslim (Plotnicov 1969:75f.). There are no reliable estimates regarding the current religious and ethnic composition of Jos, but the city is still in many ways characterised by a Muslim North and a Christian South, as the majority of the Muslim population of Jos resides in the northern side.

Already with the division between the Native Town and the Township a separation between different people was in place, and the settlement patterns of newcomers to Jos tended to reinforce these divisions – they favoured people and neighbourhoods they felt comfortable with (Plotnicov 1969:50). Additionally, the dividing line between the Native Town and the Township was enforced by different building codes and sanitary regulations. In the Township, for instance, the codes did not match the Muslim tradition of purdah, female seclusion. However, the separation was maintained not only through cultural factors but also through economic ones. Compared to the Christian southerners, the Muslim northerners generally had lower incomes that prevented them from residing in the Township, where building restrictions made it more expensive to build and where land was more costly (Plotnicov 1969:50; 1970:273; see also Bingel 1978:11).

In the Township, houses were made of concrete building blocks and the minimal standard for roofs was galvanised iron sheets, while the regulations in the Native Town were more relaxed and houses were built of mud bricks and thatched roofs (Plotnicov 1970:273). Sen Luka Gwom

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10 The last census to include religious and ethnic affiliation was in 1963 (Adepoju 1981:35; NPC 2007:206).
Zangabadt described how the Township, with its tarred roads, was reserved for ‘enlightened Africans’, while the Native Town resembled the run-down areas of apartheid South Africa (Zangabadt 1983:49). While reports in 1945 praised the Township for having houses that were solidly constructed, the Native Town did not receive the same praise; instead, complaints were directed at the congestion of its centre. Towards the end of the 1970s the differences in building standards still existed, and compared to the Native Town, the Township had a better city plan, with maintained roads that allowed comfortable access to its houses (Bingel 1978:8f.). Today, differences in housing styles, similar to those that once existed between the Native Town and the Township, can be found between richer and poorer areas of Jos. Compared to more wealthy and formally planned areas, the streets in poorer, non-planned areas such as Angwan Rogo are narrower and often unpaved; many are impassable for cars and are more like walking paths (see Obiefuna & Agbo 1999:197-200).

People's different movements and activities had left very visible traces in many different domains, but one of the areas in which they were highly noticeable was within the educational system in Jos. All over Nigeria educational institutions have functioned as principal sites for playing out religious identities and rights (Hackett 2003:47). Even if ethnicity – at least in the past – generally formed the grounds for more controversies in the nation, religious differences have always dominated when it comes to the educational system. Religious teachings in schools as well as religious control and ownership of schools have long been an area of conflict between Christians and Muslims. Over the years there have been a number of violent clashes over religious uses of spaces and symbols, such as the location of crosses, churches, mosques, and praying grounds and the use of religious school uniforms on university and college campuses in Nigeria (see Falola 2009:171f., 175-187; Hackett 1999).

The spread of Christianity and Western education went hand in hand and was part of forming a separation of people. On the national level, the relation between educational difference and religious affiliation was observed as far back as the 1930s. ‘Thus Christianity is generally accompanied by some measures of education, or, at least, of literacy. Muhammadianism can generally show a fair sprinkling of such literacy as the Koran schools provide, while “animism” generally goes with complete illiteracy’ (Perham 1933:425). The missionary presence in the southern part of Nigeria and its absence in the north was made very visible in the Nigerian
census of 1931, where the southern provinces were reported to have 2,786 Christian schools and no Muslim schools and the northern provinces had 236 Christian schools and 33,426 Muslim schools (ibid.:426).

Also in Jos, children attended different schools according to religious and ethnic belonging. As early as 1926 a government school had been established for the benefit of the children of educated Nigerians from the South and from other African countries; in addition, there were four mission schools. The total number of pupils in Jos at the time was 456, and of these, only 5 per cent were from the North of Nigeria (Ames 1972:314). Around the same time there were 84 Koranic schools with a total number of 476 students (Morrison 1975:458).

In 1962, almost 62 per cent of the students in the township school were Igbo and 15 per cent were Yoruba. In the native authority school, on the other hand, almost 51 per cent were Hausa and 29 per cent Fulani. No southerners attended the native authority school, and fewer than 8 per cent of the students in the township school were northerners. In addition to this divide, there was a clear separation according to the religious affiliation of schools. In the Islamiya post literacy school, for example, almost 80 per cent were Hausa or Fulani, and in the Roman Catholic school almost 82 per cent were Igbo (Plotnicov 1969:78f., 81).

The pre-primary and primary schools in Jos are still often based on both ethnicity and religion (Mwadkwon 2001:63; see also Adetula 2005), and their names contain religious markers (Egwu 2004:258; Zangabadt 1983:67f.). In travelling through the streets of Jos, one passed through a landscape dotted with schools that bore religious names and were dominated by children from certain religious backgrounds. This was a pattern that appeared to be steadily increasing.

Once in 2007, when we had spent a whole day walking through Jos, Jibril observed that there where schools everywhere and added that they were all either Christian or Muslim. The schools in Jos followed the same pattern as the churches and the mosques. Jibril explained that just the way you might find five churches and three mosques in one area and in another you might find five mosques and three churches, you would find Christian and Muslim schools. Jos was a landscape full of striking church buildings of many different denominations, as well as mosque buildings, marked-out praying grounds, and mosques built as part of private homes (Danfulani 1998:344f.). Jibril clearly did not find this a good thing. He saw the growing number of churches, mosques, and religious schools as manifestations of the tensions in Jos.
Almost immediately when you entered an area you would be able to decipher what religion was dominant. This dividing line was extremely obvious in some areas, such as Babale, a small village just outside Jos. The road coming out of Jos heading towards Bauchi divided the village in two, with Muslims living on one side of the road and Christians on the other. One day when we were passing from the Muslim side to the Christian side, Jibril commented that on the Christian side there were *burukutu* (traditional beer) places, money lending, beer parlours, and hotels that you would not find on the Muslim side. There you would instead find praying grounds. People’s different activities left very visible traces in different areas, traces that had increasingly acquired religious connotations.

Danfulani has suggested that in Jos there is a culture of ‘religious everything’:

> Everywhere, religion is seen either in the numerous numbers of religious monuments, churches and mosques, or in institutions such as schools and hospitals, vehicles, and the many properties that bear the names of religious organizations. This is exhibited on bill boards, over radio and television, and in the print media. (Danfulani 1998:344)

Not only schools, but also hospitals, clinics, financial institutions, and different forms of stores carried religious names. Jonathan, a Christian man in his forties who had lived most of his life in the Jos area, described one day in 2007 how there were religious signboards covering Jos with messages such as Blessed Bookshop, God’s Supermarket, Arabic Eye Clinic, and Our Saviour Eye Clinic. This had not always been the case, however: things had changed in Jos, he declared.

When he was younger, in the 1970s and the 1980s, there had been a lot of cultural activities and parties, but today these kinds of activities were seen as improper. People preferred to go to church, and all activities were organised by different churches. Jonathan connected the change and the appearance of all the religious signboards to a religious strife and awareness that had started in Jos during the 1980s but had really taken off during the 1990s. Jonathan supposed that there were currently more churches than bars in Jos. He compared it with Cameroon, where there were more bars than churches but where it was still more peaceful than Nigeria. In Jos, and in Nigeria as a whole, everyone was going to church or to the mosque, yet crime, armed robbery, and corruption were still getting worse.
Signboards and school uniforms as parts of an increasingly religious landscape.
The religious strife that Jonathan observed corresponded with national processes. With independence in the 1960s, ethnicity was clearly experienced as the most disruptive force, but since the late 1970s religion has become a competitor, dividing communities all over Nigeria (Falola 2009:2) – as well as the nation itself. As part of global religious processes that have been sensed all over Africa (Ahmed 2008:vii f.), there has been a steady growth of both Christian and Muslim revivalist groups in Nigeria (see Loimeier 1997; Marshall 2009:2; Obadare 2004b:178; Westerlund 1997). Simultaneously, religion has come to play a more central part in Nigerian society as a whole, and in its footsteps an increase in religious tension and division followed (see Abdu 2002:143, 162; Falola 2009:2f.; Hackett 2003:48, 51; Mu’azzam & Ibrahim 2000:63f.; Suberu 1997:401). Politicians started looking for supporters along religious lines. In mosques, churches, and other venues across Nigeria, there was a ‘violent verbal warfare’ that anticipated the religious riots that were to follow (Falola 2009:2, 175).11

Nowadays, there is a constant religious battle over Nigeria’s public space and an ongoing struggle for souls, attention, dominance, and access to state resources. The other has increasingly become demonised, and attitudes of intolerance and suspicion have come to dominate the relationship (see Hackett 2003:51, 62; Obadare 2006a:667ff., 674f.; Ojo 2007:175, 186); both sides ‘conjure the devil in the name of the other’ (Marshall 2009:230). As indicated by the increasing number of religious signboards, in post-military and democratic Nigeria religion has increasingly become an intertwined part of everyday life (Obadare 2004b:177).

Dressed Presence

Entering a taxi in Jos, you would often be able to tell if the car belonged to a Christian or a Muslim by looking at the rear view mirror. Hanging from it would commonly be either a Christian Rosary with a cross or Muslim prayer beads or an amulet with a Koranic verse. In addition, different vehicles were very often decorated with religious stickers (Danfulani 1998:344). Trucks were painted with religious symbols that showed the religious affiliation of the owner. In Jos, as Innocent Chiluwa observed in his study of vehicle stickers in southern Nigeria, religious stickers outnumbered all other forms. The stickers quite literally brought the

11 Starting at the beginning of the 1980s, Nigeria came to experience numerous religious crises (see Ali 2002:97; Falola 2009:3; Hackett 2003:51; Je’adayibe 2008:156; Mustapha 2002:171f.).
religious tension between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria to the surface. They were part of the struggle to propagate one religion above the other, as Chiluwa noted (2008:384f.). People’s movements in Jos had become clad in a very visible way with religious messages.

Sara, a Berom woman in her forties who has lived her whole life in the Jos area, once commented on the growing presence of religious markers in the way people dressed. She started by telling me that Berom girls used to wear garments of soft, braided grass; one part had covered the bottom and the other the front part. The men, on the other hand, had worn only a penis sleeve. This was what Berom had been wearing ‘traditionally’, up to the 1960s at least (see also Morrison 1975:417; Smedley 2004:19). Today, however, you would only see these kinds of clothes when people performed traditional dances. She added that Berom also used to wear very soft and fine facial markings made with very fine lines from the mouth towards the cheeks; now, almost no one would give these markings to their children.

Although Jos has always been characterised by a divide between Islam and Christianity, the surrounding countryside has had a different story. When missionaries arrived on the Jos Plateau at the beginning of the twentieth century, they reacted with horror at the nakedness of the ‘pagans’ and expressed deep disappointment over not succeeding with the mission of making them wear clothes, which were felt to be a sign of civilisation (Morrison 1975:386-390, 410, 417). When the ‘pagans’ started to settle down inside Jos at the beginning of the 1960s, they either adopted the Hausa way of life and converted to Islam or turned to Christianity and embraced the missionaries’ ideas regarding behaviour, home life, and styles of dress (Smedley 2004:19). Though perceived as almost entirely ‘pagan’ in the 1930s (Ames 1972:310), this was a group that today was seen as nearly totally Christian (and labelled ‘indigene’) – a fact clearly marked in their ways of dressing.

With respect to ‘tribe’, Sara went on to argue that in Nigeria today you could no longer tell by their clothes and face where somebody came from. I added that you could, however, tell if someone was from the South of Nigeria or from the North. She answered that this was true, but that what you could see by the way people dressed was whether they were Christians or Muslims. Sara said that the Muslim women would wear the veil and they would almost always wear \textit{wrappa}, the material that you tied around your waist, and she added that you would hardly ever see them wear trousers and a blouse, this in contrast to Christians. Similarly, Western clothes for men were connected to Christianity, while the robes of the
Above: taxi cars moving through Jos. One with an amulet with verses from the Koran hanging from the rear view mirror, and another with a cross on the windscreen. To the right: a stall in Jos selling Western second-hand clothes, and people moving through the city. Movements had become clad with religious markers.
Hausa type were associated mainly with Islam. These tendencies were in no way absolute, but they still formed how many of Jos’s inhabitants dressed and interpreted the appearance of other people.

In 1969 Plotnicov noted: ‘The Nigerians in Jos cannot conceive that one may be both black and detribalized. One is identified by name, facial scars, dress, physiognomy, etc., as belonging to a particular ethnic group’ (Plotnicov 1969:61). I would not say that ethnicity is of no importance today (see Adetula 2005:148-182; Egwu 2004), but other markers have become more important. Facial scars are seldom practiced anymore; I have seen very few children with facial scars. Names and ways of dressing more often indicated religious than ethnic affiliation. From a national perspective, anthropologist Murray Last alike has noted that 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 residency, today they are viewed in relation to religious belonging. The diagnostic tools are still the same, but ‘tribalism’ is out and ‘faith’ is in (Last 2007:606).

What defined areas in Jos was an absence just as much as a presence of certain stickers, signboards, buildings, people, and clothes. A BBC reporter who portrayed Jos as a city divided between Muslim and Christian areas, observed that when you entered a Muslim area you would see

women walk the streets with their heads covered in Islamic headscarves while the men wear long flowing gowns and the colourful, fez-shaped “Hula” hats typical of Muslims in northern Nigeria. But turn a corner and the atmosphere and clothes change straight away. Suddenly there are endless signs advertising different churches, while the men are wearing western-style suits and the women are keen to show off their elaborate hairstyles. (Winter 2003)

Just as traces of people’s activities are an essential part of the landscape, so, too, are people themselves. It is the presence of people that gives the city life. People’s bodies are as much a part of the streets as the buildings. An indispensable part of the experience of Jos was the presence and absence of different people.
Fused with a War on Terror

In the years that followed the crisis of 2001, Jos was portrayed, for example, as ‘religiously divided and ready to explode’ (IRIN 2007). The map of Jos has in many ways become a religious map indicating how many Muslims and Christians live in different areas and to whom the areas belong. Different areas received new informal names – New Jerusalem, Afghanistan, Jihad Zone, Saudi Arabia, and Seat of Laden – which not only indicated a religiously divided landscape but also spoke to larger religious contexts. The tensions that the global war on terror brought with it could also be felt in Jos.

The connection between global politics and Christian and Muslim relations in Nigeria was nothing new. There had been tensions connected to Nigeria’s relations with the Vatican, Israel, and Muslim nations (see Falola 2009:93-97, 174; Ibrahim 1997:442, 430; Mu’azzam & Ibrahim 2000:65; Ojo 2007:181f.; Suberu 1997:401; 2001:17). But with the September 11 attacks in the U.S. – just a few days after the outbreak of the Jos crisis – and the events that followed, the already existing gap between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria grew. Part of the enhanced animosities was connected to the opposing reactions of the two sides to the United States’ attacks on Afghanistan. As the United States was perceived as a Christian country, Christians in Nigeria agreed with its actions, while Muslims were opposed to them for the same reason (Bastian 2006:43f.; Obadare 2004b:188f.).

Pam, the Berom practitioner, speculated that the Hausas had been planning the crisis for years. This was not an uncommon idea at the time. Like him, many Christians in Jos connected the start of the crisis on 7 September to the 11 September attacks in the U.S. It was believed to be a part of a world jihad that for some reason had started too early in Jos. Others interpreted the increased violence in Jos on 12 September as part of jubilations at a felt triumph of Islam over the West (Danfulani & Fwatschak 2002:251; Harnischfeger 2004:445f.).

People made sense of the crisis in relation to international politics, but through this looking glass they also explored what it meant to be Christian or Muslim. On entering a house in Jos it was easy to tell from calendars and pictures on the walls whether the house belonged to a Christian or a Muslim (see also Danfulani 1998:344). In 2004 the homes of many Muslims were decorated with different Osama bin Laden posters. Similarly, in Kano just a few weeks after the attacks in the United States, ‘pro-Bin Laden posters and stickers were already plastered throughout the city, including on automobile bumpers and windows’ (Miles 2003:69; see also
A poster of Osama bin Laden hanging on the wall in the home of a Muslim practitioner in Jos.
An Osama Bin Laden perfume belonging to one of the practitioners of traditional medicine in Jos. Perfumes were commonly used to call and appease spirits.

No-go Areas

In 2000, after the full corpus of sharia had been implemented in several states in northern Nigeria, the homes of many Muslims in Jos were decorated with sharia posters showing different behaviours that were illegal. Courts that handled civil matters according to sharia already existed in Jos, but some Muslims argued that the full corpus of sharia law should be applied as well. Hence, some areas were renamed Sharia Line

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12 Before 2000, sharia law had jurisdiction only over personal status and civil law, but in January 2000, after the turn to civil rule in 1999, Zamfara State in the far north of Nigeria was the first of twelve northern states to enforce the full corpus of sharia law, which meant extending the application of sharia criminal law to criminal cases as well. The states that followed Zamfara were Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, and Yobe (see HRW 2004:1, 13ff.; Kalu 2003:391ff.; Nmehielle 2004:731ff.; Peters 2003).
A house in Angwan Rogo with the inscription ‘Sharia line’.

A Christian principal that had used to live in Angwan Rogo explained:

Christians can’t live in Angwan Rogo now. I can’t go back to live there. All Christians have vacated. In Angwan Rogo there is a place where ‘Sharia line’ has been written on the tar on the road. It was written during the crisis. When we hear the government saying it’s safe and we can go back, we just laugh. (HRW 2001:13)

‘We make time and place, just as we are made by them’, Barbara Bender noted (2001:4). People’s activities were an intrinsic part of the landscape’s becoming as a whole, but it also formed these activities. In other words, what is done with the landscape ‘affects what can be done’ (Bender 2002:104). The landscape acts back. If the spatial order is an ensemble of possibilities and interdictions – different ways in which different people can or cannot move (de Certeau 1988:98) – Jos’s inhabitants became
increasingly aware of them with the crisis in 2001. In people’s talk about Jos as a place there was a new attentiveness to how they were able or not able to move – how the environment moved them (see Vigh 2008:18).

Emanuel – the Igbo practitioner who had been born and brought up in Jos – described how, with the crisis, Jos had become divided into what he called a ‘Hausa zone’ and a ‘main zone’. The place where he had gone to collect roots and herbs before the crisis was now located in the ‘Hausa zone’. With the crisis he had become an enemy in this zone and could no longer enter it and collect material as he used to. He said he was afraid that they would lynch him but that it was likewise for the others; they would not dare to go into his zone to collect, either. Today, the only way to gather the herbs one needed was to have a good friend from the other side who could help you get them, he concluded.

Jonathan explained similarly that while there had been a line before, that line had become thicker after the crisis and places had become ‘no-go areas’. Christians and Muslims no longer crossed the lines; Muslims would not enter Christian areas and Christians would not enter Muslim areas. Even though the idea of a place is always constituted in relation to other places – ‘an idea of difference’ (Hetherington 1997:197) – Jos was a city in which places were increasingly forced to be made sense of in direct opposition to each other. This was a process that changed not only the meaning of these places but also the activities that took place there.

Angwan Rogo and the grounds of the University of Jos are two places in the city where this process could be observed most clearly. They are both located in the northern part of Jos and are separated only by the wall that surrounds the university. This national university had been placed in Jos in 1974 (Taylor 1993:36); at the time, it had been quite isolated on the outskirts of Jos, but over the years neighbouring buildings in the now very densely populated Angwan Rogo had been getting closer and closer. People had already started moving into the area in the 1970s, but it was not until the 1980s that it really started to grow (Je’adayibe 2008:166). Now, houses are built all the way up to the university wall.

During the crisis, Angwan Rogo became the scene of some of the worst violence against Christians, and from there, violence spread into the university. It was estimated that at least twenty-six students and seven of the university staff had been killed as the university gates became one of the ‘fiercest battlegrounds’ of the crisis (HRW 2001:13, 15f.). In the wall that surrounded the university there were 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 remained so through all my subsequent periods of fieldwork. The religious borders had become very clear. On one side of the university wall was the ‘Muslim ghetto’ and on the other was the Christian university compound (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:249f.; see also HRW 2001:15).

As places changed, so, too, did the activities that were performed there. The university had around 14,000 students (Plateau State Government 2004d), and many of them used to rent rooms in Angwan Rogo. Before the crisis, hundreds of university staff and students lived there (Adetula 2005:232), but with the crisis Christian students and staff moved away. The university imam used to welcome Muslims from the town to participate in the Friday prayers at the main university mosque even if they did not belong to the university. But after the crisis the university barred Muslims who were not affiliated with the university from taking part in these Friday prayers (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:249f.).

A telling instance of the religious segregation was how Mai Lafiya and Jibril – the two Muslim men who were both listed as ‘consultant herbalist doctors’ on the door to the union office at the university – had changed their patterns of movement. I would meet both of them regularly at their office during their consultation hours and their weekly union meetings. After I left Jos at the beginning of 2001 and up to the crisis in September, they would both visit my field supervisor at his university office after their weekly meetings. They had been very friendly, and sometimes they had even brought their wives. However, with the crisis they had stopped visiting him, and when I returned to Jos Mai Lafiya no longer entered the university grounds. The first time I met him after the crisis was two months into my fieldwork in 2003-2004 at a visit in his house in Angwan Rogo. When I arrived he was upset that I had not come to him first. I tried to explain that I had gone to the union office as a way of not excluding anyone. It was clear that I had been wrong. By going to the union office I had excluded a lot of people, including him, who no longer felt comfortable entering the university grounds.

Angwan Rogo and the university were not only placed in relation to each other but were also constituted in a context of the routes that connected or did not connect them. It was fundamental to the emergent landscape of no-go areas in Jos that possible paths which had connected different places no longer did so. Thus, the closed gates in the university wall not only called to mind how they had been one of the most violent battlegrounds during the crisis, but they also called to mind the paths between two places that had been closed. As a frontier, the university wall with its gates held a paradox. It was simultaneously the point of differentiation
and where the two places came together. The gates had the potential to open up communication as well as shut it down (de Certeau 1988:127f.). Routes that had once connected the different places had not only been part of people’s mobility, they had also been part of a communication or an opening between the two places that was now closed.

No-go Times

In connection to the pattern of no-go areas, a new pattern of no-go times emerged as well. For the same reason that specific places – in the case of no-go areas – were feared because of the presence of certain people, specific times – in the case of no-go times – were feared. Places that could be visited during a certain time would be avoided at other times because of this felt presence. Many people warned me to be extra careful on Fridays when I was moving through Jos. I was told to not leave the house in the morning until I knew what was going on in the city. Fridays and Sundays were no longer perceived as safe. For Christians, the mosque was a threatening place, especially on Fridays, where people went to talk and secretly make plans, and for Muslims the church and Sundays were similarly intimidating places and times.

An illustration of how intense these feelings were could be seen in the initial interpretations that surrounded the above-mentioned bank robbery on a Friday in 2007. According to my friends, the notion that ‘the Arabs were coming’ was connected to the fact that it was Friday and that the crisis of 2001 had started on a Friday. One of them added that he assumed the robbery had started after the Friday prayer, but that he actually did not know. Nevertheless, he surmised that the rationale behind the assumption that the Arabs were coming was that Muslims had been making plans during the Friday prayers. Leaving the mosque, they had been prepared for fighting.

How time, place, and people’s movement were fused together to form a landscape not only of no-go areas, but also of no-go times, was brought to the forefront during a walk I took through Angwan Rogo one Friday in 2004. Joshua and I had met at around twelve o’clock outside his work place at the university. Possible routes had changed, and instead of entering Angwan Rogo from the back gates in the university wall, we had to take a roundabout route and exited the university from the main gate in the front. When we entered Angwan Rogo from Bauchi Road – the main road that passed the university on its way into Jos from the north –
Joshua started to observe the surrounding environment. He made comments about houses and places. He talked about how houses that looked nicer, more in order, renovated, and bigger had used to belong to Christians. We passed a burnt-down building and he commented that it had been a hotel, adding that his house in Angwan Rogo had also been looted and burnt at the time of the crisis. Though he had not been at home at the time, his wife and children had, but they had been able to escape safely. He had subsequently moved to a more Christian area.

It was a bit past twelve, and the Friday prayer would soon be starting as we walked along the streets. Joshua commented that it was dangerous to walk in Angwan Rogo, and especially on a Friday. Since the declaration of a state of emergency two months earlier, the military presence in Jos had greatly increased. Especially on Fridays and Sundays, one could see convoys of soldiers on all sorts of military vehicles going through Jos with their sirens on, warning people to stay out of trouble. As we continued our walk, Joshua explained that it was to prevent Muslims from causing any more problems that they had all these soldiers patrolling the streets on Fridays. However, this was a calm day in Jos and we saw no soldiers in the course of the whole day. Joshua nonetheless still insisted that Angwan Rogo was a very dangerous place at this time.

Blocked Roads

When travelling in Nigeria, you constantly encountered roadblocks manned by uniformed personnel. These police checkpoints were notorious for their part in everyday corruption in Nigeria (Smith 2008:61). In addition, for at least a month around the election in 2007, the roads around Jos were scattered with military roadblocks guarded by soldiers looking for potential troublemakers. These were generally thought of as young, rough-looking men who would come in cars or trucks. In going from Jos to Bukuru, a trip of thirteen kilometres, you would pass at least two roadblocks stopping the traffic in both directions. They were made of rows of large stones that forced passing cars to slow down. One lane was open at a time, while the soldiers checked the cars and directed the traffic.

Besides these, a pattern of non-official street blockings also appeared. These could occur during joyous occasions such as the 2004 African Cup of Nations, which engaged a lot of football fans in Jos. When Nigeria won against Cameroon, people took to the streets in celebration. Some started burning tires and stopping cars to collect money. However, people also blocked streets during distressing situations. One of these occasions
occurred in December of 2000. Together with the son of the family I was staying with, I was heading towards the university. Coming from the south, we were walking along the Bauchi Road. Some 500 metres from the university we saw lorries lined up along the roadside. The last part of the road up to the university was totally empty, since it was blocked off by the authorities. However, it was another roadblock that had forced the authorities to intervene. Outside the university, students had gathered among burning tires in reaction to an accident the evening before in which a law student had been hit by a bus. The student had been on a motorcycle taxi and both he and the driver had been killed. The students were now demanding that the bus company compensate the student’s family.

Much more regular and pronounced, however, was a pattern of religious blockings of streets. Public praying was a common sight in Jos during the Sunday service and the Friday prayer respectively; both churches and mosques have had a part in blocking and obstructing the traffic on some of the busiest streets in Jos. Muslims spread out their praying mats and parked their cars in the open street outside the mosques, while Christians similarly blocked the streets outside churches by using them as parking lots as well as by moving Sunday evening rallies out into the open street. The blocking of streets has usually been enforced and supervised by members of the Muslim Aid Group and members of the Boys Brigade respectively, together with the Nigeria Police Force (Danfulani 1998:345f.).

There was something very potent in moving the prayers and services out into the streets. The practice was seen as an attempt by Christians and Muslims to intimidate each other (Mwadkwon 2001:60), or as a demonstration that their own religion was the only one acceptable to God and proving to their counterparts that Fridays and Sundays respectively were great days (Danfulani 1998:345f.). Like many other activities in Jos, the street blockings were experienced as attempts to conquer or claim the city. By taking the prayers and the services out into the street, the worshippers made their presence highly visible, and during the time they occupied the street, it was theirs, if only briefly.

Not surprisingly, the blocking of streets on Fridays and Sundays created a lot of frustration. In the months leading up to the crisis in 2001, it was the subject of a debate in the local newspapers. Why this practice had appeared and whether it should be allowed were both questioned (Wulfhorst & Musa 2007:47). One of these much debated obstructions was the spark that ignited the crisis. Squeezed in between two houses in the
mainly Christian Congo Russia, an area in the north-eastern part of Jos, was a relatively small mosque. This was the place where the crisis started.

The mosque was surrounded by heated feelings and conflicting narratives. According to Jibril, the trouble had started when a very scantily dressed girl had wanted to pass during the Friday prayer. The street outside the mosque had been blocked to passing traffic and was full of people praying. There had been guards at both ends of the blocked street, and Jibril recounted that they told the girl that she had to wait to pass until the prayer had finished. The girl had then left, only to return with her relatives, who were armed with bows and arrows. It was then that the first four Muslims had died outside the mosque, Jibril declared.

Jibril’s account of what happened at the mosque was different from Pam’s version. Pam not only lived and practiced medicine just around the corner from the mosque, but he claimed to have been the first doctor to treat people with bullet and cut wounds outside the mosque. In Pam’s portrayal, the Muslims had thrown the first stone, not the Christians. The whole thing had started when a Christian woman had wanted to pass by the mosque on her way back from her lunch break. They – as Pam referred to them – were still praying in the street outside the mosque, and someone had stopped the woman and hit her. The woman had then gone home to her father, who returned with her. They had then hit her father as well. The Hausas – as Pam then referred to them – had then come out with guns and started to shoot.\(^{13}\)

The divergences in the stories about how the crisis started were essentially about who was trying to obstruct whom, and finally it came down to who was trying to kill whom: the final prevention of movement. With the crisis, a new pattern of religious roadblocks appeared all over Jos where people were targeted according to their religious belonging. In Muslim areas Christians were targeted, and vice versa (HRW 2001:9). Hassan, a young Muslim Fulani man, once described how he had been beaten at one of the roadblocks set up during the crisis. His family was living in an area inhabited mainly by Christians, and on the initial Friday all the women and children in his house had left Jos and he had spent the night on his own. When people came to the area the next day asking if there were any Muslims left, he had no longer felt safe and left as well.

He had started walking out of Jos. On his way he was stopped by some older Christian youths who recognised him, but they let him pass

The mosque in Congo Russia in front of which the crisis started. It was damaged during the riots and remained closed and unrepaired during my subsequent fieldwork periods.

even though they knew he was Muslim. Continuing on his way out of Jos, he bumped into some younger Christian men who also recognised him, and they started beating him. After some time, the first group of older Christian youths arrived at the scene of the beating. They stopped the younger boys, but Hassan’s leg had been so badly beaten that they had to carry him to a military post, and from there he had succeeded in getting a ride out of Jos.

Hassan explained that Christians who put up these roadblocks during the crisis had beaten, burnt, and robbed Muslims who passed by. They had forced people who passed to recite passages from the Bible and to say the Lord’s Prayer. This they had done to be able to identify people who were not Christians. Hassan reflected that not all Christians knew these things, either. Demanding the recital of either Christian or Islamic prayers was the most common method to discern what faith a person belonged to, but people were also judged according to their clothes. Higazi, making a point similar to Hassan’s, drew attention to the fact that judging people by the clothes they were wearing could be an unreliable method, since it
was not unusual for Christian men to wear kaftans and for Muslim men to wear Western clothes (Higazi 2007:82f.), and a similar pattern appeared for women.

The roadblocks during the crisis had left their mark. Towards the end of February 2004, when tensions once again were running high in Plateau State, Hassan told me that he was not going to the wedding of one of his Christian friends because the area was close to Shendam, where violence was steadily increasing. His friend had told him that there was no trouble in the area, but Hassan did not want to take any risks. Even if no one could see that he was Muslim from the way he dressed, all it took to make the situation dangerous was for one person to recognise him or know one of his brothers, sisters, or parents. He declared that as a Muslim he did not intend to go there, and he did not plan to end up in another crisis again.

The force that lay in moving the prayers and the services out into the street was not limited to the transient moments when people moved out and blocked the streets. When people dispersed after the prayer or the service and traffic once again could pass, the street did not return to what it was before the blocking. The worshippers had demonstrated their power over the place and had thus left a mark on it. In other words: ‘Space is transformed through performance, but the post-performance space retains the characteristics of the transformation’ (Mitchell 2006:394). As in Hassan’s account, roadblocks shaped people’s actions long after they had been removed. They became an integral part of the emergent landscape.

The Sound of Prayers

In 2007 I was staying at the Old Airport Junction, which was located towards the outskirts of Jos along the main road to the south. The junction was a taxi hub; you could find direct taxis to Abuja, Bukuru, and a lot of different end points inside Jos. Normally, I would wake up to the sound of cars passing outside on the street and taxi cars and busses sounding their horns in their specific way when looking for passengers. However, on the morning of Saturday, 14 April, I woke up hearing the sound of the wind in the trees. It soon became apparent that there was absolutely no sound coming from the road; no cars were running and no taxi drivers were sounding their horns. It was Election Day for the local governments and the office of governor.
The experiences of flows or blocked flows in Jos were often connected to the presence and absence of sound. According to some churches, they blocked the passing traffic during services because the sound of its movement invaded the church and disturbed them. By blocking the movement, they also blocked the sound from entering the church (Danfulani 1998:346; Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:253). After the crisis in 2001, many people explained that when the crisis started they knew that something was wrong, because it was so quiet.

Ingold noted that the taskscape appears to us in an auditory form rather than in a visual form: ‘The landscape seems to be what we see around us, whereas the taskscape is what we hear’ (1993:162). Many times, people’s movements and activities become known to us from the sound of footsteps rather than from visually observing them. We hear much that we do not see. An activity can be visually hidden in a way that its sound cannot (Feld 2005:186).

That people’s activities were heard rather than seen brings light to why people often add sound not only to emphasise their own actions but to make people act according to their wishes. At the churches and the mosques, people’s activities and wishes were enhanced by the sound from the loudspeakers. On the roads and streets, the car drivers were frenetically sounding their horns to make other people give way to them, and the taxi drivers were sounding theirs to make passengers get into their taxis. During the state of emergency, convoys of military vehicles were going through Jos with their sirens on to warn and make sure that people stayed out of trouble. Likewise, when important government people travelled through Jos, they did it in company and with sound. They, too, came in long convoys of cars and with sirens on. You saw them very well, but you heard them even better. When they came, other cars pulled over. If it was someone really important, such as the president, whole roads would be blocked off and the traffic would stand still, sometimes for several hours. During the 2007 elections, cars kept moving up and down the streets during all hours of the day with their sides covered with campaign posters and their roofs decorated with loudspeakers, singing the praises of different politicians. In a similar vein, many practitioners of traditional medicine had loudspeakers on their cars broadcasting advertisements for their medicines and powers as they moved through Jos. As soon as you entered the centre of Jos you would find small medicine stalls or carts with loudspeakers attached to them. The sellers, competing over the soundscape in the market, all broadcast the power of their medicine as loudly as possible.
Above: one of many loudspeakers belonging to a religious site. To the right: loudspeakers attached to one of many vehicles that were moving through Jos proclaiming religious messages, and a vendor of traditional medicine standing next to the central market in Jos. By boasting of the effectiveness of his medicine through the loudspeaker, he was attempting to attract customers.
As Dell Upton has noted, the omnidirectionality of sound not only places people in the midst of action, but it creates a connection or ‘communal bond’ between the makers and hearers of sound that is not necessarily appreciated by everyone (2007:32f.). Since people’s wishes could travel even further by means of loudspeakers and cross almost any visual obstruction, many people found it very hard to escape them. In 2007 a Christian man described an incident that had taken place some days before. His house was surrounded by three different churches that all had loudspeakers broadcasting their religious messages, and it was not uncommon that he would complain about the noise. This incident had all started when one of the churches held a religious service, which, with the help of the loudspeakers, had been loudly brought to his house. Not happy with the blaring sound, he decided to pay the church a visit. The young people of the church were there and he asked them to lower the volume, but without any success. He then unplugged their sound system and left. Shortly after this, the police had arrived at his house and taken him to the police station. At the station, he complained to the police about the disturbing noise and protested that the church should keep its activities inside the church and preach to the ones who came to visit. The young men, who had gone to the police station, answered that they were ‘evangelising their neighbourhood’. The use of loudspeakers was not a question of preaching inside the church to those who were already saved; it was for the people outside.

The Jos Metropolitan Development Board’s Handbook of Guidelines for 2006 declared that in low-, medium-, and high-density areas, loudspeakers were not allowed for religious uses (Gamde 2006:6-9). This rule was definitely not obeyed; almost every church and mosque had at least one set of loudspeakers broadcasting religious messages in the different neighbourhoods in Jos. Most of them were highly visible to anyone passing. Rather than being placed inside the buildings, they were attached high up on the exterior with their sound waves directed out at the neighbourhood.

‘The mounting of loudspeakers to proclaim religious teachings and in the process make provocative statements in order to oppose or antagonise the religion of the other community is a common phenomenon’, noted Mwadkwon (2001:60). Viewed as acts of intimidation, the use of religious loudspeakers, like blocking roads on Sundays and Fridays, played a part in generating resentment as well as open conflict between Christians and Muslims in Jos. In consciousness of the power connected to these practices, and to avoid increasing tension between Christians and Muslims, the Nigerian government in 1985 banned ‘amplifications of religious slogans through loudspeakers located near public buildings’ in Nigeria as well as ‘the display
of religious stickers, inscriptions, and bills in all public offices’ (Falola 2009:179).

There were constant attempts to claim and control Jos ‘through sonic presence’; religious sound practices created, occupied, and competed for the city (De Witte 2008:691, 706). Jos, with its ever-present churches and mosques, was immersed in prayers or wishes coming from all directions. It turned into a sort of duel where each church and mosque tried to play louder than the other, as though they were stating that their religion was better and more powerful than the religion of the others (see Solomon 2000:271f.). Just as the streets were part of a struggle over who could or could not walk them, the air was part of a fight over whose sound was heard or not heard.

The roadblocks and the sound of the loudspeakers were not merely a matter of claiming a place, but of making a place. Through the roadblocks and the loudspeakers, people attempted to make their prayers and wishes part of the emergent landscape. Still, people in Jos were praying for very different futures to come. It was not just their own presence and wishes that they wanted to make part of the emergent landscape, but also the absence of the presence and wishes of the others. Through the loudspeakers, the sound of prayers kept pumping out, silencing all other prayers. Roadblocks and loudspeakers both, in a similar manner, simultaneously invoked and erased presence. By controlling the present you were part of structuring possible futures.

**Erasing Potential Futures**

On Sunday, 17 January 2010 – having barely recovered from the violence in 2008 when 700 people were estimated to have lost their lives – the streets of Jos were once again, as they had by then been many times before, full of fleeing people searching for safety amidst violent clashes and burning buildings. As violence spread over Jos and into surrounding areas, there were assessments that at least 200 people were killed and 18,000 displaced (see HRW 2010; ICRC 2010).

As after previous hostilities, this event was surrounded by competing stories, but it was generally accepted that it had started when a Muslim man wanted to rebuild his house, which had been destroyed in the 2008 violence, in a mainly Christian neighbourhood in Jos North Local Government Area. A confrontation occurred between the Muslim workers
and Christians in the area who did not agree with the rebuilding (see HRW 2010; IRIN 2010a; 2010b). When the house owner, Alhaji Kabir Muhammad, was asked in an interview why they had told him to stop the work, he answered: ‘They said that they don’t want any Muslim to come back to that area again. That is what they said, that no Muslim should return to that area’ (Lalo & Bashir 2010). He went on to explain that his house was on a boundary between a Christian and a Muslim area. In the Muslim area some people had renovated and returned to their houses, ‘but my house happens to be at the boundary and there are no Muslims there’ (ibid.).

There was a fight over Jos that was fought most importantly on the ground through attempts to erase the presence of others – the traces of the activities of others – at the same time one was asserting one’s own. This process highlighted people’s power to shape landscapes through ‘production and destruction’ (Jones 2006:223). As after the violence in the 1960s (Bingel 1978:16, 18) and 1990s (Egwu 2004:11, 245, 275; Mwadkwon 2001:59, 68), burnt-down and abandoned houses were part of the scenery in Jos after the crisis of 2001. One of the first actions carried out was to attack mosques and churches, ‘the most tangible symbols of “enemy values”’ (HRW 2001:22), and a trail of burnt mosques and churches followed in the tracks of the violence. Areas became recognisable by their different burn marks. In 2008 and 2010, as new violence spread, homes were once again burnt, and, in what was by then a common occurrence, mosques and churches were also torched (Africa Research Bulletin 2010:18265; HRW 2009:4ff.; 2010; Ostien 2009).

Symbolically charged buildings are often targeted for both destruction and reconstruction during wars and their aftermath. Michael Herzfeld argued that these monuments have a metonymic relationship to what they serve; hence, their obliteration or rebuilding ‘reproduces and reinforces attempts to inflict permanent change on both demography and cartography’ (2006:129) – a form of ‘spatial cleansing’ (ibid.:142). The construction and destruction of monuments thus becomes a ‘battlefield of memories’ through which certain memories are excluded and others become part of the dominant vision of history (Kapralski 2001:50, 54).

In a contested landscape like Jos, a lot of suspicion was directed at the activities of the others. What were their intentions? The traces of the others were experienced in relation not only to what Jos had been, but also to what they would turn Jos into. They drew their significance from an ‘interactional past’ as well as an ‘interactional potential’. While the former refers to previous experiences or memories of a place, the latter refers
After the crisis in 2001, many partially destroyed houses were left empty. Absent owners often left messages such as ‘this house is not for sale’ on the remaining walls of their houses as warnings against fraudulent sellers pretending to be the rightful owners. This pattern occurred all over Nigeria (Smith 2008:22f.), but with the crisis in Jos it increased drastically.

to expectations of ‘future experiences imagined or anticipated to be possible’ (Milligan 1998:2). The establishment of religious schools, colleges, and hospitals among other actions was experienced along these lines. Muslims were believed to be trying to turn Jos into ‘an Islamic centre’, and Christians were seen as aspiring to make Jos ‘the Jerusalem of Nigeria’ (Mwadkwon 2001:66). The activities of the others were experienced and feared in terms of their looming future consequences. Potentialities were treated as given actualities – the reality of the present (Dewey 1929:324). By erasing the traces of the others, their potential consequences, together with pasts and memories not wished for, were erased.

Hausa, a lingua franca in Jos, was seen among indigene groups as one of many unwanted traces left by the perceived settlers. The importance of the Hausa language in the area has entailed many ethnic groups as well as settlements having become known by their Hausa names rather than their names in other languages. A leader of the indigenes put it this way: ‘The fact that Hausa is predominantly spoken in Jos does not make Hausas the owners of Jos. In our opinion, Hausa is simply a unifying language of
trade and commerce and not a language of culture or religion signifying traditional ownership of Jos’ (Ioratim-Uba 2009:442). In discussing the significance of language issues in ethnic conflicts in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, Godwin Aondona Ioratim-Uba argued that the dominating role of the Hausa language, and what he perceived as a decline of bilingualism in the area, had stimulated animosity between settlers and indigenes as well as a reawakened interest in the use and promotion of indigene languages (ibid.:438, 442, 444). As part of these processes, there has been a trend among indigene groups to return to using their original indigene names. Voices have also been raised saying that names of settlements should follow the same trend (Tyoden 1993:19f.).

In Jos some groups have demanded that chieftaincy titles and electoral wards carrying Hausa names should be replaced by indigene names (HRW 2001:6). With the crisis in 2001, there was an increasing wish among indigenes to replace the Hausa names of different areas in Jos – such as Angwan Rogo and Gada Biyu – with original Berom names, ‘as part of rehabilitating their linguistic esteem and control over Jos’ (Ioratim-Uba 2009:447f.). While the new names would bring forth some potential futures, they would also write over or render others invisible. They have ‘the power to wipe out the past and call forth the new’ (Tuan 1991:688). By changing the names, not only would traces left by generations of settlers be erased or made invisible, but other traces would be made visible, and with them new presences, new relationships between places and people, and new potential futures.

After the crisis of 2001, the felt aggression among indigenes towards the language of the others also expressed itself in open campaigns against the continued use of Hausa in their homes as well as at their public events (Ioratim-Uba 2009:444). In the beginning of 2004, some indigenes started calling for a ban on speaking Hausa. When Jibril and Rahila, who was also indigene, were discussing this issue they started to laugh. Since they had different mother tongues, the only language they could communicate in was Hausa. If they were to stop speaking Hausa and change language, it would mean that both Jibril and Rahila would have to go back to school to be able to communicate. On the other hand, Rahila was not too pleased with speaking Hausa, the language of the people she felt were taking over Jos. By speaking Hausa, Rahila not only brought forward the presence of the perceived others but also made new footprints that were felt to be part of the Hausas’ conquering of Jos. It was only by ceasing to speak Hausa that she would cease to call up their presence. In addition, by changing language she would bring forth another presence and new potential consequences.
For the Future to Come

After the renewed violence that 2010 brought with it, a Christian living in Congo Russia portrayed his relationship with Muslims areas: ‘We can’t go there. Our people are being killed any time they pass in that area. Once you go, you never come back. You will be a missing person’ (BBC 2010d). With the spiral of violence that initiated the new year, the police and military continued to recover corpses both in Jos and in the surrounding areas after what were referred to as ‘silent killings’ (Adinoyi 2010; BBC 2010a). A young resident concluded: ‘Rather than coming together, people are moving apart’ (BBC 2010d).

With every new footstep, Jos emerged as an increasingly contested landscape. It was a landscape shaped by absence as much as presence. There has been a constant battle over what is present and what is not. During the crisis in 2001 people fought each other with guns, bows and arrows; Muslims were killed in Christian areas and Christians in Muslim areas; mosques and churches were targeted; but there was also a continual battle that was fought with other tools. Among them were the renaming of areas, street praying, closed gates, loudspeakers, clothes, roadblocks, signboards, and access to jobs, schools, and political positions. Just as every new footstep holds the potential to form the world to come, so does every blocked footstep. The Jos to come was emerging as much from blocking others’ actions as from performing one’s own. Non-movement was as important as movement. By blocking activities, circumscribing laws, overpowering sound, removing names, and erasing traces, one was also erasing their potential consequences, along with the plans and wishes of the others.

Landscapes are always in a process of becoming and therefore they are always temporal; ‘landscapes, like time, never stand still’ (Bender 2002:103). With the acceptance that the taskscape is part of the landscape, the landscape’s temporality is brought to the forefront and so is the fact that people’s activities are an intrinsic part of its becoming (Ingold 1993:164). Embedded in a landscape are people’s wishes and prayers for the future, and hence the violence in Jos has often been directed towards the landscape itself. Places, as Tilley noted, ‘are intimately connected to history, the past, and hold out the promise of a desired future’ (2006:21). Obliterating names, buildings, and other traces of the unwanted other was a matter of changing the past in the present for the future to come.
A study of private clinics in Plateau State in the 1980s concluded: ‘In contemporary Nigeria, medical businesses are among the most widespread enterprises, being as common as drinking and educational establishments’ (Alubo 1990:313). Medicine in Jos emerged not only as ever present but also as a highly heterogeneous issue. In between churches with big healing posters, pharmacies, diagnostic centres, clinics, and hospitals of Western medicine, one would find different consulting places such as stalls, shops, temples, and clinics that performed what was perceived as traditional medicine.

Moreover, there was not one traditional medicine, but rather as many as there were corners and streets. The common denominator was not that they were ‘traditional’ in the sense of being composed of local practices rooted in the past, but that they were not Western medicine. What was perceived as traditional medicine could be anything from verses from the Koran, persons possessed by spirits, talismans made by the Wicca movement in the United States, incenses imported from India, perfumes for calling on spirits, and dried herbs with added perfume, to concoctions that had been decanted into second-hand bottles with labels giving dosage instructions. What the medicines could help you with varied just as much. It could be anything from losing weight, virility, blindness, broken legs, asthma, malaria, cancer, and HIV, to unemployment, lack of love, conflicts within families, stolen objects, elections, court cases, witchcraft, poison, and relationships with spirits.

The places where traditional medicine was performed were just as multifaceted. Some had no signs at all indicating that medicine was practiced, while others had big signboards. Some places looked similar to clinics of Western medicine; others resembled pharmacies with shelves full of bottles with colourful concoctions and dried herbs. In others, the floor was littered with dried herbs. In places where bori was performed, the walls were commonly covered with clothes and other paraphernalia of the spir-

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14 For a more detailed illustration of the variety in how traditional medicine was practiced in Plateau State, see Amma Oppong (1989).
its and on the floors you would see things the spirits liked to consume or prescribe.

Despite the great variation, there were still patterns. Just like the rest of Jos’s population, Christian and Muslim medical practitioners increasingly moved apart. In mainly Christian areas you would find a mixture of sites of Western medicine, churches with healing messages, and different Christian practitioners of traditional medicine. In Muslim areas you would find a mixture of fewer and smaller sites of Western medicine and different Muslim practitioners such as mallams, bori practitioners, bonesetters, and herbalists.

In the course of a walk I took through Jos with Jibril, this medical landscape emerged in all its clarity. We started at Terminus in the centre of Jos. While walking through the centre on our way to Congo Russia we crossed Enugu Street, the busy central street where both Jos’s main mosque and Idris’s shop were located. Idris was sitting on a small stool next to his stack of second-hand mattresses, which filled almost the whole floor of the shop and went all the way up to the roof. His business card said that he was a dealer in new/second-hand items, and there were no obvious signs at his shop to indicate anything different. Still, for over forty years Idris had been giving out the medicine his grandfather had taught him and prayed so hard that he one day would inherit. Over the years, Idris had acquired more medical knowledge from dreams, and this was how he had become a mallam, a person who made medicines with the help of his knowledge of the Koran. He had learnt to read the Koran through a dream that came to him in 1975, but he had also had gone to a Koranic school.

Idris had knowledge of many useful medicines. If you had a broken leg, he had a medicine to heal it. If you had become blind, he could cure that. If the government did not pay your salary or pension, he had a medicine that would motivate them to pay. If you were running for presidency of the nation, governorship of a state, or chairmanship of a local government, he had a medicine that would help you win the election. If someone had stolen something from you, he had a medicine that would make the thief return it within three days.

As we left Idris and turned the corner, we passed two houses belonging to Igbos that had been burnt down during the crisis. At a crossroads some streets further north, there was a burnt-down hotel that belonged to an Igbo man. In this central, mainly Muslim, area there were ruins of buildings owned by Christians. On our way to visit Pam we continued to drop in and greet different practitioners as we passed burnt houses, but as we entered Congo Russia things changed; the majority of the practitio-
ners were now Christians instead of Muslims and the burnt-down houses belonged to Muslims instead of Christians.

Congo Russia is now one of Jos’s unplanned and more densely populated areas, but at the time of Pam’s birth in 1943 it had just been bush. He had told me that he had been born in the very place where he still lived and added, ‘I am an indigene of this place’. Pam was not only one of the early Berom converts to Christianity, but he had also been one of the few Beroms who had received a Western education early on. As a young boy he had started school in the local authorities’ school in the Native Town of Jos. He had continued schooling in an Anglican mission school in Jos and from there had gone to Common Wealth College. He had not wanted at first to become an ‘orthodox doctor’, as he called it, but a white woman had convinced him. He had trained first at Ahmadu Bello University in Kaduna State for four years and then in Kano for two additional years. Prior to Ibrahim, the previous Hausa chairman, he had been the chairman of the union in Plateau State. The medicine he practiced today was, in his words, a mixture of ‘orthodox’ and ‘traditional’ medicine, although the emphasis lay on his traditional knowledge.

In contrast to Idris’s place, there were very clear signs at Pam’s to show that he practiced medicine. Along the road in front of his house was a very colourful signboard indicating that there was a ‘dispensary’. When one arrived at Pam’s house, one first entered his waiting room. Opposite the entrance was a table with patient casebooks behind which three assistants stood making sure the files were in order. To the left of the table was a doorway with a blue curtain and above it a sign saying ‘consulting room’. To the right of the table was a similar doorway with the sign ‘injection/dressing room’. A third door led to a small ‘dispensing room’. Around the walls were benches for waiting patients.

We were shown into the consulting room, where Pam was sitting behind a desk with Samuel, the chairman of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners (NUMHP) in Bassa local government, located to the north of Jos, sitting opposite him. Pam was wearing a suit and tie. He wore glasses and had grey, quite long hair that was combed back in a way that was similar to a white person’s hairstyle. On the desk was a cardboard box for a blood-pressure monitor, a wooden sign bearing the title doctor and his name, a lot of papers, some medicine bottles, a torch, and a metal horn used as a stethoscope. To the right of the desk was a green hospital bed for patients to lie on and a metal structure with a washbasin on top.
Five businesses: one Christian healing centre, one diagnostic centre, and three pharmacies – the latter four connected to Western medicine.
Signboards for different places where traditional medicine was practiced.
A selection of traditional medicine products available in Jos.
The power of traditional medicine, displayed in two different ways.
Traditional medicine displayed for customers.
In the homes of two *b ori* practitioners.
One medicine practitioner’s lavishly decorated car, which he travelled around with selling his medicine. On top of the car were two loudspeakers and behind them in two boxes he kept snakes to entertain the customers with.
Even if Pam was emphasising the traditional side of his medicine today, it was his ‘orthodox’ side, with casebooks, stethoscope, and blood-pressure monitor, that he wanted to display. Illustrative of this wish were the positions Pam chose when I took some pictures. Pam stood up and put on a doctor’s white coat, hung a stethoscope around his neck, and settled down behind his desk again. For the first photograph, Pam pretended to take Samuel’s blood pressure. For the second one, they changed positions and Pam listened to his heart with the stethoscope. Then Pam moved out to the waiting room and posed with the three assistants behind the table with all the patients’ casebooks.

After saying goodbye to Pam, Jibril and I continued our walk and headed to the centre of Jos. On our way we continued to drop in and greet different practitioners. On any street you walked down, or around any corner you turned, you could almost always locate at least one person who practiced medicine. Not all had signboards like Pam or other attributes indicating the work that was performed, and others had stalls at a market, a cart, or a car that they moved around to sell their medicines. These mobile vehicles were commonly painted with signs indicating their practices and mounted with loudspeakers that announced their medical messages.

Other practitioners often looked down upon these mobile practitioners. Sentiments of this kind came out when Jibril and I passed one of these parked cars. In the front seat, speaking into a microphone that was connected to two loudspeakers on top of the car, an older man was praising his medicine while a younger man stood by the open trunk in the back of the car organising different medicines. When we passed the car Jibril refused to greet the two men and stared at the ground. After we had passed he declared in a disapproving tone that they were just ‘hawkers’. They were people who sold their medicines without a stable place where you could locate them. They did not have any personal relationships with their patients. As hawkers, they were seen as improper, and people often talked about them in contexts of being ‘dupes’, meaning that they were charlatans.

The emergent Jos was formed as much by forces that crossed borders as by compartmentalising forces. While many people had stopped crossing the lines between the different ‘zones’, there were other movements – like the hawker’s as well as Jibril’s and mine this day – that crossed these borders more and more. While people moved apart, poison followed in their wake and was being delivered to their homes or sent through needles, missiles, and injections. Like many other parts of the medical land-
scape, these forces were often invisible. It is the invisible side of Jos that is brought to the forefront here.

The Other’s Medicine

To be able to survive union politics one needed to have strong medicines that protected against the strength of other practitioners’ medicine. Not having medicine that was strong enough could have fatal consequences. A series of accidents that took place towards the end of the 1980s, when three of the four leaders of one of the associations in northern Nigeria died, were all interpreted as proof of the inadequacy of the medicine of the association’s leaders at the time. Two were killed in car accidents and one had a heart attack when meeting the minister of health. One rumour had it that one of the leaders, just before his death, had been scammed out of several hundred Naira\(^{15}\) – all proof of the weakness of their medicine (Last 1992:404f.).

Isaac, the Igbo practitioner born in southern Nigeria, once described how things had gone when he attended his first union meeting in the southern town of Calabar. Since he was a newcomer, they had wanted to test his strength and power as a medicine practitioner. Not knowing any better, he had not prepared himself. At the meeting, an old man stepped forward and Isaac fell down, unable to move. Only with great difficulty had he been able to bring himself home. At home he settled down in front of his shrine to regain his strength and to prepare himself for the next encounter. After long preparations he returned to the union office. This time he passed the trials and left the office unharmed. He subsequently came to work as public relations officer for the union’s branch in Calabar.

When Isaac moved to Jos several years later, in 1997, he was once again a newcomer, but this time he was prepared. He arrived at his first union meeting in Jos with very strong medicines that would protect him against all the tests that were going to be thrown at him, and the protective medicine in his pocket had just crumbled in response to all the pressure put on it during the meeting. As a result of his strong medicines he left the meeting not only unharmed but also as the newly elected public relations officer of the union in Jos. Isaac concluded that one has to come prepared to meetings; without protection they were very dangerous events.

\(^{15}\) In 1989 the official exchange rate between the USD and the Naira was 1 to 7.39.
Among the traditional practitioners there was a great fear of others’ medicine. This fear reached new levels with the crisis in 2001. For this reason both Isaac and Emanuel – the Igbo practitioner born in Jos – had stopped attending the union’s meetings. Emanuel explained that if he went to a meeting and spoke his mind, he knew that people who got annoyed or angry would never tell him to his face but would secretly send medicines that would make him ill. Being that people before the crisis had participated in large numbers, but after the crisis most meetings had only a few participants, and some, not a single one, Isaac and Emanuel concluded that the reason the union was currently in such a poor state was that everyone was too afraid of each other’s medicines.

With the crisis, the other’s medicine turned into poison; it became lethal. One day in 2004 Jibril and I visited James, the chairman of a group that organised most of the Yoruba practitioners in Jos. When we arrived, Emanuel and Isaac were already there. Isaac, Emanuel, and James all agreed that they would not take any medicine from a Muslim. At present, no Christian would, just as no Muslim would take medicine from a Christian, for fear of being poisoned. Emanuel and Isaac went on to state that they used to go to Muslim barbers to be shaved but no longer did, because it would be easy for them to slit their throats. These three Christian men said all this while sitting next to Jibril – a Muslim. As the conversation continued, it became clear that as an indigene, Jibril did not quite fit in the Muslim category. It was added that Jibril, on the other hand, because of the risk of being poisoned, would never take any medicine from the Hausas. Jibril’s feared other was not the Christians, but the Hausas.

After the crisis, people moved away from each other, avoided no-go areas and no-go times, stopped attending meetings together, no longer went to each other’s barbers, and ceased taking each other’s medicines. Even with all these precautions, the other’s medicine – your poison – sometimes actually came knocking on your door. During a conversation in 2004, one of the women who worked for the polio immunisation programme in Jos described how they targeted different areas in Jos, one week at a time. They would knock on people’s doors and offer the oral vaccine for free to children under five years old. While most people agreed to give their children the vaccine, she acknowledged that Hausas often did not. This, she said, was connected to family planning and AIDS. Many Hausas believed that the vaccine gave people AIDS; also, that it was intended to make their children infertile. It was all part of a plan to reduce their numbers.
Around the same time, four women and a man who were wearing green aprons and said that they were working for the polio programme stopped by Maryam’s mud house, which was located in a village on the northern outskirts of Jos. Maryam was a Hausa woman in her sixties who had been practicing traditional medicine ever since her father taught her at a young age. When they left, Maryam explained that they usually came by every other month to give the vaccine to children between six months and two years of age, but that not everyone wanted to give it to their children. I asked if her grandchildren had taken it and she answered that some of them had. I told her that I myself had had polio vaccinations twice, once as a child and one more time before I came to Nigeria. She answered that we ought to know best how to use our own drugs, but if you told a Nigerian that he or she would need to take it more than once, they would think you were trying to cheat them out of their money.

Among Muslims in Nigeria, Western medicine and its services had long been seen as activities of Christians, and as such, they evoked a certain degree of suspicion (Last 2007:613). At the time, voices questioning the oral polio vaccine were being raised all over northern Nigeria, and people made a sharp distinction between vaccines administered at postnatal clinics during routine immunisations and those handed out by ‘roaming vaccinators’ who went to people’s homes (Yahya 2007:195). A man from Kano explained: ‘If I go to the hospital, even simple Panadol (paracetamol) for a headache, I cannot buy and these people are following us into our houses, forcing us to bring our children for free medicine for polio’ (ibid.:202). How huge resources could be spent on free polio vaccines when basic medicines were unattainable for the common Nigerian, was beyond the grasp of many (Renne 2010:105; Yahya 2007:202). A man from the northern city of Zaria explained: ‘We are looking for medicine in the hospital to give to our children and we can’t get it but this one, they are following us to our houses to give it. I don’t trust this polio vaccine’ (Renne 2006:1862).

The controversy about the safety of the oral polio vaccine had started back in 2003, when five of the northern states in Nigeria banned its use on children. It all happened during the WHO programme ‘Kick Polio out of Africa’, and in the middle of 2003, the controversy surrounding the programme set Muslims of northern Nigeria against the WHO, UNI-

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16 However, this does not mean that people in southern Nigeria were not also suspicious of Western medicine. Misty L. Bastian, for example, has analysed rumours about poisoned Western medicine that were circulating in the Onitsha market in south-eastern Nigeria. She interpreted them as expressions of feelings of an infrastructural collapse of Nigeria that was fuelled at least partly by human greed (Bastian 1998:127).
CEF, and Nigeria’s federal authorities (Obadare 2005:265ff., 279). The controversy reached a peak when Dr. Dattii Ahmed, who was on the Kano State Sharia Supreme Council, declared that as part of its war against terrorism the U.S. government had deliberately contaminated the vaccine in order to reduce the Muslim population (see Fleshman 2004:188; Obadare 2005:275; Yahya 2007). In contrast to the doubts in the northern part Nigeria regarding the vaccine, people in the south ‘simply could not fathom why anybody would decline a vaccine declared safe by the WHO’ (Obadare 2005:268f.). The dangerous other whose medicines you had to safeguard yourself against was not the same for the southerners as for the northerners.

As a transmitter of both health and death, medicine emerged as something highly ambivalent; simultaneously ‘therapeutic, prophylactic, and lethal’ (Jackson 1989:25). This ambivalence was rooted in its capacity to be on the one hand a healing or protective tool under one’s control, and on the other something hostile that was invading one’s body (see Jackson 2005a:130f.). In Jos, it was part of an increasing feeling of being acted upon by forces beyond one’s control, and borders were emphasised by which medicine people used and feared; a situation that was augmented by that the other’s medicine – your poison – would often be impossible to detect before it had already reached and affected you.

Poisoned Matters

It was a poison incident that made Pam stop working with Western medicine and turn to traditional medicine. After receiving his medical education around the time of Nigerian independence in the 1960s, he had worked with white doctors at the Maternity Hospital in Jos. When these doctors left Jos, they had left Pam in charge and according to him, he had not only been the first African to be in command, but also the first indigene. However, there had been a group of students at the hospital who did not approve of his appointment and wanted to get rid of him. Within this group there had been persons from different ethnic groups, but no one had been indigene.

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17 It is important to acknowledge here that northern Nigeria had obvious reason to distrust the U.S. when it came to medicine. In 1996 the U.S. pharmaceutical company Pfizer tested Trovan, an experimental meningitis drug, on children. Eleven children died and many were deformed (see Ezeome & Simon 2010; Frishman 2009; Kaufmann & Feldbaum 2009; Obadare 2005:278; Petryna 2005:190; Renne 2010:107ff.; Yahya 2007:189, 203).
One day, after he had been operating in the theatre for many hours, he asked one of the medical officers to get him some rice. He had just had time to take three spoonfuls when one of the nurses came running towards him; there was a woman in delivery and the umbilical cord was wrapped around the child’s neck. Pam left his rice on top of his changing locker and went back to the theatre again. After performing a caesarean section on the woman, he washed his hands and then continued to eat his rice. He had been fine while he was eating the food, but that night he thought he was going to die from being poisoned. He claimed that they had wanted to kill him because he was an indigene.

After this incident, Pam chose to quit working at the hospital. How he had been treated as an indigene led him to reflect about his line of work, and he recalled that his great grandfather had been what he called a ‘traditional medicine man’. As a child, Pam had been able to pick up a leaf and know what it was good for, and he now understood that this had been his great grandfather’s way of telling him that he had inherited his talent. After this revelation, Pam had focused his attention on traditional medicine and had opened his own clinic. He went on to explain that traditional medicine, unlike Western medicine, could treat conditions caused by poison, witchcraft, and spirits. He declared, ‘No orthodox doctor, no surgeon in an orthodox job can cure this poison, never’.

Isaac, in a similar vein, once described how traditional medicine was not just the only one that could deal successfully with poison, but that Western medicine would even worsen the condition. He picked up a nail from the floor and showed it to me, commenting that this was an ordinary nail, but that for no more than 20 Naira a ‘tradomedical doctor’ could harm a person with it. They could harm your children by sending needles, seven to be exact – one to the forehead, three to the chest, and three to the stomach. The child would not notice anything and you as a parent would not see anything, but after some time the child would begin to have headache followed by pains in the stomach and chest. If you took the child to a Western doctor and gave it an injection, the child would become sicker and eventually die. However, if you took the child to a ‘tradomedical doctor’, he would just hit the child on the different places where the needles had been inserted and the needles would fall out directly into his hand. He would then just let the needles fall to the ground. Isaac showed the movement with his hand and explained that as soon as the needles were removed, the child would be healthy again.

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18 In 2004 the official exchange rate between the USD and the Naira was 1 to 127–130.
In 2000, when several practitioners and I were visiting a practitioner in Barakin Ladi, a small town south of Jos, a twenty-three-year-old man who had only been practicing medicine for one and a half years stopped by. The spirits had come to him in the market and told him that he should start giving out medicine. He had first hesitated, but later agreed to work with them. He wanted to show us proof of his powers and held out an egg that we were all allowed to inspect. He then prayed to God and talked to the spirits. He made a small hole in the egg and drank it, after which he drank a glass of water. After this, he started bringing sewing needles out of his mouth. Everyone was very excited and respectful of his powers. He told us that he could send these needles away by spiritual means and kill people. For reasons of safety, a piece of paper was brought out and he put the needles on it. The paper was folded and thrown into the well as a way to put the forces of the needles out of circulation.

Practitioners of traditional medicine were very skilled not only in curing cases of poisoning but also in preparing poison. Pam went on to relate that there were people who could make different forms of poison. Some used hair, some charcoal, and others lizards. He added thoughtfully that they could poison the meat you ate. Jibril and Samuel, who had been present but totally quiet during Pam’s whole recollection, now broke their silence. Referring to how various people in the union were trying to poison each other, Jibril stated, ‘Exactly, that is the real problem even within our own movement’. Poison was a topic that engaged, and Samuel filled in and agreed with Jibril’s interpretation of the situation. In fact, there was a recurring pattern among the practitioners of dealing with and interpreting conflict through poison or suspicions and accusations of poisoning.

When Jibril and I visited Samuel at the beginning of 2004, he explained that there would always be people who were not happy that you were a chairman, that a lot of people came to consult you, that your medicine was effective, or that you were successful. Their highest wish would be that you lose your reputation as well as your patients. He concluded that you ought to be very careful and protect yourself against the harmful ways of other practitioners, and he went on to recount several instances when people had tried to poison either him or his patients. One of these incidents had almost killed him. A woman had showed up at his house with a medicine for one of his patients. His skill as a practitioner had made him question the content of the medicine, however, and before administering it to the patient he tried it himself. It nearly killed him, but with the help of his knowledge of traditional medicine he had been able to
neutralise the poison. He never saw the woman again after this incident. He added that if two of your patients died, nobody would come to consult you, because the rumour would be that you had killed them.

During union elections in 1998, when Samuel was appointed chairman in Bassa, the former chairman had tried to poison him, but once again he had been able to detect the poison. In contrast to Samuel, who was Christian and Rukuba, his opponent was a Muslim Fulani man. With the crisis in 2001 and several attacks against Fulanis in the area, the opponent no longer felt safe and moved with his family and cattle to Bauchi State. From here he had sent a man with poisoned drugs. Yet again, Samuel had understood where the drugs were coming from and had been able to avoid a tragedy.

‘Everybody who is within the medicine trade knows that you cannot be a chairman of the union without being tried. […] Even our secretary has been tried’, Samuel said. I asked Jibril who had tried to poison him. He answered, ‘Our people’, and Samuel added, ‘Enemies’. Jibril referred to problems with the Hausa faction and said that he had been warned, since he was standing in their way. If he was not careful, they were going to kill him. Samuel added that they would not kill him themselves, ‘physically’, but through ‘poison’. As in the case of the needles, they would ‘either send poisonous missiles or injections’.

After the crisis, both the magnitude and prominence of these kinds of accusations and fears escalated. Since poison was based on an absence rather than a presence of the other, moving away did not decrease the felt presence of poison but, rather, increased it. Through its ability to move beyond the physical limitations of the other, poison brought an absent other to a presence; places became ‘haunted, by an absent other’ (de Certeau 1988:154).

Evil Phone Calls

There were other matters that increasingly were bringing absent others to a presence. Towards the end of June 2004, I received a phone call from Yakubu, a Muslim Hausa man in his late fifties. Two weeks later, Yakubu phoned me again without any apparent reason. Then one week later the same thing happened, and this time he asked me when I was coming to visit him in the new house he had bought in Angwan Rogo. Like many others, Yakubu had lost his house during the crisis in 2001. He had previously lived in a mainly Christian area, but with the violence he had fled without any wishes of ever returning again. Being unable to sell his old
house, and in a very strained financial situation, he had ended up renting a house in Angwan Rogo. Now, all of a sudden, he had been able to buy not only a mobile phone with a subscription but also a new house. I was told by Jibril that he had received the money from a patient who was living in Abuja – Nigeria’s capital.

When the GSM communication system was introduced in Nigeria in 2001 the telephone industry was very stagnant. With a population of over 100 million, there were somewhere around 500,000 landlines in use (Obadare 2004a; Onwumechili 2005:24ff.). With the introduction of GSM, telecommunication in Nigeria took a great leap forward (Elegbeleye 2005:197). By the end of 2004 mobile phone market had around 7 million subscribers (Smith 2006:497). At the time, it was still relatively costly to use a phone: among the medicine practitioners I knew, only two – one of them being Yakubu – owned phones with lines, while a third had bought a phone without being able to afford a telephone number.

In 2006 it was concluded: ‘Every major city and many small towns are now connected, and countless rural and urban communities that have no running water and little or no electricity service are integrated into the country’s vast and expanding mobile telephone network’ (Smith 2006:498). In 2007 ‘everyone’ had a phone. Over 43 million GSM lines were estimated to be in use (Badaru 2007), and Nigeria was one of the fastest growing GSM markets in the world (Jonah 2007). Almost all the practitioners I knew now had their own phones and lines. My phone kept ringing – people wanted to greet, to inform, to invite, or to visit. When I returned to Sweden, greetings, news of new clashes, fears, and wishes continued to pass through the air.

About a week after Yakubu’s third phone call, Jibril and I walked through Angwan Rogo to visit him in his new home. It was a quite large compound that he had bought from a Christian family who wanted to leave the area. Yakubu was not at home but had left his phone number, and after our call it took him no more than ten minutes to arrive. He greeted us and opened the door to his medicine room. As we sat down on pillows on the floor I asked Yakubu about the patient from Abuja. He explained that it was all true, but that the patient was not in Abuja but in London. The person had come to him in Jos to receive medication (prayers) for HIV. He had treated him for three months and then he had been cured. In return the man had given him the money. It was clear that for Yakubu, it was important that the man was in London and not in Abuja. Having a patient abroad and receiving money from London carried great force and importance – the distance was powerful in and of
itself: ‘Movement, especially instant movement, adds value’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999:291). When we left, Jibril was annoyed that Yakubu had said that the man was in London and not in Abuja. He claimed that Yakubu was lying.

As poison could bring forth the presence of an absent other, so, too, could the mobile phone. Through the mobile phones, the sound of people could move beyond their physical limitations as never before. Rumours, gossip, and fights within the union in Jos could spread immediately across the city and the nation as well as to other countries, at speeds and with a reach unheard of before. Union meetings could be organised in days instead of weeks.

Mobile phones enabled people to move beyond the ‘friction of distance’ in ways that contradicted all previous experiences. They became tools that were part of forming a ‘time-space compression’ to the degree that they allowed people, in a sense, ‘to be in two or more places at once’ (Larsen et al. 2006:261, 263, 273). James Katz argued that there was a seemingly magical quality to how the new technology worked, and also to the power that it transferred to its users, who could just ‘wander around and yet invisibly connect to just about anyone’ (2006:6). The mobile phone quite literally became a ‘portable power’ that could immensely amplify a person’s reach and power to affect circumstances that would otherwise be out of reach (ibid.:10).

Referring to Vicente Rafael’s use of the term ‘telecommunicative fantasies’, Obadare argued that the mobile phone in Nigeria came to be seen in the light of fantasies about improved futures. He wrote: ‘At the very least, mobile telecommunication was expected to accomplish some of the “miracles” associated with its introduction in other parts of the world, for instance, “abolishing” distance by facilitating the conduct of business and interpersonal relations’ (2006b:101). But as the communication speed increased, Nigeria’s failing infrastructure also revealed ‘the gap between actual and potential acceleration’ (Larkin 2004:305). The initial euphoria connected to the introduction of the GSM system was soon replaced by disenchantment over the inadequacy of the services, such as poor reception and what were felt to be exorbitant tariffs. These feelings resulted in mobile phone users en masse switching off their phones on 19 September 2003 as a protest (see Obadare 2004a; 2006b:93, 101; Onwumechili 2005:32; Smith 2006:518). That event brought into focus not only the shortcomings of mobile technology in Nigeria but also its great potential to connect people and to synchronise and promote the actions of many.

The mobile phone has been seen as empowering people and almost as a revolution when it comes to making people feel more safe and pro-
tected. In times of emergency, help is only a phone call away (see Katz 2006:10f.; Ling 2004:35-55). From this point of view, it has been seen as ‘a type of umbilical cord’ (Ling 2004:48). However, ‘the euphoria about unlimited reach and the boundlessness of communication is countered by a deep uncertainty concerning the side-effects of this new technology’ (Hahn & Kibora 2008:89). These fears have echoed globally. Among other things, the radio-frequency radiation from mobile phones and their communication towers has been seen as a potential health hazard, and sparks from the mobile phones have been thought capable of igniting petroleum fumes at petrol stations (see Burgess 2004; 2007). It has been argued that the subtext to these tales is that ‘there surely must be a hidden price to pay for using a device that so effortlessly connects us to whomever we want, whenever we want’ (Burgess 2007:135).

The ambivalence of the mobile phone resembles that of medicine as a simultaneous source of enormous curative powers and poisonous forces. It is a move between the technology being a tool that enhances our abilities – seen as a part of us, being under our control or subject to our will – and something that invades us – experienced as alien, controlling or subjugating us (Jackson 2005a:130).

In July 2004 I was sitting on a bench on the grounds of the University of Jos, talking to a woman who worked at the university. Our conversation eventually turned to the increasing use of mobile phones. She told me that there existed a phone number that you could die from; if you answered when this number called, you would die immediately. The rumour was also related by the BBC (2004) and circulated all over the country. As a result, some Nigerians stopped answering calls coming from numbers they did not recognise, and a steadily increasing list of ‘killer numbers’ was shown on television. People also stopped using commercial mobile phone centres, some stopped using their own phones, some memorised the killer numbers, some stored them on their phones under the name ‘evil’, some argued for the ban of GSM (Adam 2004), and many, after receiving calls, went to hospitals for checkups (Agbu 2004:16).

A company was reported to have alerted its employees by posting the following on a notice board: ‘Please beware of these strange GSM numbers: 08011113999, 08033123999, 08032111999 and 08025111999. In short, any number that ends with 333, 666, 999. They are killing! This is nothing but reality, you are warned!’ (Agbu 2004:17).

These evil phone calls were referred to at the time as ‘satanic calls’, ‘killer calls’, and ‘doomsday calls’, and many Nigerians saw them as a sign of
the ‘end times’ (Agbu 2004:18f.). Two weeks after the conversation on the bench, the rumour about the phone numbers that killed people had grown to such an extent that I received a text message from MTN that declared: ‘Y’ello Customer, we assure you that the rumour about an evil GSM number is unfounded and scientifically impossible. Please disregard this rumour. Thank you’.

With the introduction of GSM there followed an increasing tension between an ‘acoustic revelatory presence’ and a ‘visual hidden presence’ (Feld 2005:186). A form of ‘spatio-acoustic confusion’ emerged in which
‘delocalized sounds’ could move without restraints (Yablon 2007:641). In a fashion similar to poison, the phone call could travel any distance, locate you anywhere, and enter your home. The killer numbers also shared another trait with poison – you did not know their nature until it was too late. Isaac’s example cited earlier described how the victim was unable to detect the poisonous needles until after they had entered the body. Likewise, Samuel, despite his skills as a practitioner and his suspicions, had been sure that the medicine he had received was poisoned only after he had consumed it and nearly been killed. Similarly, you would not know that the evil number had reached you until you answered it or saw its number on your display.

The increasing use of mobile phones came to be very noticeable visually in the urban landscape. The picture shows one of Jos’s many small commercial phone places with their typical umbrellas, which allowed people to tap into the mobile network even if they did not own a phone. People also used these places to transfer refill card credits to each other as a safe, instant, and wireless banking system.
At about the same time, there were reports about poisonous noodles or ‘Indomie’ – the name of a major brand that had become a generic term for all noodles. The Indomie crisis was initiated on 11 May with the circulation of text messages and phone calls declaring that they were poisonous (Adekunle 2004; SWAPHEP 2004). The news initially reached me through a rumour that people had died from eating noodles that had been poisoned by pesticides, but just some days later it was reported on the news that the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) had tested them and that Indomie produced between certain dates had indeed been found to be poisonous. After NAFDAC’s investigation, newspapers started to list the dates of production of the potentially harmful noodles (Adekunle 2004) in a way that was strongly reminiscent of the way the evil numbers had been presented.

The noodles, in a fashion similar to the ‘killer numbers’ or ‘killer calls’, came to be termed ‘killer Indomie Noodles’ (Jaydilla 2004). Rather than being under your control, they became invading evil forces that were beyond control. The capacity of poison – killer Indomies or killer numbers – to reach you depended on their ability to detach themselves and move beyond their makers, callers, and senders. Not only did poisonous needles, killer numbers, and killer Indomies move on their own, but they also had an agency of their own. They were no longer just extensions of absent others, but uncontrollable forces in and of themselves.

As something that, like a poisonous needle, could defy any distance without difficulty and find you anywhere, the mobile phone was both powerful and fearsome. It was a ‘portable power’ through which a person could gain the ability to move in ways that defied physical constraints. In your hands, it embodied great potential, as the mobile network provider GLO indicated. In 2007 GLO covered Jos, like the rest of Nigeria, with commercial posters that asked ‘Jos, Yaya dei?’ (Jos, how are things going?) and ended their message with ‘Rule your world’. The new GSM system had brought with it not only a changed landscape in the form of commercial posters and small commercial phone places with highly visible signboards and umbrellas, but also highly moveable and invisible forces that carried the ambiguous potential of either ruling your world or helping you rule it.
Violent Rumours

Invisible forces that were based on a tension between presence and absence were recurrent companions in Jos, as in the case of the poisonous needles, evil phone numbers, and killer noodles. It was extremely hard to know what was going on behind the scenes. There were constantly feelings of hidden agendas and hidden aggressions that could surface at any time. Just as there was a fear connected to what the other was planning in the church or in the mosque, there was a fear of what the other was doing behind your back at the meeting or in his or her area. Ordinary day-to-day events like eating or taking medicine became marked by a fear of being killed by poison.

It was no simple task to detect what was going on, and people tried in different ways to tune into the state of the city. Before leaving their homes in the morning people checked the news on the radio. When he was on the move, Jibril, like many others, carried a small radio with him. All over the city you could see small groups of people gathered around radios. When tension increased, the use of the radio also increased. It became an essential piece of equipment; not just a matter of satisfying curiosity, but a matter of life and death.

On the other hand, the radio had its clear limitations as a tool for understanding what was going on – not listening could actually save your life. This predicament became apparent when Esther told me about her experiences during the crisis of 2001. Living on the outskirts of Jos, she had wanted to go into the centre to buy some food and visit her Bible study group on the fourth or fifth day of the crisis, and she had heard on the radio that everything was calm and that everyone should go back to their business as usual. From one of the larger roads heading into Jos, she and a friend succeeded in finding a taxi to take them to the centre. As mentioned earlier, the absence of sound and passing cars was an indication that something was wrong in the city, but since there were taxis passing, Esther and her friend assumed that everything was okay.

They asked the driver to take them to their Bible study group inside Jos. When they got there, it turned out to be closed and they decided to walk to the bank. As they were leaving the bank, they heard gunshots. Now very afraid, they tried to find a taxi or any other vehicle to get a ride out of Jos, but without any success. Instead, they found temporary shelter in the house of a friend in the area. Because they knew, after some hours in hiding, that people at home would be very worried about them, they then left the house and started to walk towards home even though they were still hearing gunshots. After some walking they met a soldier, who
asked them what they were doing outside. They had told him that the radio had said that everything was calm in Jos. The soldier answered that this was clearly not the case and they should go home. The soldier helped them stop a car, and they had eventually been able to get home.

On 18 May 2004, when I met Jibril at the union office, I was aware that something was going on, but I was not sure what. In the taxi on my way to the university and the union’s Tuesday meeting I had heard the other passengers talking about a problem connected to Obasanjo and Dariye, and at the university I had seen students standing together in small groups listening to radios and talking. Jibril, on the other hand, who had arrived in a hurry from the small village outside Jos where he was living at the time, was unaware of the tension. But a few minutes later, one of the cleaners at the university dropped in and told us excitedly that the president had declared Plateau State in a state of emergency and that the governor had been removed.

Wound up by the news, Jibril hastily brought out a small radio from his plastic bag. When the only thing mentioned on the local news was that Dariye had started some kind of commission concerned with all the violence in Yelwa and Shendam in southern Plateau, Jibril reacted by stating that it would not lead to anything. There had been so many commissions put together to investigate the violence that had occurred in the area, but one never saw any reports or any actions taken to correct the situation (see also HRW 2005:53; Ostien 2009:14f.). When the local eleven o’clock news ended, Jibril went on to try to tune into the Hausa services on BBC and Voice of America, but failed. After waiting for another hour without anyone else showing up for the union meeting, we headed to the hotel across from the university. On the television in the bar, CNN reported that Obasanjo had declared Plateau State in a state of emergency.

When violence again struck Jos in 2008, similar stories emerged. The news reported people complaining about the lack of information from the local media. At the same time that people could see smoke rising all over Jos, there were no comments about the violence (Audu & Ajakaye 2008; BBC 2008a). One man cried out, ‘We have three radio stations in Jos and they are only playing music and telling us about what happened yesterday. Nobody is telling us what happened now’ (BBC 2008a).

As one of the most important news media in Africa, the radio has had clear limitations when it comes to satisfying its listeners’ questions. In comparing the radio to what he translated from the French expression radio trottoir as ‘pavement radio’, Stephen Ellis illustrated several instances when the latter – conversations in bars, markets, living-rooms, and taxi-parks as well as on pavements – had been much more accurate than the
former (1989:321, 325f.). While most people did try to tune in to Jos through the radio, the most important medium by far was the rumours that were in the air. They were a vital part of knowing what was going on in Jos, and as Veena Das observed in relation to her work in India during the 1980s: ‘Being able to interpret the rumours correctly became a matter of life and death for many’ (1998:120). Listening to rumours about the situation in Jos might save your life, since what the news broadcast did not necessarily correspond to any experienced reality. On the other hand, there was no guarantee that the rumours did not portray a reality dreaded or wished for rather than one experienced. People found themselves in a ‘twilight zone in which it was difficult to know whether it was wiser to believe in rumours or in the official versions of events’ (ibid.:119).

In Jos, tensions constantly appeared between the news on the radio and the news on the pavement radio. In the beginning of April in 2004 a phone call came to the family I was staying with. The caller wanted to warn us that there was trouble in Jos again and said that it had started during the night. It was decided that I could not go into Jos that day. At ten o’clock in the morning we were listening to the local news when we heard the chief of police of Angwan Rogo talking. He explained that armed robbers had attacked some houses in Angwan Rogo during the night. The public had phoned it in and the police had been on the scene immediately. I later found out that five Muslim houses in Angwan Rogo had been robbed and that people living in the area had thought it had been Christians attacking. The chief of police went on to encourage people to stop spreading rumours. There were no problems in Jos. The broadcast continued with interviews at the main market in Jos, where commerce was proceeding normally, the journalist claimed. People at the market said that they had heard the rumours but that everything was just as usual at the market.

As they provide us with real-time knowledge, rumours simultaneously ‘shape plans for action’ (Fine 2007:8). In Jos, rumours could make people stay at home, leave their homes, avoid or enter areas, calm people down or incite them to violence. What makes either rumours or news powerful is not whether they are true or not, but the power they possess to shape the world. By building on J. L. Austin’s arguments in his classic work How to Do Things with Words (1962), Das analysed the ‘perlocutionary’ force of rumours ‘to do something by saying something’. She argued that the rumours brought a new ‘form of death into existence’ (1998:125). Similarly, while acknowledging how rumours shaped people’s perception and actions, Michelle Osborn noted in her work in Kenya that they inten-
sified feelings of fear and panic and accelerated and increased violence (2008:316, 318, 321, 324).

In the midst of the violence in 2010, one resident of Jos said: ‘Ru-

mours are being spread and that is making people afraid. People are pan-

icking and telling their loved ones to come home’ (BBC 2010c). During

the crisis in 2001 – just as in previous conflicts in Jos (Plotnicov

1971:301f.) – rumours had played a large part in the escalation and


Rumours were something greatly feared. Like Angwan Rogo’s chief of

police, who wanted people to stop spreading rumours, the local govern-

ment authorities tried to counteract the rumours that were circulating and

being spread when Plateau State was declared in a state of emergency. It

was just a week after the day of the declaration that I heard for the first

time a message – or rather a jingle – on the local radio channels that

would be repeated continually through my entire stay in 2004. It declared

that people should stop spreading rumours, they should stop spreading

hearsay that they had not seen proof of, and if they had important infor-

mation they should report it to the proper authorities.

The capacity of poisonous needles, killer Indomie, or killer numbers to

reach you was connected to their ability to detach themselves from their

makers or senders and gain their own agency. Likewise, in the case of a

rumour, the perlocutionary force ‘would be lost if it was tethered to the

words of the speaking agent’ (Das 1998:127). The very power of ru-

mours emanates from the fact that they lack signatures, from the absence

of their being tied to an individual agent (ibid.:125). Through not being

attached to a specific person, rumours, like poisonous needles and evil

numbers, could move very far, cross almost any border, and affect people

like a ‘contagion and infection’ (ibid.:116).

Dewey has asked where an echo or an explosion is located (1925:603);

similarly, we could ask where a rumour, a poisonous needle, or a killer call

is to be found. He thought that we locate things in relation to where they

are perceived to be able to be generated or prevented. Thereby, “where”

signifies the point at which action should be directed to control the occur-

rence of the phenomenon’ (ibid.:604). By not being attached to a specific

agent, neither the rumour nor the killer call nor the poisoned needle could

be located and controlled until they had already reached and affected you.

They were all potentially everywhere and yet nowhere to be found.

Localised conflicts often went national. The violence during the Jos cri-

sis in 2001, like many other conflicts in Nigeria, spread to the most
northern and southern cities in Nigeria as reprisal attacks took place (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:253; HRW 2001:20). During continually renewed outbreaks of violence in Jos, police all over Nigeria in apparently peaceful cities took the streets to prevent possible spill-over. Like the fear of the potential of rumours to spread, there was an even greater fear of violence as a force that could spread very fast through unknown paths and reach anywhere.

During the January 2010 violence in Jos, the police public relation officer of Kaduna State to the north-west of Plateau State made assurances that the ‘Operation Yaki squad’ – a specialised police unit equipped with ‘state of the art patrol vans, motorcycles, bulletproof jackets, GPS and latest communication gadgets’ – was ‘battle-ready to deal with any possible spill-over’. While the squad furnished with the newest tools for communication patrolled crisis-prone areas in ‘full battle-ready uniforms’ (Alkali 2010), there were other forces that had also embraced the new technology. What were referred to as ‘short text hate messages’, which had initially circulated around Jos, now spread across Kaduna as well (Alkali 2010; BBC 2010b).

In Jos, inflammatory text messages had fuelled and escalated the violence that had spread across the city. According to some figures, over 145 different messages had been circulating. One of the reported messages declared: ‘War, war, war. Stand up... and defend yourselves. Kill before they kill you. Slaughter before they slaughter you. Dump them in a pit before they dump you’ (BBC 2010b). Another one warned Christians not to buy food from Muslims because it was poisoned. Another, addressed to Muslims, claimed that Jonah Jang, the governor of Plateau State, in an attempt to kill them, had ordered the water supply to Muslim-dominated areas in Jos to be cut off (Alkali 2010; BBC 2010b). There were also messages warning Christians that Muslims were going to attack churches over the weekend (BBC 2010b).

With the growing ownership of mobile phones, both violence (Last 2007:606) and rumours gained a new potency that enabled them to spread faster as well as further. In Jos, as in Kenya, rumours acquired ‘an instantaneous spread’ – they could go national in minutes (Osborn 2008:315f.). As local authorities in Jos had encouraged people to stop spreading rumours, other authority figures in Kaduna now urged people to ignore the text messages that were being sent with intentions of creating hatred and mistrust between Christians and Muslims. A Christian leader said:
We are living together peacefully in Kaduna, so there is no iota of truth in the text messages being circulated. Let both Christians and Muslims ignore the SMS messages because God is the only one who can protect us all; so let us all believe in Him and go about our daily activities without fear or favour. (Alkali 2010)

A Muslim leader appealed in a similar manner to people to ignore these messages and delete any they received. In his words: ‘They are only meant to cause panic and crisis in the state. So, when you get such SMS do not forward them to anyone’ (Alkali 2010).

The Invisible Side of Jos

With the crisis in 2001, feelings of suspicion and fear had become very present in Jos. People moved away from each other, areas were renamed, gates were closed, and no-go areas and no-go times emerged. As borders became thicker people stopped crossing them, but there were other things that increasingly did just that. These were forces that carried the ambiguous potential of either ruling your world or helping you rule it. As tools under your control, they could enable your sound to travel across any distance at any time, cure you, inform you about the state of Jos, or feed you. However, they could just as well appear as forces that were beyond your control. In the form of poisoned needles, killer calls, killer Indomie, and violent rumours, they could quite literally kill you. Moving, avoiding areas, or blocking other people’s movements could not obstruct or fool these forces because, being based on absence, they could travel any distance, cross any border, and find you anywhere. By being unlocalised, they had the potential of being anywhere.

With the crisis, not only did these forces increasingly appear as out of control, but their frequency was also amplified. The other’s medicine turned more and more poisonous, and also ever more present in the form of suspicions and accusations of poisoning as well as poisoned food, medicines, needles, injections, or missiles that were felt to move across the city. The growing ownership of mobile phones enabled people to move beyond distance but also to be found by others in ways never imagined before. In its wake, a new presence emerged – the killer calls. In a city where tensions and the fear of the other kept rising, so did the discrepancy between the radio waves and the rumours that were in the air. As an essential tool for grasping a world that emerged in unpredictable ways, the presence of rumours increased, and with the help of the mobile phone they, just like the violence, came to spread with unprecedented speed.
The emergent Jos was formed as much by forces that were highly mobile, unlocalised, invisible, and absent as by compartmentalised, visible, and present forces. In *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City*, Filip De Boeck described how there existed both a visible and an invisible city. Behind the visible city, he wrote, ‘lurks yet another city, an invisible but very audible city of whispers, […] consisting of fleeting words, questions, harmful suspicions and treacherous accusations’ (2004:50). Jos emerged as a city where ‘the uncertain, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and hazardous’ (Dewey 1929:42) parts of the world appeared in all their force. It was a fear of the absent, the unknown, that was evoked. Although they were built on an absence, killer numbers, suspicions of poisoning, poisoned needles, and rumours were ever present. They were the invisible side of Jos.
Before the crisis of 2001, Yakubu and Idris – both Muslim men who had lived and practiced medicine in Jos for many years – had been living in Kabong and Jenta Adamu, two neighbouring, mainly Christian areas to the west of central Jos. However, with the crisis neither of them felt safe there anymore and they ended up renting parts of the same house in the mainly Muslim Angwan Rogo. As a consequence of their relocation, Idris’s and Yakubu’s relationship was transformed. From being good neighbours, they found themselves in 2004 on opposing sides of a conflict, which before the end of the year had developed into different court cases as well as accusations of poisoning.

This was neither the first nor the last time I heard about practitioners trying to solve their conflicts through the use of the court system. In relation to different factions in the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners (NUMHP) in Jos – as well as conflicts between individual practitioners – there appeared a pattern of court cases similar to the rise in accusations of poisoning. When I met Jibril in the beginning of 2004, he referred to the persons who, in his words, had conducted the ‘illegal election’ and declared, ‘They took us to court, but we won. They did not appeal, but took us to another court again. We won again, since we had not done anything to them’. As I asked why they had taken them to court, he explained:

It was because we did not allow them to dupe people. They were spoiling our way and that was why we announced on the radio that the Union has never known those people. If somebody wanted information about those people they should either come directly to the University or the Ministry of Health. […] Those dupes argued that we had spoiled their names so they took us to court.

Jibril concluded, ‘This was how the misunderstanding between us and them came to be’.

The day after this conversation, Jibril was taken to the police by the same group of persons. As he later told me, this was connected to
Houwa’s participation in the meeting at Hadiza’s compound (see chapter 1). After the meeting, Houwa had informed the Hausa faction that Jibril was trying to form a separate indigene group within the union. They in turn had reported him to the police, who had questioned him about why he was trying to split the NUMHP. In 2007, the secretary, the treasurer, and some other persons of the Hausa faction were also taken to court. The case was connected to a workshop they had organised at the university in 2004. The case, which concerned embezzlement of union funds, continued to move around in the different courts in Jos for a long time.

In the words of anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff, a ‘culture of legality’ has become part of everyday experience in postcolonies all over the world (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006a:25). Already in the 1980s, D. D. O. Oyebola noted that many of the associations of practitioners of traditional medicine in Nigerian had engaged lawyers to draft their constitutions (1986:232). The copy of the constitution of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners to which I have had access lacked any date, but according to Jibril it had been composed in Kaduna in 1981 (NUMHP). Legality was a constant issue in union contexts, a matter that seems to have been encouraged at a visit to the Nigerian National Assembly in 1983, which was followed by a week-long hearing session with the Senate Committee during which traditional medicine organisations from all over Nigeria sought government recognition. A representative of a group called the African Medical Herbalists had been armed with their nineteen-page constitution, which led representatives of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners to become conscious of the force of legal practices, and they hired the services of a lawyer (Oyebola 1986:233ff.).

The practices of the union were not only legally formed by their constitution; they were also judged according to a general culture of legality and illegality. One of the most telling examples was the purported ‘illegal election’ mentioned above, an issue that was highlighted in a letter that Jibril wrote to the Ministry of Health. The letter had been ‘computerised’, as he called it, and copied onto the union letterhead. The heading listed the people elected under Ibrahim, the former chairman. Looking very official, the letter was written in very bureaucratic language with constant reference to legality. It was titled ‘PURPORTED ELECTION OF OFFICERS NIGERIA UNION OF MEDICAL HERBAL PRACTITIONERS, PLATEAU STATE BRANCH’.
As duly and legally elected Executive Members of the above named Association, We wish to notify you that the under mentioned Members are Still the leaders of our association in Plateau State. The said purported election was null and void and of no effect whatsoever. There was never any legal election in the State in the sense that it was only the coordinators of the Northern States Zone, who was presently in charge of the 19 Northern States and who is based at Madalla Junction, Jarkwa village. Abuja was not aware of such election.

Should there be any election in Plateau State the Zonal Coordinator would have written to the existing exco notifying Us of the reason for the election, venue, date as well as time. He would also have sent guidelines as well as Preceding officers for the election. We want to make it abundantly clear that those so called elected officers are only dissidents expelled from the Union for trying to deceive some Aids & H.I.V. Patients, an action that we considered dubious in nature and the law. We are therefore using the ample and golden opportunity to inform and advice the government as well as law enforcement agencies not to recognise, deal and entertain any Correspondence from them whatsoever. The certificate of registration of our Union is in our custody which proves that only legally and only elected officers are the custodian of the properties of the Union. We shall be pleased if you will speed up action and accordingly.

The letter was signed by the national secretary of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners.

The ‘language of jurisprudence’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006a:26) has become a part of everyday descriptions of people and practices. The most noticeable example might be the term ‘419’, which has not only become part of everyday language in Nigeria but has entered the vocabulary of many other countries as well. The term emerged in the 1980s during the country’s drastic economic decline and refers to the article in the Nigerian Criminal Code that deals with fraud. It was commonly used to describe the character of individuals (see Apter 1999:287; Smith 2008:79-81, 140). In 2004, while the tensions between the different factions within the union in Jos were steadily increasing, it also became more common for people to refer to each other in terms of 419. One person, for example, argued that the side opposing him ‘was all 419; they were dupes and everybody knew that’. The word was used in a similar vein in an invitation letter to a national meeting of the NUMHP in Abuja in 2004. The letter looked very official and was stamped with a union stamp. Towards the end of the invitation was written: ‘The attendance of all state chairman and secretaries only of all 36 states including Abuja is highly needed for the benefit of all herbalists in order to finish out 419 among us. What we
need is only treatment with our herbs and roots in Nigeria’. The letter was signed by the national executive secretary.

Life had become ‘judicialized’ and ‘lawfare’ had become a common ingredient in everyday conflicts (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006a:29-32), a fact made apparent in the turns that Idris’s and Yakubu’s relationship was going to take.

A Series of Court Appearances

Yakubu’s father and grandfather had both practised bori medicine, and Yakubu was seven years old when his grandfather began to teach him the trade. After going to a Koranic school he had given up the bori medicine, and in his own words he now exclusively performed the practices of a mallam. Forty-four years ago, as a young teenager, Yakubu had come to Jos to sell his medicines, but ended up settling down. As he explained, he had found a place that was blessed and where the weather was good for practising medicine. However, things changed.

At four o’clock on the Friday the crisis of 2001 started, Yakubu ran home, gathered his family, and took them to a police station in the area. For several days, they hid in an enclosed space together with both Muslims and Christians. While they were staying in the enclosure, two of his sons arrived at their house. Not knowing where the others had gone, they decided to spend the night there. While they were sleeping someone set the house on fire, but because they had a medicine that made them invisible, Yakubu’s sons were able to escape without being caught by the arsonists. Yakubu’s house, possessions, and goats, however, were all destroyed. He had moved to Angwan Rogo, where he was presently renting a house together with Idris.

Idris’s story was similar. He was in his sixties and had been born in the far north of Nigeria. Thirty-eight years before, he had just been passing by for a week’s visit to Jos. But God had had other plans and made him stay, as he explained. During the crisis in 2001 his house, too, had been destroyed. Idris’s wish for the future was to sell his land in Jenta Adamu and move permanently to an area behind his mattress shop in the centre of Jos. He was hoping to swap houses with a Christian family that wanted to leave this area and settle down in Jenta Adamu. He was having discussions with two families at the time, and while he was waiting for a possible swap he ended up renting the house together with Yakubu.

Like Yakubu, Idris had become a mallam. He had once described knowing a medicine that could be very useful if you were living in an area
where someone did not like you: it had the power to make the person move. But even though Idris had this medicine, he had been chased out of his own house.

I first heard in the middle of April 2004 that a court case was coming up that involved two practitioners of traditional medicine. But it was only some days later, when I met Jibril at the university, that I realised that the case involved Yakubu and Idris. Jibril had been summoned as a witness. It was a civil subpoena where Yakubu was suing Idris. Jibril had been summoned at the insistence of Yakubu, to testify the following morning, 15 April, in the Upper Area Court in Kasuwa Nama. Yakubu argued that Idris had slandered him and destroyed his reputation. He wanted 100,000 Naira as compensation.

The next morning Jibril and I shared a taxi heading towards the Upper Area Court. We met Idris in the courtyard. He was dressed in a black gown and burgundy-coloured trousers. The clothes were quite worn and a bit too small. He appeared to be very nervous, and his clothes made him look very ragged. We did not discuss the case, and it was decided that Jibril should go and find the judge and register his presence with him. The judge had gone out, but outside his office we bumped into Yakubu, who was very well dressed. He was wearing a new green gown with matching pants and a red hat. He was also wearing glasses that matched his outfit, and in his hand he held his car keys, which he kept playing with.

Jibril stated that he should not talk to any of the parties before the court proceedings, so we settled down outside the gate of the court. At around ten o’clock a law clerk summoned us to the courtroom. At the front of the oblong courtroom was a small stage with the judge’s desk, on which there were files about the different cases that were going to be brought forward. To the left of the desk sat a policeman with a gun in his holster. In front of the judge was a desk at which one female and one male clerk sat with their backs to the judge. In front of them were four bench rows where the lawyers sat. They were all dressed in black and white. Behind the lawyers were bench rows with spectators, witnesses, defendants, and plaintiffs. On each side of the lawyers was a podium. When a plaintiff was called he stood behind the podium on the right side, while defendants were called to the podium on the left side. If there was a lawyer connected to a case, he just stood beneath the person questioned.

All the plaintiffs and the defendants entered the courtroom through the front door, while witnesses and spectators entered from the back. After we had been seated for some time a few knocks could be heard. Every-
body stood up, a door in the front of the room was opened, and the judge, who wore a black suit, entered the court. While the judge bowed and sat down everybody else did the same. The first six cases that were brought forward were presented by a lawyer. They were all postponed to new dates and there were no discussions regarding the cases. Before the case between Yakubu and Idris was brought forward, two Muslim women presented their complaints. They went up and stood behind the podium on the right side. Neither of them had a lawyer, and the judge spoke directly to them. Throughout the day the judge spoke English with the lawyers, but when he turned to witnesses, plaintiffs, or defendants he spoke to them in Hausa.

After the two women it was time for the case between Yakubu and Idris. Idris went up and stood behind the podium on the left side and Yakubu positioned himself next to the podium on the right side. Neither of them had a lawyer, so they both spoke for themselves. The judge first asked Idris if he was the defendant and he answered that he was. He looked very small, nervous, and uncomfortable. Extremely well dressed, Yakubu, on the other hand, looked very sure of himself. The judge turned towards Yakubu and checked whether he was the right person, commenting that the file said that he was a doctor. He asked what kind of doctor he was. Yakubu explained in Hausa that he was a doctor na maganin garga-jiya, doctor of traditional medicine. The judge laughed and with irony in his voice asked if Yakubu could not cure his own trouble. Yakubu answered that he could. But like Idris, who in spite of having a medicine to make people leave, in the end had dealt with the situation by moving himself, Yakubu had resorted to the court system in his efforts to deal with the problems that his moving had created.

The judge went on to ask Yakubu if his witness was here, and he answered that he was. They then called Jibril, who went to stand behind the podium next to Yakubu. He was sworn in and the judge started to ask his personal details. He then asked if he knew what the problem was. Jibril answered that he did and started to relate how Idris and Yakubu had been living in Jenta Adamu and Kabong before the trouble in Jos, but that both of their houses had been burnt down during the crisis. Another medicine practitioner, who owned a house in Angwan Rogo but had moved to Imo State in the very south of Nigeria, had asked Jibril to find tenants for his house. Jibril had then contacted Yakubu and asked if he wanted to rent part of the house; it was a very big house with ten rooms.

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19 When practitioners referred to themselves as doctors – no matter what the language spoken – they always used the English word ‘doctor’.
Yakubu had said yes, and when Jibril had later asked Idris if he wanted to rent the other part of the house, he had responded in the same way. They had both moved in during the spring of 2002.

Jibril went on to recount that there had been a shortage of water in Angwan Rogo. According to Yakubu, Idris had accused him of selling water from the well in the house compound. It was not clear whether any water had been sold or even if any such accusations had been made, but Yakubu felt that Idris had tarnished his reputation. Jibril, on the other hand, seemed to think that the thing was a bit ridiculous, since selling water was not a very grave accusation. He went on to relate that Idris had asked him to come to the house to try to sort out the conflict. When Jibril arrived he had found Yakubu trying to beat Idris with a stick. The judge turned to Idris and asked if Jibril was telling the truth, and Idris answered that he was.

Jibril then asked the judge if his work was done or if he needed to come back later. The judge answered that his testimony was complete. He declared that they would adjourn and that the court case would be resumed on 6 May. Especially the stick part in Jibril's account seemed to have been working in Idris's favour rather than Yakubu's, and when Jibril and I left the court Idris came running after us. We started to chat and he seemed to be more relaxed and quite happy. He suggested that Jibril should be his witness the next time. Idris left us and Jibril and I continued on our own.

In spite of everything, the two opponents were staying together in the same house. The only difference was that the owner of the house had asked Jibril to collect the rent instead of Yakubu, who had been doing it before. By now, the fight had been going on for two years and according to Jibril, it was not likely that they would ever be friends again, even though their wives and children still were.

On 6 May, Jibril was once again called to testify, this time as Idris's witness. The judge, however, dismissed the case for lack of grounds. Yakubu did not give up, however, but took the case to another of Jos's Area Courts, where he once again accused Idris of destroying his reputation. The case came up on 29 May. This time, no one called Jibril as witness, which he was quite pleased about. The case was dismissed by the second court as well. In the beginning of June, however, the case between Yakubu and Idris was extended. This time, Yakubu took four different people to court: the owner of the house, Idris, the ward head of the area where the house in question was located, and, finally, one of the neighbours. The case was adjourned to the following day. Jibril told me
that he had passed by the court to try to mediate between Idris and Yakubu, but by now, Idris was very upset and had declared that he would take the case to the bitter end. Jibril had left both of them arguing outside the court.

In the beginning of July Jibril was once again called as a witness. The subpoena stated that he had been summoned as a witness for Yakubu and that the complaint was made against the ward head, who was mentioned by name, ‘and three others’. While he was showing me the subpoena Jibril remarked that the three others were the same as the last time. The text that followed declared that the four were suspected to have committed the offence of Criminal Defamation S. 392 P.C. (State the offence concisely with time and place) and it appears likely that you can give material evidence. You are hereby summoned to appear before Central Area Court II Jos on the 6th of July 2004 at 8:45 o’clock to testify as to what you know concerning the matter of the said complaint not to depart thence without permission and you are hereby warned that if you shall without just excuse fail to appear on the said date, a warrant will be issued to compel your attendance.

The letter was dated 5 July, but Jibril had not received it until the day after the date he was supposed to appear in court. It had not mattered that much, however, since the case had been adjourned to 2 August, on which date the case was once again postponed, to 30 September.

In being adjourned without any apparent reasons, the last case was similar to the previous ones, but it was different in terms of the accusation. After receiving the subpoena, Jibril explained to me that it concerned Yakubu’s accusing Idris and three others for alleging that he had slaughtered a camel. Registering my surprise, he added that Yakubu had supposedly slaughtered the camel because he wanted to kill Idris and the house owner so that he could have the house all to himself. The accusation of selling water had been a civil case and Yakubu had wanted 100,000 Naira in compensation, but the camel case was a criminal case of defamation. As such, and as Jibril’s subpoena indicated, it was judged according to section 392 of the Penal Code Act20 (1990a), which stated: ‘Whoever defames another shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years or with fine or with both’.

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20 Since 1959 in Nigeria there have been differentiations between the South and the North with respect to the criminal laws applied. The southern states basically kept the Criminal Code that had been implemented in 1916, while a different one, referred to as the Penal Code, was introduced for the northern states (Nmehielle 2004:735ff.; Williams 1967:79).
All Idris knew about the event was that Yakubu had slaughtered a camel and given him part of the meat as *sadaka*, alms. He had then prepared it himself and eaten it, but nothing had happened to him. Exactly how the alleged attempted murders had happened was never quite clear to anyone. The slaughtered camel case followed the same obscure pattern as most other cases involving poison. The practitioners rarely distinguished between ‘poison’ as a harmful substance that could be mixed with food or smeared on an arrow, and as a spell, needle, or talisman that worked through spiritual means. In understanding poison, it was not the exact manner in which it functioned that was important. Rather, it was defined by the obscurity in which an act of aggression was cloaked. But even if Jibril had no idea how the slaughtered camel had turned into a murder weapon and even laughed at the accusation, he was very bothered about how the situation was developing. There was no denying the turmoil that the incident had brought with it. However obscure the workings and paths of poison were, its consequences were very real.

In a courtroom, though, the obscure nature of many aspects of traditional medicine made them impossible to deal with or prove, since the court system could not judge issues of non-empirical, or ‘supernatural’, offences (see Aremu 1980; Ojo 1981). As Emanuel once explained, a court could not judge that which, in his words, was ‘not scientific’, because there was nothing they could see or prove. However, when the issue of the slaughtered camel had turned into a criminal case of defamation of character, acts that otherwise were perceived as non-provable, non-scientific, and belonging to the realm of traditional medicine had been able to enter the courtroom as something that could be recognised, substantiated, and dealt with.

Towards the end of May 2004, a month after the first court appearance, Yakubu moved out as a result of the conflicts. He chose to rent another house in Angwan Rogo while Idris and his family stayed on in the old house. But no more than a month later I got the first phone call from Yakubu asking me to come and visit him in his newly bought house in the same area. The compound, which had previously been owned by a Christian family, consisted of five small houses that were laid out like an L. One of the houses was Yakubu’s bedroom, another one was for his children, two others for his two wives, and the last one was his medicine room. When Jibril and I visited him, he started to talk about the last time I had been to his old house in Kabong and how the crisis had forced him to move and rent the house with Idris. In a very pleased voice he continued by describing how we now were visiting in his new house.
When I went to say goodbye to Idris before leaving Nigeria in 2004, he said he was sorry that he had nothing to give me. He had little to spend on presents, since the different court cases were costing him a lot of money. He had two court cases going on about the rented house – one about the selling of water and one about the slaughtered camel – and besides those, another one that concerned the land on which his old house had been built. His ownership had been questioned. He went on to relate that the water case was coming up in court again the next day. He was very tired and worried. This would be the fifth time they had gone to court for this case and on 30 September the camel case was coming up again.

He was still living in the house he had previously rented along with Yakubu’s family, but he was not happy there. He had a serious catarrh; his eyes were red and he had a running nose. Now, with the rainy season, there was a small flood outside his leaking house. When he went to bed he had all his clothes on, but he would still be freezing. As if this was not enough, there were also spirits in the house. Every night between twelve and two o’clock they kept knocking on the walls so that Idris and his family could not sleep. He did not know what they wanted, but they resided in the part that Yakubu had lived in.

With the house full of water and spirits, Idris really wanted to move, but he had not yet been able to switch houses. His old house in Jenta Adamu was worth more than the one belonging to the family he was currently discussing the exchange with and they did not want to pay the difference. He was stuck, and as he had done many times before, he returned to the fact that the crisis was the reason he had moved from Jenta Adamu, where he had lived for nineteen years. Everything had been better before; people had been friendlier, electricity and water supply had been more reliable. For Idris, his movements within Jos had caused him a lot of problems that at the time seemed almost impossible to settle.

While Yakubu and Idris put their hopes in the law as a tool for dealing with their conflicts as well as the obscure poison that had become part of their relationship, the outcome was unpredictable. Rather than solving anything, their struggle could just as well give rise to more unsolved situations. When my fieldwork in 2004 came to an end, the court cases and the conflicts between Idris and Yakubu were in no way resolved. The case regarding the slaughtered camel was to be brought up in Magistrate Court three more times. The first time, the judge asked them to present the case and then they adjourned. The second and third time, they went through the same process. After the third time, they decided to settle. No money or other compensation was paid; they just decided to leave their
arguments behind. They settled, but they were no longer friends and they did not talk to each other anymore.

**A Matter of Transduction**

The Penal Code Act (1990b: section 214-219) includes a chapter that deals with ‘Offences Relating to Ordeal, Witchcraft and Juju’ (*Juju* is a pejorative word often used to refer to various activities that are seen as religiously improper). Witchcraft, sorcery, workings with spirits, and other elements of what was perceived as traditional medicine were commonly included in this category. Among other things, the text declares that it is illegal to represent oneself as having the powers of witchcraft, but also that it is illegal to accuse someone of being a witch (ibid.: section 216), highlighting how the law restricts people’s possibility to take conflicts of this kind to court. However, in a manner similar to the instance of the slaughtered camel, there were ways in which the non-scientific and illegal force of witchcraft could enter the court.

In August 2004 I met Musa ‘the witch doctor’ for the first time in his compound in the countryside outside Jos. He was in his fifties, and was the only practitioner I ever heard people refer to as a ‘witch doctor’, and he was also the only person I ever met who called himself a ‘witch’. Musa had been the only one among his siblings to inherit his father’s medicine, and he had gained additional skills when, as he put it, a witch had opened his eyes. It was also then that he had gained the skill of recognising other witches.  

When we had settled down in Musa’s medicine room he asked me why I had chosen to come and visit him. I told him that it all had started with a discussion about a witchcraft case that had been taken to court. Since people had told me that he knew everything about taking these kinds of cases to court, I had decided to visit him. He answered that it was all very good that I had come. He went on to explain how you could pass a spirit without it attacking you, but this was not the case with witches; they were always after you. They were pure evil and they always ate human flesh. If a witch came to a rich man and asked for money and the rich man said that he had no money, the witch would slowly start to eat him. Musa

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21 Fisiy and Geschiere have emphasised a similar ambivalence in Cameroon towards the witch doctor or witch finder as also potentially having the same power as a witch. In a way, they became ‘the champion of all witches’ (Fisiy & Geschiere 1990; Geschiere & Fisiy 1994).
himself became a witch during the night. He changed shape and travelled to a place where he and the other witches came together. When he arrived they would ask him what he had brought and he would show them all the human flesh that he had taken with him. It all ended with a feast.

Hanging from Musa’s ceiling was a tool for determining if someone was a witch. It was a technique that he had inherited from his father. It consisted of a string with a moveable calabash on it. To use it, you moved the calabash towards the ceiling and released it. If it got stuck on its way down, the person was a witch.

In other instances of suspected witchcraft cases, guilt could also be discerned by drinking a concoction that would show whether or not the accused was guilty. Before the trial, the accused had to sign a document declaring that he or she underwent the examination out of free will. I was told that this was done in an attempt to avoid future charges, since trial by ordeal was illegal. The document also stated that the accused promised to accept the result as true. Thus, if the test showed that the person was a witch and he or she denied this later, the case could be taken to court as a breach of contract.

In the middle of our conversation a young man entered the room. He had come to discuss a witch case that had been taken to the High Court in Nasarawa, a state bordering on Plateau. It had started with the young man having accused his older brother of being a witch, something the brother denied. Both of them had then travelled to Musa to prove their cases. When they arrived at Musa’s place along with their different witnesses they first signed an agreement stating that if the older brother was found guilty of being a witch he should pay his younger brother 18,000 Naira. Musa had then performed the test. The calabash got stuck on the string on its way down, and the older brother started vomiting all the human flesh he had eaten. After the vomiting subsided he confessed to being a witch, and his witnesses now ran away.
The older brother refused to pay the agreed amount and some months later also withdrew his confession. The younger brother then took him to court, not accusing him of being a witch – which in itself would have been illegal – but of having breached the contract they had signed. In court he once again denied being a witch. The judge then asked him if he had any witnesses of his own who could prove this, but since the witnesses had run away he had none. As he still refused to pay the money, he was currently being held in jail waiting for the case to be brought up again in court. I asked the younger brother if his brother had killed anyone or what had happened to make him accuse him of being a witch. He answered that his brother had just been bad mannered.

Arenas or tools available to deal with problems come to shape how the problems are defined; they become named in relation to what can be done to them. By the same token, problems can also be redefined in relation to new solutions (Spector & Kitsuse 2001:84). An accusation of poisoning can become a case of criminal defamation of character, and a witchcraft accusation a case of breach of contract. In the cases of both the slaughtered camel and the bad-mannered brother, issues belonging to the realm of traditional medicine were rephrased into a legal framework. What had occurred was not a mere translation of meaning from one context to another. Nor was it a transformation into something completely different.

Michael Silverstein drew attention to the meaning that is found in the pragmatic aspects of language, in what words do rather than in what they denote in a lexical sense. To refer to how meaning in this sense can be conveyed between different contexts, he used the word ‘transduction’. A term used in one language in a specific context is replaced by another word that has the same performative effects in another language in another specific context (Silverstein 2003:83f., 86f.). Through transduction, the court system appeared as a new context for dealing with the non-scientific and illegal forces of poison and witchcraft. The witchcraft accusation had been transduced to enable it to give rise to the same actions and reactions in the courtroom as it had previously done in Musa’s medicine room. By being transduced from a system of traditional medicine to a judicial one, the younger brother’s aim of making his older brother confess and pay the fine had been able to enter the courtroom. Similarly, Yakubu, through transducing the accusation of poisoning into a case of criminal defamation of character, found a way to handle within a legal context an issue that had previously belonged to the context of traditional medicine.
Safeguarding the Nation

Last described how, with the reintroduction in 2000-2001 of the full corpus of sharia in several of the northern states of Nigeria, people experienced that they were living in a ‘mixed-up world’ that was approaching its end time. The implementation of the new law was seen as a way to deal with these increasing feelings of insecurity in both the physical and spiritual realms (Last 2008). The movement towards bringing everyday life under the terms of law in this manner has been seen as connected to an imagery of widespread metaphysical disorder that haunts postcolonies – a dialectic of law and disorder emerge where law and lawlessness become mutually dependent, forming each other’s potential (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006a; Geschiere 2006).

These feelings of a mounting spiritual disorder that were growing across the continent corresponded to the increase in highly moveable, unlocalised, invisible, and absent poisonous forces that many people in Jos experienced. As attempts to deal with poison failed, they were pursued from context to context. With Idris and Yakubu, this landscape of poison moved into the courtroom and a new arena opened up for handling forces that appeared next to uncontrollable. However, it was not just practitioners of traditional medicine who were trying to control the paths and workings of poison through legal means; there was a national project working in the same direction. Several of Nigeria’s laws pertain to these issues (Erhun et al. 2001:24f.). For example, in the Poisons and Pharmacy Act (1990), under ‘As to Sale and Possession of Poison for Unlawful Purposes’, it is written:

41. In this Part of this Act, the terms “poison” or “poisonous matter” mean and include all animal, vegetable and mineral poisons.

42. A person who sells or transfers, makes or possesses a poison or poisonous matter, with the intent that it shall be used for an illegal purpose is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine of two hundred naira, or to imprisonment for a term of two years, or to both fine and imprisonment.

44. A person found in possession of arrows or other weapons or missiles, which contain or bear upon them any poison or poisonous matter or any concoction of decomposed or other animal matter or ingredient of a poisonous nature is liable to the penalties provided in section 42 of this Act and the forfeiture of the arrows, weapons or missiles.
In addition, in 1993 a parastatal organisation was established to control and safeguard the nation from poisonous forces. In 2003, Dr. Dora N. Akunyili, then chief of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), explained that the organisation had been established with the purpose to control and regulate the manufacture, importation, exportation, distribution, advertisement, sale and use of food, drugs, cosmetics, chemicals, detergents, medical devices, and all drinks including our popular ‘pure water’ otherwise called Regulated Products. The scope of this mandate puts the responsibility of safeguarding public health on the Agency, and this touches on the life of every Nigerian. (Bivbere 2003)

Akunyili gained a reputation for being incorruptible and became greatly respected for her commitment to the task of protecting the nation against hidden dangers. Internationally, she received acknowledgment for her battle against the false pharmaceuticals so ubiquitous in Nigeria (FUG 2005). In 2004 not a single day went by that you did not see NAFDAC’s commercial on television or news reports that NAFDAC had seized poisonous medicine or food. One commercial showed how the agency destroyed different products by driving over big piles with large vehicles, leaving goods that were smashed to pieces and were later set ablaze. It was like a ritual destruction and burning of poison. Through the language of the law, its path had been blocked and it had been put out of circulation.

Within NAFDAC there had also emerged a growing wish to control traditional medicine in ways similar to those for Western medicine. In 2007, on one of my many visits to NAFDAC’s office at the Federal Secretariat in Jos, the deputy director told me how the organisation’s approach to traditional medicine had changed over the years. Initially, it had only tested medicines suspected of being poisonous that the police had brought in. With the turn of the new millennium there had been a gradual shift from criminal forensics to registering medicines. A registration was initiated with an application, followed by laboratory tests to ascertain that the medicine was free of toxic elements, and ended with the product’s receiving a NAFDAC number – as a guarantee that NAFDAC had declared that it was not poisonous.

To register a traditional medicine was a relatively expensive affair at the time – the cost for one medicine was somewhere between 25,000 and
In 2007 one of the more successful practitioners in Jos registered a medicine against cancer. When I entered his shop it was covered with stickers from NAFDAC and the walls were full of shelves of medicines that were packaged very nicely. He was doing really well and he was planning to register more medicines. He showed me a bottle with the NAFDAC number he had received when he registered the product and explained that he had prepared it with pure water according to NAFDAC standards.

30,000 Naira. In Jos I knew only one practitioner who had been able to register a product. During a meeting with the person in charge of issues connected to traditional medicine at the office in Jos, that person complained that while practitioners of traditional medicine and governments in other African countries cooperated and medicines were controlled, things were very different in Nigeria.

Still, at another level, NAFDAC’s language of law greatly influenced the practices of traditional medicine. When Jibril wrote the letter to the Ministry of Health emphasising that action must be taken against the group that had conducted ‘the illegal election’, because they were deceiving patients by claiming that they could cure HIV, the statement was made in relation to NAFDAC. As the person in charge of traditional

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22 In 2007 the official exchange rate between the USD and the Naira was 1 to 120–125.
It was illegal to claim to be able to cure AIDS. It was also unacceptable to allege that one medicine could cure an unreasonable number of conditions. Nothing could cure all diseases, he argued. It was very common among practitioners of traditional medicine to hear that a medicine could cure a very wide range of different illnesses, and NAFDAC had decided that you could only claim that a medicine could cure three things. Though apparently quite arbitrary, this number was embraced by many practitioners. It was not uncommon to hear them list three things that their medicine could cure and echo the phrase that nothing could cure everything.

Nevertheless, traditional cures for HIV/AIDS were still very common, and many practitioners had medicines that they claimed could cure almost everything. Even if the wish existed to control the highly extensive and complex field of traditional medicine, it was obvious how difficult such a task would be. But the ambition, and the fact that it was phrased in the
language of legality, is in itself significant. NAFDAC’s growing prominence at this particular time might not have been a coincidence. An increasing awareness of poisonous forces combined with the use of the law is connected to experiences – not unique to Nigeria – of an increasing disorderliness on the one hand and the ever more present appeal of the law on the other (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006b:viii).

The Obscure Path of Judgment

In Nigeria there are three parallel legal systems operating: the common law system with its Magistrate and High Courts, and the systems of sharia law and customary law. In addition to these three systems, there are also differentiations within the customary law, as Nigeria’s many ethnic and religious groups have their different laws (Akande 1991). In Jos, at the state level, are the High Court of Justice, the Customary Court of Appeal, and the Sharia Court of Appeal (Plateau State Government 2004c). Below the state level are the Magistrate Courts and the Area Courts. The Area Court system came into being in 1966, after the military seized power. The structures and operations of customary courts were reorganised, and the Native Courts in the south were named Customary Courts and the ones in the northern states – including Benue-Plateau State, which the present Plateau State was part of at the time – were named Area Courts (see Nwogugu 1976:2, 14; Obilade 1969:28ff.; 1973:228).

Unlike the state level in Plateau, where customary and sharia issues were brought up in two different courts, the Area Court system in Jos handled both sharia and customary issues. While criminal cases in the Area Court system were judged according to the Penal Code of Northern Nigeria, civil matters were judged according to the ethnic and religious belonging of the people involved. The Area Courts did not have very high status in the judicial system. They were often seen as a bit of a joke, and lawyers generally did not attend them or take them seriously – as one lawyer said, ‘You can hear all kinds of stories about what is going on in the Area Courts’. Lawyers preferred to handle court cases in the Magistrate Courts or higher. On the occasions when I attended Area Courts, most people did not have lawyers with them and if they did, the lawyers looked very young and inexperienced. The general picture among people was that it was mostly people from the lower strata of society who brought cases before an Area Court, while educated and more well-off people preferred to bring their cases to a Magistrate Court. In the Magistrate Court and higher you needed to have a lawyer, which greatly in-
creased the cost. The absence of such a demand in the Area Courts meant that they were more accessible for poorer people. Through this, a form of segregated system was created.

The court called for its own tools. Many people would not enter the courtroom without medicine. Houwa – the bori queen of Jos – had, for example, once stated that if you had to go to court and everything seemed to be against you, you should come to her. She would know what needed to be done for the case to be treated benevolently. A general feeling existed that use of the court system was a sort of gamble with an unpredictable outcome. Rather than the law, other things, such as corruption (Smith 2008:174), wickedness, bad luck, or medicine seemed to determine the judgment.

Just as the path of poison was obscure, so, too, was the path of judgment. In the Area Courts there was generally a great deal of confusion among spectators, witnesses, plaintiffs, and defendants as well as lawyers about which laws would apply to a specific case. On one of my visits to Idris’s mattress shop, when he, Jibril, and I were reflecting upon the long (and growing) series of different courts in which Idris and Yakubu had met, we tried to sort out which laws had been used. Everyone agreed that with the slaughtered camel, the conflict had turned into a criminal case. Since the sharia law and the customary law were applied only to civil cases in Plateau State, we were all agreed that both in the Area Court and later, when the case had moved to the Magistrate Court, it had been judged according to the Penal Code of Northern Nigeria. On the other hand, while we agreed that the water case had been a civil case, no one was really sure of which law had been applied; had it been sharia law, since both Yakubu and Idris were Muslims? Or had it been Hausa customary law, since Yakubu was Hausa? Or perhaps Fulani customary law, since Idris was Fulani? Or had it been some other one altogether?

The obscurity of the court process also increased with the two cases being continually adjourned, postponed, or dismissed without any apparent pattern or reason and without either Idris or Yakubu understanding why. This was not unique to Yakubu’s and Idris’s cases. It is common that cases in the higher courts wait three to six years before being brought up, and the Area Courts ‘are characterized by delay, lack of due process, abuse of judicial power, and corruption’ (Manby 2004:184). In the context of courts in the common law system, Johannes Harnischfeger concluded that they ‘do not work predictably. Court cases often drag on for years, only to end in arbitrary judgments because the crucial agreements are made be-
hind the scenes. Even within the courtrooms it remains obscure to the uninitiated observer, how the truth is established’ (2008:170).

For Idris, the obscurity was also increased by the judge’s switching continually between English and Hausa. Since neither Idris nor Yakubu spoke English, half the time they did not understand what the judge was saying or what the discussion was about. In addition to the switching between Hausa and English, the legal terms belonged to a language of their own, which neither Idris nor Yakubu were fluent in. Both the words and the practices of the courtroom were hidden under a veil of obscurity.

In his article ‘The Importance of Knowing about Not Knowing’, Last raised the question ‘of how much people know, and care to know, about their own medical culture and how much a practitioner needs to know in order to practice medicine’ (1992:393). He argued that not-knowing could actually be an institutionalised part of a medical culture. In northern Nigeria he found a flourishing traditional medicine that was part of a ‘nonsystem’ rather than a medical system. He wrote: ‘In short people really do not know, truly “don’t know” through a combination of secrecy, uncertainty, and scepticism’ (ibid.:401). The same could be said about the judicial ‘system’.

Still, even if the proceedings were shrouded in mystery for both Yakubu and Idris and their outcome appeared highly unpredictable, they nevertheless turned to the courts. Just as people’s attention was directed towards counteracting poison rather than understanding its path, it was clear that what was important for both Idris and Yakubu was to find ways to deal with their problematic situation, not to understand how the judicial system worked.

Whyte has noted that when people are struck by illness they strive to find treatments – relief of symptoms – rather than answers to how the illness and the potential cure correlate with any abstract systems (2002:178f.), and so it was with Idris and Yakubu. The court became a counter-medicine. No matter that the process was obscure and its outcome uncertain; the court with its culture of legality was a tool, or maybe rather represented a hope, of being able to counteract the increasing presence of conflict and poison. As Galina Lindquist noted, when the world cannot be predicted people ‘hope’ for beneficial outcomes rather than making calculated choices based on ‘trust’ in systems (2000:317ff.).
Poisoned Relations and Landscapes

The judicial system has been ‘attributed an almost magical capacity to accomplish order’ – as a form of guardian against disorder (Comaroff & Comaroff 2004:192), but obscure and inefficient court systems come to leave their own trail of increasing feelings of disenchantment and disarray as they confirm the very disorder they try to dissolve (Geschiere 2006:230, 232, 236f.). The quarrel between Yakubu and Idris had taken them through a seemingly endless series of court sessions with little or no success for either of them. Despite the amount of energy invested in the court cases, they dissolved into nothing and the hostility remained. As Dewey remarked: ‘Action to get rid of the objectionable has no warrant of success and is itself perilous’ (1930:213).

When Jibril and I passed by just around the corner from Idris’s shop in 2007, he pointed at a house on the left side of the street and told me that this was Idris’s new house. He had moved there a year earlier from Angwan Rogo and the house he had once shared with Yakubu. On the opposite side of the street, several houses had been burnt down during the crisis, and in 2004 they had just been ruins, marked with messages such as ‘be aware of 419’, and ‘this house is not for sale’. Like ‘Sharia line’, these inscriptions told the story of a life in which people looked to the law to counteract consequences that the crisis had left in its trail. However, new two-storey buildings had now been built in place of the ruins. Compared to the surrounding houses they looked very exclusive. It was clear that they were not inhabited by the same tenants as before. This part of the centre of Jos, a place full of ruins, had turned into a landscape dotted with new Muslim luxury houses.

Then, turning the corner, we found Idris in his mattress shop. He had sold his house in Jenta Adamu to a Christian Igbo family and I imagined that Idris’s old house had been rebuilt by a rich Christian, just as the burnt-down houses here had been rebuilt by well-off Muslims. He went on to tell me that only Christians lived in that area now. All the Muslims who used to live there had moved. On the other hand, in the centre where he was living now, only Muslims were living. No Christians stayed in the area anymore, he concluded.

When we left Idris, Jibril told me that Yakubu was planning to move from Jos to Bauchi State, further north, where he was building a new house. The head office of his business would still be in Jos, but he no longer wanted to live there with his family. Relationships and landscapes had changed, and both Yakubu and Idris tried to deal with these altered circumstances through the different tools available, even if the world and
the tools employed to deal with it were equally uncertain. All in all, as an action to get rid of the objectionable, moving seemed far more rewarding than employing either medicine or law.
6. To be Part of a Place

Once, when Jibril was telling me about the time the union – the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners, Plateau State Branch – had been given the office at the University of Jos, he related how he had been travelling all over Nigeria in those days, collecting herbs. The bori practitioners, such as the bori king of Jos and Mai Lafiya, also part of the inner group of the union, had likewise been travelling to different bori festivals all the time. Since they were storing all the collected herbs in the union’s office at the university they had needed someone who could be in the office full time to receive, register, and organise the steady flow of incoming new herbs. The choice had fallen upon Hadiza, since she had been the only one who was sufficiently settled.

With the grant of the office at the pharmacology department in 1984, the university became a place of importance for the members of the union. However, with the crisis, it became increasingly difficult for many members to gain access to the university grounds. Tensions emerged between members who were torn between trying to retain their connections to the university as a place of importance – as well as to old friends – and rejecting them altogether. It is these struggles I try to bring forth here.

Matters of Herbs and Spirits

Through the years there had been a continuing fight about what person the union office at the pharmacology department belonged to. Although Mai Lafiya, Jibril, and Hadiza were all listed under the ‘Consultant Herbalists’ heading on the A4 paper attached to the union’s office door, only Hadiza’s name was displayed on the official university sign above the door. Mai Lafiya, however, told me that the office at the university had initially been given to him. He had been introduced to one of the professors in the department, who not only had given him the office but also had congratulated him for successfully delivering herbs that had been requested. Mai Lafiya claimed that it was he who had made Hadiza a
member of the union in the first place. When Hadiza talked about the move from the cultural centre in Jos to the office at the university’s department of pharmacology, she maintained that it had not been given to Mai Lafiya, even if he was the chairman at the time, and that Mai Lafiya had never, in fact, had an office at the university. Instead, the room had been assigned to her. Browsing through one of her many piles of paper, she located a paper dated 1987 which showed that she was already connected to the pharmacology department by then. Hadiza claimed that her name had been on the office door the whole time.

Of the old group at the cultural centre, only Mai Lafiya, Jibril, and Hadiza were still living in Plateau State. The others had left. The last to leave had been the bori king, who moved to Bauchi after the crisis of 2001. In 2004, when I met with the pharmacology professor in his department office, the original plan had been that Hadiza, Jibril, the professor, and I would get together to discuss the history of the relationship between the department and the practitioners of traditional medicine. Even though Mai Lafiya had been part of this relationship from the very beginning, it was not once suggested that he participate in this meeting. Over the years, Mai Lafiya’s relationship with the university had become problematic.

Given that in the end neither Hadiza nor Jibril had been able to attend the meeting, the professor and I sat down on our own that day. He recalled that at the cultural centre, Mai Lafiya had been the chairman but that Jibril and Hadiza had also been part of the inner group. Commenting on the different names that were displayed on the union door, the professor told me that he knew that the other practitioners were complaining that Hadiza was the only person who had a room. All of the practitioners wanted to gain from the collaboration. They too wanted their own rooms. The professor’s wish was to give Hadiza one office and to keep another office for meetings for all practitioners. When the union was given the office at the university, its members had chosen Hadiza as their representative. The reason was that Hadiza was a woman, and so she did not move around so much – and that she knew a bit of English. Eventually the pharmacology department had employed her as a consultant. The
professor said that he had liked her from the very beginning, because she had been so ‘organised’ – even before they met she had set up a clinic in her home village. He added that he was very happy that she was not working with spirits, only with herbs.

The professor stressed the necessity that practitioners clean up their practices, a task that ideally should rest with the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), but he also acknowledged that it would be hard for them, given that a lot of the traditional medicine was a mixture of the herbal and the spiritual. The professor went on to say, by way of example, that some practitioners who delivered herbs to the department thought that certain plants needed to be picked at night, for spiritual reasons. He declared that this was a misunderstanding. The scientific explanation was that their flowers were active during the night, and the medicinal substances were thus more concentrated. He disapproved of spiritual explanations and of medical practices that included work with spirits. He asked me if I was aware that May Lafiya did that.

The department of pharmacology shared its interest in the herbal side of traditional medicine with universities and pharmaceutical companies all over Africa. This trend has led to a move towards ‘herbalism’ among associations of traditional medicine since the 1980s (Chavunduka & Last 1986:263f.). In this spirit, the president of ‘Nigeria Real Traditional Medicine Practitioners’ complained in 2003 about the ‘dubious’ nature of some practitioners. She argued that instead of using herbs and roots, the dubious practitioners performed incantations and rituals. She concluded that ‘the authentic practitioners do not perform rituals, rather, they use roots and herbs as a traditional means of healing ailments’ (Tyonongo 2003).

As a trend, the move away from practices that could be taken to be sorcery towards an emphasis on the ‘medical’ herbs has also been connected to the implementation of different witchcraft regulations, ordinances, and acts all over colonial Africa as well as to the adoption of Christianity (Chavunduka & Last 1986:263). The chapter ‘Offences Relating to Ordeal, Witchcraft and Juju’ in the Penal Code of Northern Nigeria declares many parts of what is perceived as traditional medicine to be illegal (Penal Code Act 1990b: section 214-219). Although they differ when it comes to punishments, the newly introduced sharia penal codes have much the same effect, as they retain almost the same wordings (see Miles 2003:68f.; Peters 2003:41). In fact, efforts to circumscribe practices relating to spirits are not new to northern Nigeria. Legal processes to
that effect appeared as far back as the beginning of the nineteenth century (Tremearne 1912:257; 1913:148).

Changing Names

This trend towards favouring herbalism had affected Mai Lafiya in no small way. Mai Lafiya, like all bori practitioners I have worked with, saw himself as a good Muslim (Andersson 2002: 4ff; see also Shuaibu 1990:198). He had even gone on hajj, pilgrimage, to Mecca no less than seven times. His path as a bori practitioner had started when he fell seriously ill as a teenager. All signs of life had disappeared and everybody thought he was dead. But to the shock and horror of the people in the village, he had woken up the next day and started walking around. They told him that he could not be Mai Lafiya, since he had died the day before. But his mother saw that he really was her son and gave him a hug. Mai Lafiya had been fine and explained that a white doctor wearing a white medical coat and a stethoscope had come to him. The doctor had looked at Mai Lafiya and given him an injection.

Since that day, Mai Lafiya had worked with this spirit; in 2004 it was on both Fridays and Sundays. When possessed by the White Doctor he could no longer speak or understand Hausa, but only English, French, German, and other languages associated with white people. From within Mai Lafiya’s body, the White Doctor administered medicine and gave advice to patients. He liked to smoke St. Moritz menthol cigarettes or, if they were not available, Benson & Hedges. He drank whisky like water – there seemed to be no limit to how fast and how much he could drink.

Although he continued to practice the same medical work, Mai Lafiya kept changing what he called it. In 2000 he said that he used to be a bori practitioner but that he was now a mallam. While bori was associated with ‘tradition’, ‘backwardness’, and ‘illiteracy’, being a mallam working with the Koran held higher prestige (Masquelier 1994:12). However, in 2004, when I reminded Mai Lafiya about how he had described the shift he had made, he got upset and claimed that he had never been a bori practitioner. He pointed out that there were different forms of medicine practitioners. You had the mallam, who copied texts from the Koran on notes, dissolved the ink in water, and gave it to you to drink. Then there were also people who used prayers against illnesses and other problems. Further, there were individuals who just dealt with herbs, and they were called mai magani, possessors of medicine. There were many different categories of
practitioners, but he was a mai magani, and he was working exclusively with herbal medicine.

As Mai Lafiya continued explaining, the blurred and contradictory nature of his medicine became increasingly apparent. Even if he firmly emphasised the herbal side of his medicine, he pointed out that the spirits gave him the names of medicines in his dreams. During our conversation he switched between using iska and aljan as terms for spirit. Through the years, the Hausa term for spirit, iska (plural iskoki), has been interpreted as the jinn of the Koran, to the extent that the Arabic term jinn and the Hausa term iskoki are many times used interchangeably, along with aljanu (singular aljan), which is the Hausa translation of jinn (see Besmer 1983:8f.; Greenberg 1946:28, 60; Wall 1988:157). When I asked Mai Lafiya about his use of both iskoki and aljanu he told me that they were the same and added that so was the Arabic world jinn. He concluded that all terms were the same in the sense that they all meant spirit, but iska evoked connotations of tradition and ‘paganism’, while aljan and jinn referred to more modern practices and the Koran. To be a mallam working with aljanu was more respectable from Mai Lafiya’s perspective than being a bori practitioner working with iskoki.

In 2007, when I and Abbas, one of Mai Lafiya’s sons who also practiced medicine, settled down to talk, he strongly emphasised that he did not work with spirits and was not interested in this path. As he said, he just wanted to go to the bush and pick his herbs and then use them. He also told me that his now eighty-seven-year-old father had given up working with the spirits a year before in favour of pure herbal work. The spirits had told him that he was too old for this work and had started working instead with Abbas’s older brother, who since then had been working on the same days and with the same spirits as his father had done. So on Fridays and Sundays, Mai Lafiya’s elder son called on the White Doctor spirit, who entered his body, put on the white robe, and started to drink whisky, smoke cigarettes, and give medicine and advice to patients.

To the professor, and many other people connected with the university, working with all spirits, no matter what they were called, was equally unwelcome. The fact that, in this context, Mai Lafiya – despite performing the same work – changed the way he referred to himself, from being a bori practitioner working with iskoki, to being a mallam working with aljanu, and finally to being a mai magani working with herbs, conveyed its own messages. It was a process that spoke of wishes of belonging and inclusion. The fact that in the end it was not just a matter of what to call things but that after seventy years Mai Lafiya actually stopped working
with spirits and, like his younger son, turned to exclusively using herbs, also illustrated how the university’s department of pharmacology was influencing the medicine that was practiced in Jos.

**Obstructed Office Relations**

However, in a Jos where the wall surrounding the university was becoming increasingly hard to cross, Mai Lafiya’s efforts did not make much difference. While he before the crisis in 2001 would often hang around at the union office, taking part in all union meetings and frequently visiting the pharmacology department and my former field supervisor, I, in 2004, saw him only once at the university. At the time, a rumour was circulating among the mainly Christian staff of the pharmacology department that Mai Lafiya had fought against Christians during the crisis of 2001 and that this was the reason he no longer entered the university grounds, which was only a few hundred metres from his house in Angwan Rogo. Mai Lafiya, on the other hand, had told me that during the crisis several of the patients in his house had been indigenes and he had protected them. When I told Jibril about the rumour, he stated that it was not good to talk about these kinds of things if one did not know for sure.

When the professor told me one version of this rumour I replied that things were a bit tense here at the university. They had even closed off the entrance gates facing Angwan Rogo and it was possible that Mai Lafiya no longer felt welcome. The professor replied by pointing out that Jibril was also Muslim, but he still entered the university grounds. He thought for a while and added that Jibril, unlike Mai Lafiya, who only spoke

Below: Angwan Rogo. To the right: the university wall.
Hausa, also spoke English. This skill gave him an access or made him belong to the university and the pharmacology department in ways that Mai Lafiya could not. In a similar manner, Hadiza’s knowledge of English, albeit rudimentary, had been instrumental in her being given access to the office.

The fact that Jibril, unlike Mai Lafiya, had access to the university created a distance between the two that had not been there before. It had been Jibril who introduced me to Mai Lafiya in 2000. They had been very close. Actually, the first time I visited Mai Lafiya’s home in Angwan Rogo he had not been there, and Jibril had introduced it as his compound and Mai Lafiya’s family as also his own. It was only when Mai Lafiya returned from a visit to the city of Kano some weeks later that I had realised that Jibril’s home was actually Mai Lafiya’s. In 2004, however, at a Tuesday meeting organised by Jibril, he related a rumour that Mai Lafiya was going around telling people that practitioners who took part in the meetings at the university would be arrested; in Mai Lafiya’s opinion these were illegal meetings, since they had been arranged by people without authority to do so. Although Mai Lafiya had expressed concerns that the Hausa faction might think that Jibril was standing in their way and had urged him to be careful, it was obvious that Jibril and Mai Lafiya, on this occasion, were on different sides of both the union and the university wall.

It was not just that certain passages were blocked or that individuals avoided certain areas; places in themselves created distances between people. In a similar manner, Hadiza and Mai Lafiya had been good friends, but a changed Jos had also changed their relationship. At an earlier union meeting in 2004, it was related that Mai Lafiya was annoyed; he was going around telling people that they should not attend the meetings at the university, since Hadiza was the only one who gained anything by it.
Hadiza was likewise very disappointed with Mai Lafiya. During the last five years her father, three of her children, and her husband had died. It had been a very hard time for her. Despite the fact that they had worked together for so long, in the year that had passed since her husband’s death Mai Lafiya had not once stopped by her home in mainly Christian Gada Biyu to tell her that he was sorry. At this time, Hadiza and Mai Lafiya found themselves on two different sides not only of the herbal/spiritual, indigene/settler, and Christian/Muslim divide, but of the university/Angwan Rogo divide as well.

Changing Clothes

As the line between areas where people felt part of a place or out of place became sharper, people also became increasingly aware of how they could or could not move, and how they had to act if they crossed the thresholds in the city. Before they entered places of the others, people started to check themselves and what they were wearing. Were there any outer signs that might reveal that they did not belong? Several times I observed how people who usually wore perceived Western and Christian clothes or traditional and Muslim clothes changed their attire depending on the place they were going to visit. In 2004, when one of the families with whom Idris wanted to switch his house in Jenta Adamu with came to see him at his mattress store, the husband and Idris after greeting moved their discussion just outside the shop, while the wife waited further away along the roadside looking very uncomfortable. She had a veil, and I wondered if she was Muslim. Jibril, sitting next to me inside the shop, thought she could not be, since no Muslim would want to live in Jenta Adamu. After the family left, Idris told us that she was Christian. She had only been wearing a veil because she was in a Muslim area. To be able to move between different places in Jos, it had become increasingly important that your outward signs of belonging matched the places you were moving through.

By not dressing in accordance with a place or time, your right to access could be questioned. But there were also times when your life quite literally depended on it, as when religious roadblocks appeared all over Jos during the crisis in 2001 and people were targeted and killed according to what clothes they were wearing. One day in 2004 when Jibril and I met with James, one of the Yoruba practitioners, he told me that when the crisis started, Jibril had changed clothes in his home. When he entered the house he had been dressed like a Christian and when, some hours later, he
left James’s home in a mainly Muslim area in the centre to try to reach his own village outside Jos, he had been dressed like a Muslim.

Today, however, James observed, Jibril looked like a Christian, with his yellow corduroy pants, shirt, and jacket. When I met Jibril the following day, he had put on a white gown over his corduroys and wore a small flat hat; he was dressed more like a Muslim. It was a Friday, and later in the day he attended the Friday prayer at the main mosque in Jos. Jibril had an ability to move between and feel comfortable in many of Jos’s different areas in ways that were unthinkable for most people.

Moving Like a Spirit

As he crossed the stereotypical distinction between the indigene Christian and the Muslim settler, Jibril also crossed linguistic barriers. Speaking Hausa and English as well as Ankwai, his own local language, Jibril was able to understand a lot of what was going on in Jos as a whole. Even if Hausa is a lingua franca of Jos – along with English and Pidgin, to certain degrees – not all people could communicate with each other directly or understand what people were talking about in different places. In union contexts, discussions were often translated for different members, and as all union documents were written in English, it meant that letters, invitations, minutes, and membership certificates, etc. often had to be read and translated for members who did not understand English or could not read.

Because of his linguistic and literacy skills, Jibril had been the union’s unquestionably elected secretary for a long time, even if, after the crisis and with the union’s split into two factions, his position was no longer so clear. In a way similar to his ability to cross borders and feel at home in many of Jos’s directly oppositional areas, he was able to move between his own local language, Hausa, and English, and between what was written and spoken. He could 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 of Jos Pharmacology Department, the Ministry of Health, and the NAFDAC office in Jos.

The level of Jibril’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. Isaac, the Igbo practitioner, said for example that Jibril was like a spirit; one could never find him. When you arrived at the
place where you had heard that he was, they would tell you that he had just left and gone to another place. If you then followed in his footsteps to the next place, you would hear the same story again. Later on, Jibril commented that people could not just come unannounced to his house and expect to find him. One had to inform him about what one wanted so he could prepare an answer. If you came unannounced you would not see him, no matter how long you waited or how hard you looked. I turned to him and added, ‘Just like a spirit’. Jibril replied, ‘Just like a spirit’.

It was not uncommon for people to refer to a person who was perceived as not being settled, grounded, and predictable as a spirit or iska, a word that also refers to the wind or the air. Being invisible, moving like the wind, the spirits could not be seen but felt. They were also seen as omniscient, extremely powerful, and able to move very quickly (see Besmer 1983:64; Schmoll 1991:239-242; Wall 1988:157). Once when I was at a restaurant with three friends, a person who had received the knowledge to read palms from the stars read my hand and continued with two of my friends, but when he came to my third friend he refused, just stating that he (my friend) was an iska. I insisted that he should. He started to look at the hand and said that my friend’s palm was different from all others’, and that he would just continue moving around and would never settle down. People who were likened with spirits were seen as very fluid, unsettled, and unpredictable, but also very skilful in their ability to move, change, and adapt to different contexts.

Jibril 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 had had to learn how to improvise and bargain, a talent that had come to make it possible for people to relentlessly keep changing their persona – to continually undergo ‘mitosis’ (Mbembe 1992:5f., 11). Thus, tools of identity become matters of imagination and experimentation in what a person ‘may be or can become’ (Hannerz 1983:355). But although Jibril’s talents in this area exceeded those of most people, even for him it had become harder to move in Jos, as the following story exemplifies.

An Encounter with a Security Guard

It was a Monday towards the end of June 2004, and I was on my way to meet Jibril in the union office at the university. When I arrived at the office there was no one there. I turned to the janitors’ room in the same
building. Since the key to the union office was kept with them, I knew that Jibril had to pass by there to be able to enter the office. I left a written message and headed on to my former field supervisor’s office. I needed a letter for the immigration office to renew my visa. He was not available either, so I settled down to wait.

When I had been waiting for about an hour, Jibril entered. He was very agitated and talked about there having been problems. He was hoping to get support from my former field supervisor, and before he stumbled upon me, he had also tried to find one of the professors at the pharmacology department. Dragging me along, he hurried out of the office, talking and walking very fast. I found it hard to keep up. He tried to tell me a story of how he had been not only humiliated but also discriminated against because he had been dressed as a Muslim. The incident 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. Jibril felt very humiliated at being mistreated because 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. He had tried 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’ that he had received from the pharmacology department. This was a laminated letter with the emblem and address of the pharmacology department. The document certified that the bearer worked for the union and supplied ‘herbal Medicines to the Department of Pharmacology and Clinical Pharmacy for research purposes’. The guard had reacted by confiscating it and insisting that he was in very big trouble.

Jibril had tried to show that he was part of the place, but it had been denied. Neither the clothes, nor the explanation, nor the ID card had made him part of the university that Friday. Clothes, just like documents, could open places up and give you a right of entry, but what they actually did was highly relational and contextual. Even with all his skills, Jibril – in a manner similar to that in the opening chapter’s story of the coincidence – had failed to predict possible actions and their consequences. If it was going to be like this, he told me, he would leave Jos.

Times and places act on us as we act on them – an interaction through which both we and the world continuously emerge in uncertain ways. As our identities ‘are bound up with the contingencies and uncertainties of the present’ they are, as Tilley pointed out, ‘improvised and changing,
rather than fixed and rule-bound, intimately related to experience and context’ (2006:17). On the Friday outside the university wall, Jibril had been questioned; it had not been his place and his relationships. He had found himself very ill equipped to deal with the situation. This Monday, however, he was dressed like a Christian, wearing a grey jacket and his yellow corduroys. As we were walking towards the security guards’ office on the university grounds, the new clothes helped to bring forth quite a different place, and as the day passed he found himself steering through it with more and more skill.

In the security guards’ office there were two guards in blue uniforms. In a nervous, agitated voice Jibril started speaking with one of them. He described what had happened and that he was associated with the university’s department of pharmacology. After some minutes, the security guard succeeded in locating the ID card that the other guard had confiscated. He told us to follow him to the university library, where the security guard Jibril had encountered last Friday was working today. Before we left the office I pointed at a sign on the wall: ‘God has given you temper don’t lose it’. Jibril had become much more cheerful. He laughed and stated that he dealt with things without getting upset and that he would resolve everything. When we entered the university library, people in the reception recognised and greeted me. Jibril seemed very pleased; we were known here. The two security guards exchanged a few words and the matter was over with.

Places are in constant becoming, and every time Jibril entered the university it was a new place. Despite the fact that he had been part of the inner group of the union and had been working with the pharmacology department for such a long time, his relationship with the place had been questioned. As we were walking towards the union office, Jibril greeted everyone we passed. Just as his wearing clothes perceived as Christian, and looking for people through whom he was connected to the university, this was a way of trying to bring forth a place that he was part of.

Back Behind the Desk

On our way we passed by the janitors’ office to pick up the key to the union office, and Jibril greeted the janitors just as cheerfully as everybody else. When he received the note that I had left for him, he became very excited; it was a testimony of his connection to the University.

While Jibril settled down behind the desk inside the union office, the security guard who had helped us sat down on the other side. Jibril 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. He praised the guard who had followed us 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 was presently with us. Jibril took great care to get the names right, and the security guard had to spell them out several times.

Jibril had not decided to put the whole humiliating Friday incident behind him when it was resolved at the library. Instead, he had made the security guard follow us to the union office and sit down while he wrote the report. The behaviour of the security guard as well as Jibril changed drastically through this process. By the time we had arrived at the union office Jibril had not only verified that he was part of the university, he was also the one directing the unfolding events. Initially, Jibril had been the one asking for help and even though agitated and hurt, he had waited humbly for the security guard to act, but things had changed. Jibril had become the one in control, offering money – that he did not have – as a sign that he was superior, while the security guard on the other side of the desk sat looking down, ashamed, at the ID card in his hand.

Through his skills as a secretary, Jibril was able to convert what was written on a piece of paper into verbal communication, and what was said into writing. These procedures held a great potential to control what was conveyed. But that was not all. Through his abilities to convert, Jibril held a power to define what had happened. With the paper in his hand, he was more than an interpreter of reality; he was a transformer of it. While the security guard was sitting in front of him spelling out his name, Jibril decided what should be put in the union’s notebook. Through this conversion, his experience of the Friday event was turned into a form of official report. There was something very powerful in this procedure. As his actions on this day had changed the place, they were also an essential part of transforming the Friday event – the past. Through writing the report, Jibril created a past that he needed or wished for. As he froze the incident into a formalised written document, he produced a piece of evidence sup-

The union office.
porting his history – a document through which he gained control over future interpretations of the unfortunate Friday.

Documents for Easier Movements

For Mai Lafiya – no matter what his efforts – it had almost become impossible to enter the university, but even for Jibril with all his skills it had become an increasingly complicated task. That Friday he had been out of place, and all his efforts to become part of the place had made him even more alienated. However, this Monday, through his Christian clothes and by making sure to greet everyone we passed, he became part of the place. His actions literally came to change not only the place, but also the past. Through his skills as a secretary he was able to convert the humiliation of Friday into a report, which spelled out the past he called for. By freezing the history in the form of a text, he also gained a tool for future reference. As much as himself, he had changed the place and the past.

Before leaving the union office, the security guard returned the ID card that he had been holding in his hand during our whole tour through the university grounds. Soon after, Jibril and I also left the union office and continued to my former supervisor’s office. Two hours later we left his office with three newly typed letters that I hoped would make my own movements in Jos easier. There was one letter to the immigration office and two letters to different libraries in Jos. Jibril commented that today we had ‘really tried and suffered’. I agreed; we had spent the entire day moving between different offices on the university grounds while we were waiting for, writing, or searching for different documents.

In a city where movements had become increasingly unpredictable, the written document was brought forward as an important tool, even if the consequences of using it, just like names or clothes, were just as uncertain as the city itself. As though we had not had enough of all these written documents, Jibril and I headed on towards one of the photocopy places opposite the main gate of the university to make sure that we had copies of the different documents. The owner of the small shop refused to take our money, since we copied so few papers this time and were such good customers.
7. Making Things Real

It was widely acknowledged that all the conflicts in the union had their origin in the crisis of 2001. It had made the union divided and 'disorganised'. The day in 2004 when Isaac, Emanuel, Jibril, and I visited James, I was sitting next to the people who, before the crisis, had been the unquestionably elected public relations officer, Igbo chairman, secretary, and Yoruba chairman of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners, Plateau State Branch, but things were no longer so clear. Before, they had regularly met at the University of Jos and had held different workshops, but now no one came. Everybody started laughing, since not a single person had shown up for last Tuesday’s meeting at the university. Isaac declared with sadness in his voice that they had been so ‘organised’ before.

Emanuel was very frustrated with the situation. They had to move fast, he argued, because the Hausas were making headway. On 14 March 2004, at the same time the other part of the union was having its weekly Tuesday meeting at the office at the university, the newly elected leadership of the ‘Hausa faction’ had been inaugurated by the Ministry of Health as the official leaders of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners, Plateau State Branch. If their own faction was too slow getting ‘organised’, Emanuel argued, the ministry might not acknowledge them. Everybody agreed, and Emanuel went on to elaborate on how easy the Yoruba practitioners would be to organise and persuade to follow. The Igbos were very few, but they too would follow. The Hausas, on the other hand, would only come to the meetings they themselves had arranged. When it came to the indigenes there was a similar problem; it was argued that they were not serious. Emanuel, Isaac, and James all agreed that Jibril was the only one among the indigenes who took the union seriously. If you called a meeting, the argument went, the indigenes would not come because they were ‘illiterate’.

Illiterate was a derogatory term used to describe people perceived to be less educated, but it was also employed to say that people were not organised. Literacy and education were used as synonymous with being structured, informed, and reasonable. During a visit I made to Pam at his dis-
pensary in 2004, he expressed his annoyance at the many ‘illiterates’ in the union. As a person who had received a Western education early on, he complained about them constantly and failed to see how the union could ever become ‘organised’ under these circumstances.

Even if many of the members could not read them, documents were viewed as prominent tools when it came to organising a disorganised union. In 2004, when Jibril had been preparing for weeks for a big Tuesday meeting, he complained that they had no money to send out letters to inform their members of upcoming meetings. He questioned how they could expect people to show up when it was just him running around informing people. Some weeks later, when he was looking at a photograph filled with people who had taken part in a meeting at the union office in 2001, Jibril concluded that people had stopped coming not only because of the tensions but because the union no longer sent out any circulars. People wanted written invitations if they were going to take a meeting seriously and come to it.

On the whole, papers in different forms were an important tool among the practitioners in Jos for bringing about desired realities. But with the crisis and the emerging factions in the union, it was not only the usefulness of documents that was highlighted, but also questions of whether various documents were real or fake. Documents and photographs could have evidential force – they could make things real – but the question that was persistently raised was whether they themselves were false or real.

Paper Matters

In discussing the importance placed on diplomas and titles, Mbembe suggested that in the postcolony not only the few, but the many wished ‘to be honoured’ and ‘to shine’ (1992:25f.). Practitioners in Jos took immense care to refer to each other according to their various titles. They commonly addressed each other as ‘doctors’, and holding positions within the NUMHP carried great prestige. When invitations were written, it often seemed more important to get the titles right than the names. In 2004, after I had been shown a herb that could help a person quit smoking, Isaac and Jibril had had a long discussion about how I had become a doctor. They argued that one had to start somewhere, and the only thing one needed to become a doctor was one medicine. Following this event, documents were addressed to me as ‘Dr. Miss Ulrika Andersson, PhD Candidate’.
Back in the 1980s, associations all over Africa that were organising practitioners of traditional medicine started ‘issuing certificates and diplomas, membership cards, with extensive rules of association, even titles’ (Chavunduka & Last 1986:263). Although there was no uniform approach to testing professional competence, associations in Nigeria started to issue certificates to their members in the same spirit as a way to authenticate professional competence and counteract outside criticism of a lack of uniform standards (Oyebola 1986:231f.).

Certificates and membership cards were highly valued among the practitioners in Jos, even if the only thing you needed to do to receive one was to pay the membership fee. There were no tests, apprenticeships, or any other comparable demands connected to a membership. The only requirement was that you supposedly knew some medicines. Then again, the potential of the membership cards did not lie in what you had to do to receive them, but in what they did or what could be done with them. Documents had a force that made events, relations, positions, and organisations real. When I settled down with Emanuel and Jibril one day in 2004, Emanuel told us that he had talked to the ‘Hausa faction’ about Jibril. They had said that Jibril had done so much for the union and that they would not leave him outside the union. Jibril responded by stating that it was not until he saw himself on paper possessing a position that he would believe it.

When I returned to Jos in 2007, Jibril and I reunited at a photocopy place. He almost immediately brought out his plastic bag, which he had hidden under his gown because of the rain. As always, it was full of documents that he began to show me. Among them was his ID card from the department of pharmacology, which had been confiscated in 2004 by the security guard. When I told him that I had heard that one of his tuberculosis medicines had been tested and approved in Abuja, he responded by bringing forth yet another document, this from the National Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development at the Federal Ministry of Health. The letter said:

I wish to inform you that first batch of your recipe submitted to this project has shown some antimycobacterial activity, congratulations. We therefore need a second batch of the same recipe that you earlier gave us. It is important that you give us exactly the same recipe each time. This is to enable us to continue the joint scientific investigation with you. We also wish to have full details of the plants and other additives of the recipe. We shall as usual give some compensation for the efforts. Please note that your reference number is […], use this reference number in correspondence. Thank you for your cooperation.
When I returned to Jos in 2007, new organisations and factions had been developing at a steady pace and were now all competing for acknowledgement and members. The ‘Hausa faction’ of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners was still the only group that had been recognised and sworn in by the Ministry of Health. The group connected to the pharmacology department, with Pam as their chairman now, no longer saw themselves as part of the NUMHP but as an independent group. They called themselves Traditional Herbal Medical Research Group and Supply.

Besides the different factions in the union and other smaller groups, two new national organisations had been established during my absence. One was the National Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners, which still had problems in Plateau, however, and at the time was lacking leadership. The other was the National Association of Nigerian Traditional Medicine Practitioners. In Jibril’s words, the government had created it as a way to clean up the work of practitioners. While we were taking shelter from the rain in the photocopy shop he showed me a paper folder from a meeting in Abuja in which he had taken part. The print on the front stated: ‘Theme: Sanitizing Traditional Medicine Practice in the Federal Capital Territory, Under the Emerging Situation in Nigeria’. Text on the back stated that the Minister of Health had inaugurated the association on 19 December 2006.

A blank sheet of paper with the new association’s letterhead (originally in colour).

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23 These smaller groups included organisations such as the Hunters Herbal Association, Wanzamai Herbal Association, Awela Herbal Association, Eze Herbal Association, etc.
Upon his return to Jos, Jibril had been part of creating an affiliate of this association. The Association of Plateau State Indigenous Herbal Practitioners\textsuperscript{24} had been established in April 2007 and Jibril was currently its chairman. When I congratulated him on his new position he brought forth a sheet of letterhead stationery from the newly formed association. In the top left corner was the Nigerian coat of arms and in the top right corner a drawing of Plateau State. In between was written ‘Association of Plateau State Indigenous [sic] Herbal Practitioners’. The hurriedness of the association’s creation and the lack of money for reprinting had resulted in a misspelled letterhead. When the new association was established, the making of the wrongly spelled letterhead was the very first document created in its name, but it was not going to be the last.

On 4 July 2007, we were on our way to a meeting with the new association, held at the State Secretariat. Wearing a new suit in honour of the

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The invitation that Jibril addressed to me just before we entered the meeting hall.

\textsuperscript{24} There was also another association that had been created for the entire North Central Zone of Nigeria that was also claiming to represent the National Association of Nigerian Traditional Medicine Practitioners in Plateau, even if it did not yet have an office there.
occasion, and accompanied by the association’s security guard, who carried a plastic folder containing all his valued documents, Jibril looked like a proper chairman. Just before our arrival at the meeting he took me aside and brought out a paper from the folder that had replaced his plastic bag. It was a blank invitation to the meeting, photocopied onto the letterhead stationery of the new association and impressed with its newly designed stamp. He hastily addressed it to ‘Dr. Miss Ulrika Andersson, PhD Candidate, UniJos’. Although the day’s date was 4 July, he dated the invitation 29 June in accordance with the date the association’s secretary had signed the invitation. Just a few steps away from the venue, he handed it to me. Clearly, the significance of the paper went beyond its obvious function as an invitation.

When we entered the meeting hall there were probably over fifty people waiting around a U-shaped table. While Jibril settled down in the middle in a big green armchair with wheels, the others were sitting in white plastic chairs. As one of the first points on the agenda, computerised and photocopied minutes from the last meeting were handed out, something that I had never before seen except at national meetings. On top of this, food and drinks were served. As the meeting progressed, the importance of documents kept being addressed. Complaints were raised over the lack of ID cards, letters of appointment, and uniforms; officials without proper documents did not possess the authority necessary to exercise their offices. It was decided that letters of appointment should be printed, signed, and handed out.

Jibril’s appearance, the food, and the written invitations and the minutes were all part of bringing the association into existence. Just as officials without the proper documents lacked authenticity, so, too, did organisations.

Unpredictable Documents
Certificates and titles connected to the different organisations in Jos did not necessarily correspond to the performance of any tasks normally connected to the positions they referred to. There were elected treasurers who had neither skills in accounting nor any money to safeguard, elected coordinators who never seemed to coordinate anything, and directors of research without the presence of any research. The positions often seemed mostly to be matters of appearance – of honouring and shining. The signifiers did not necessary refer to something ‘real’ but were true or complete in their own right. In Jean Baudrillard’s words, it was ‘a question of
substituting signs of the real for the real itself, a condition that he referred to as ‘hyperreal’ (1988:167).

During the oil boom of the 1970s, Nigeria’s consumption power and credibility peaked and everyday life improved for many. The rapid economic growth and the proliferation of imported commodities made for a world of highly convincing appearances. During the 1980s, the oil boom was soon replaced by the oil bust. The order of the day became broken contracts and dreams as well as a new category of crime: the 419. As the value of the Naira waned just as mysteriously as it had waxed, a ‘crisis of representation’ appeared (Apter 1999:268ff.). Andrew Apter argued that ‘the “seeing is believing” of the oil boom gave way to the visual deceptions of the oil bust, a social world not of objects and things but of smoke and mirrors, a business culture of worthless currency, false facades, and empty value forms’ (ibid.:279) – ‘a national culture of “419,” in which illusion has become the very basis of survival’ (ibid.:293). While reports came out on bank frauds and counterfeit currencies, there were advertisements for fraud-check machines (ibid.:295), and

business centers with photocopy machines, computers, faxes, and international telephone lines proliferated into bustling sites of activity as job seekers constructed professional CVs, printed up authentic-looking contracts, and purveyed the instruments of finance capital with the tools of the international ‘419’. (Apter 1999:296)

While the documents had the potential to substantiate and make things real, it was not easy to know if they themselves were real – if they referred to anything genuine. That day in 2004 in James’s home, Emanuel showed us that he had renewed his ID card for the NUMHP. He said that he had looked for Jibril for a very long time but had not been able to find him. In the end, he had turned instead to the person who had been elected second chairman in the ‘illegal election’. A bit annoyed, Jibril brought out his own ID card and showed us that the address on his card for NUMHP headquarters in Abuja differed from the address indicated on Emanuel’s card. Jibril argued that Emanuel’s card was not correct. Emanuel got a bit worried. He was not happy that his card might not be ‘the real one’. He said once again that he had looked for Jibril for a long time but had not been able find him. In the end he had been left with no other option than to turn to this second chairman. It all seemed a bit of gamble, and a month later when I met Emanuel again, he had resigned. By then, he had paid membership fees to three different factions of the Nigerian Union of
Medical Herbal Practitioners and was presently in possession of three different membership cards.

The phenomenon as such was nothing new; already in the 1980s several different associations existed in most states in Nigeria, and there were factions within the same associations (Oyebola 1986:232), but as all groups and factions bore similar signs – they had headquarters and gave out membership certificates and letterhead stationeries – there was no easy way to discern what was genuine. Revealingly, one organisation actually took the step of calling itself ‘Nigeria Real Traditional Medicine Practitioners’ (Tyonongo 2003), in contrast to the supposedly non-real ones.

In 2007, with the appearance of the new association on the scene, the war going on through the means of issuing different documents reached new levels. During the 4 July meeting of the Association of Plateau State Indigenous Herbal Practitioners, the secretary of the association handed out minutes from the previous meeting two months before, which stated ‘That issuance of documents has been the talks of the day without any meaningful progress and herbal practitioners have been cheated for long through that means’. A bit further down it was declared ‘That the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer should be resolute and transparent in their work not as was experienced in the other groups in the past which lead to collapse of the Union’. The new leadership meant that the former leadership’s membership cards and other documents had been false; they had just been a way to steal money from the members. They – the new leadership – on the other hand had even opened a bank account for transparency. Neither the state branch of the NUMHP nor any other group had ever done this before. The new association was, in the view of its own leadership, more genuine, which in turn also made its documents real and powerful.

Which documents and associations could be trusted was never clear. Even if there was no necessary correspondence between signifiers and what they signified, the signs were still very much part of forming the emergent world. As Baudrillard pointed out, since acts, whether simulations or not, produce the same consequences, simulations come to override distinctions between true and false as well as real and imaginary (1988:167f.). The simulated has as much potential to become the truth as the non-simulated. Truth is not an inherent static property, but is ‘made true by events’ (James 1995:77f.). What is false today can be tomorrow’s truth. It is all part of a continuous becoming. As they become what they do, the genuine and the false can only be revealed ‘by the results of acting upon them’ (Dewey 1929:322). Only time could prove whether the association and its documents would hold true.
Posing to Make Real

Events that highlighted the importance of photographs were numerous. Often, the first thing practitioners did when I visited them was to show me a great mix of personal and work-related photographs. They kept them in piles or albums or hung them on the walls. It was also common to call on photographers at conferences, meetings, celebrations, and visits. Experiences had in many ways become tightly knit with photographs of them (Sontag 1980:24).

When I was saying goodbye to people towards the end of my fieldwork in 2004, I brought cakes with the names of the person or the group written on top. When I presented the Yoruba group with their cake at their weekly Wednesday meeting, a photographer was called in. A long photo session followed with me handing the cake to different people. In the last photo I was handed a child and Jibril was holding the cake while all the members stretched their hands towards the cake. After the meeting Jibril was very happy and commented that he did not know why the Yoruba group liked photographs so much. He did not know if they wanted to have them as some sort of archive or as a memory. ‘They love it too much’, he declared, but added that we had to get copies as well.

When I gave Pam his cake, however, no one called for a photographer or took any pictures. Some days later he realised the mistake and wanted us to meet again for a picture in which I formally handed it over. He came to visit me a week after receiving the cake, and we immediately started posing in front of my camera. A lot of pictures were taken as I pretended to hand over the cake and later, as we ate it. When I returned in 2007, the first thing Pam asked me was where the pictures of his cake were.

When it comes to making things real, photographs have a great potential. They provide evidence; they have the power to prove unquestionably that a specific event has occurred (Sontag 1980:5, 20). The essence of a photograph is that it proves what it represents; it verifies what has been there in front of the camera. It is ‘co-natural with its referent’ in a way unlike most other representations (Barthes 1983:76f., 85, 88f.). It is simultaneously both an ‘icon’ and an ‘index’ in that it both imitates and is physically connected to what it represents (Peirce 1998:5). As Charles Sanders Peirce wrote, ‘This resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature’ (1955:106). The photograph derives its power from the magic both of contact and of imitation – the
forces of ‘contagious magic’ and ‘homeopathic magic’ (Frazer 1979:338f.). This blending makes it almost impossible to separate the signifier from the signified, the picture from what it represents: they become one and the same.

The truthfulness of a photograph arises from the production process, but as the process can be subverted, there is also in every photograph a tension between honesty and deception (Knappett 2002:113f.). Photographs, like almost no other tool, underscore the idea of simulating to make real. The friction between photography as a matter of posing and as evidence was constantly being highlighted. Not only did I very often end up in staged pictures, but I also found myself taking a lot of such photographs. People had clear images of what they wanted to bring forth. They kept changing places, clothes, and positions, and I was running in and out of the pictures. The photo sessions often entailed the practitioners pretending to perform certain activities – people acted as though they were measuring blood pressure, crushing herbs with a mortar, or performing bori dances. Posing developed into a form of ‘playful magic’, which could turn the staged into reality. Photography became a form of ‘wish-fulfilling
machine’ (Behrend 2003:139), and the photograph an incantation for futures dreamt of.

Someone who, well beyond the level of most people, had mastered the ability of staging or posing to create powerful tools was Umar. When I visited him in 2007, it was all about photographs. As we settled down in his office he started showing me his many albums that displayed before and after pictures of different patients. His walls were almost covered with shelves filled with bottles of medicines and enlarged photographs. Among them was a picture of when he had cured the son of the Chief Imam of the National Mosque, a picture of when NAFDAC had visited him, and a picture of when, as part of the ‘Hausa faction’, he had been sworn in at the Ministry of Health in March 2004. A bit nervously, Umar pointed to an enlarged picture of him and me that had been taken in 2000. A caption under the picture stated ‘UNICEF staff analysing Dr Mohammed Umar Medicine’. He excused himself by saying that at the beginning he had thought I was with UNICEF but that later he had been told I was not, and so I should not care about the caption.

The meaning of a photograph is its use, as Susan Sontag argued (1980:106). By being photographed, enlarged, and framed, my visit had become a valuable tool with the power to enact a reality that Umar wanted. Regardless of how it came about, most people who looked at it saw nothing but a record of UNICEF approving Umar’s drugs. By being made into a photograph, what was, or what was pretended to be, becomes fixed for the future (Hannerz 1983:357). Photography thus ‘recycles’ the real by providing the possibility to return to past events, which simultaneously opens up the possibility of giving them new uses and meanings (Sontag 1980:174). Photographs become ‘material realities in their own right, richly informative deposits left in the wake of whatever emitted them, potent means for turning the tables on reality – for turning it into a shadow’ (ibid.:180).
The Power of the Copy

When Jibril told me in 2004 that the other faction had taken them to court, he explained, ‘We then already had a letter from the inspector general of police from the headquarters in Abuja, stating that those people already totally were expelled from the union. We have a copy of this letter and this copy is a power to us’. Like a photograph, a photocopy is simultaneously both an icon and an index because of the way it is produced. Its very production is based on a physical connection that produces a likeness. As such, it has evidential force that what it refers to has indeed existed.

In the homes of most practitioners, the walls were decorated with documents: certificates, memberships, letters, and photographs. Many times, from heaps, plastic bags, or improvised archives, a great number of documents were brought out for me to see. These were not necessary originals or addressed to the person who owned them. By being photocopied, documents were multiplied and spread from hand to hand.

A few days before a national meeting of the NUMHP in Abuja, Jibril and I headed for one of our usual photocopy places outside the university. I was going to photocopy the letters that had been written on my behalf to the immigration office as well as to two of Jos’s libraries. I wanted to have an extra copy and so did Jibril, although I really did not understand what use they could be to him. On the day of the meeting, Hadiza and I waited in vain for Jibril for three hours before we decided to go on to Abuja our own. On the bus, she showed me bundles of photocopied documents that had been stapled together. The first letter in each bundle was a letter of recommendation regarding Hadiza, and the second one concerned Jibril. Both were signed by a professor in the pharmacology department. Then there were the letters that had been written to the immigration office and the two libraries on my behalf. There was also a letter that my old supervisor had written to Jibril declaring that he had the right to work with me. Finally there was a letter of recommendation regarding me written by Doctor Cheto, a ‘Western’ doctor who was a general practitioner at the Ministry of Health. I had no previous knowledge of the two last letters. Seeing them, I assumed that most of these letters could not really be of any use to anyone besides me and the other persons they concerned, but I was wrong. During the meeting in Abuja, Hadiza distributed the bundles of photocopied documents to people she regarded as important in the NUMHP, who very gratefully received them.

Walter Benjamin has noted that ‘technical reproduction can put the copy of the original in situations which would be out of reach for the
original itself’ (1999:214). Clearly this was the case with the circulation of photocopies within the union. They could reach far beyond the situations for which the originals were intended and be utilised in unexpected – and no doubt often unauthorised – ways. Not unlike ‘piracy’ of media, software, and commodities, it was an ‘act of taking things out of their normal or legitimate frameworks of circulation and use’ (Simone 2006:357). Akin to what Brian Larkin noted in regard to media piracy in Nigeria, the photocopies, in relation to the originals, had their ‘own structures of reproduction and distribution’ (2004:290). It was not only that the copy could move beyond the original, but that it also had its own channels for movement.

A person who had brought the use of the photocopy to new levels was David. He was a Yoruba man in his fifties who in his twenties had moved with his brother from southern Nigeria to Jos. Both of David’s parents had practiced medicine, but he himself had started out as an engineer. After he had married and had children, he started having dreams about giving out medicine. Afraid that people at home would laugh at him, he started travelling all over Nigeria giving out medicines that he had dreamt about. In the end he understood that this was his calling, and towards the end of the 1980s had travelled to a secret school in south-west Nigeria to add to his medical knowledge.

During a visit in his home, David brought out, from all his heaps of photocopied papers, books that had been translated into Yoruba,25 photocopied, put together with a spiral binding, and given a blue plastic cover. The books he had learned to use at the school in the south-west were about how to make and use ‘talismans’, as he called them. The first book he showed Jibril and me contained Indian medicine created by an Indian-Nigerian; the second one dealt with Egyptian medicine; and the third was titled The Magick of Chant-O-Matics and was written by Raymond Buckland, whom David explained was a ‘white-witch’ from America. Buckland describes himself on his official website as the father of American Wicca (Buckland). While going through one talisman after another, David told us that all the medicines in the books had been tested and that they worked very well. They were ‘very, very powerful talismans; they would be working like magic’. Some would protect objects from being stolen, several others were for love or if you wanted a specific person to arrive, and one was for improving your memory.

25 The translator was from Oyo State and, according to David, was like a ‘wizard’. He knew all languages and could translate anything into Yoruba. He was extremely powerful.
Browsing through the books, he stopped at a talisman for success at exams. If you had it in your pocket, your pen would just write perfectly. With the talisman there was no way you could fail. He asked his son to locate the same design in a folder that was full of different photocopied talismans. After some time he found it. Without knowing why it looked the way it did, David had copied it by hand from the book and then multiplied it with a photocopy machine. In the middle was a triangle with some symbols inside it, and around its three sides were the words ‘present’, ‘future’, ‘passe’ (spelled incorrectly on the handwritten one). The triangle was encircled by the numbers 1 to 65. For additional power he had also added the Basmala in Arabic writing, a phrase that opens all but the ninth sura of the Koran. It is commonly translated as ‘In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful’.

Reading from the book, he set out to teach me the technique of preparing the medicine. Carefully tearing out a copy of the talisman from a sheet of paper, he described a bird that I needed. It was black, very small, and sang all the time. I was supposed to dry the bird, grind its head, take some of the ground substance and put it in the triangle, and then add some scent, like perfume. The next step was to fold the paper and take blue or black nylon string and wind it around the paper until it was completely covered. After teaching me how to prepare and fold the talisman,
he told me that if I wanted to I could photocopy the medicine and make more.

To me it seemed a bit strange that one could just photocopy the medicine like this, but David assured me that the talismans would not lose any strength by being photocopied and that it did not matter if they had been written by hand or computerised. However, what did affect the medicine’s power was the quality of the paper it had been printed on. The stiffer the paper was, the more powerful it would become. David touched the fairly thin paper that the talisman had been photocopied on and added that if it had been thicker, like parchment paper, it would have been stronger. With a thin paper the medicine was weak inside, but with a thicker paper it would be stronger – it would stay forever.

David pointed to another talisman that he had made into a sticker and said that if it was like this or if you laminated it, it would become stronger. Jibril agreed with David, explaining that if you laminated the
medicine it would become more powerful because it would last longer. On almost any corner in Jos you would find places that not only made photocopies but also computerised and laminated documents. Jibril had himself laminated many documents and often told other practitioners that they should do the same. He explained that he was telling them this because of the added power and strength. David returned to the medicine for success at exams and said that it was the same with the thread that was supposed to be wound around the paper. It would make the medicine stronger, since it would last longer. Jibril concluded by saying that if the paper became torn the medicine became weaker.

Fundamental to photocopies as well as photographs was the ability to move beyond the restrictions of the originals when it came to both time and place. Jibril’s ID card from the pharmacology department had been produced in 1998, and by now it was so torn that it had been glued onto a new piece of paper and then laminated. This way it had lasted and its power had been preserved. When Pam turned my handing over of the cake into a photograph, it gave the event a possibility of lasting, of moving across time. Roland Barthes observed: ‘What the Photograph repro-
duce to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially’ (1983:4). By being photographed, events that have ceased to exist are given an immortality and importance that without this technique they would never have possessed. An image world is produced that ‘bids to outlast us all’, wrote Sontag (1980:11). While the strength of photographs and photocopies could be located in their relation to time, it was also here that their very weakness could be found. Their evidential force would survive only as long as the paper held.

Tools of Emergency and Simulation

It was a Tuesday in 2004, and while I was waiting for a taxi going in the direction of the university and the weekly union meeting, I heard sirens. After some minutes a long row of police cars, police motorcycles, some ordinary cars, and a car with black windows passed on the closed-off street. People were running along and cheering while the police officers on their motorbikes jumped up and down expressing their excitement. No one could see him, but the signs were all there. The event was the arrival of the new administrator of Plateau State, Chris Ali, who had been appointed to this position after the declaration of the state of emergency. When the new administrator arrived, it was the visibility of the signifiers and not the signified – the administrator himself – that was of importance and possessed the potential to create the effects wished for. For Mbembe, the postcolony was characterised by ‘a specific pragmatic: the simulacrum’ (1992:14). Appearances were what was real and what made other things real.

Just like Ali in his convoy, Jibril knew the importance of appearance. He had been planning and organising for this union meeting for several weeks, taking it all very seriously. Despite the lack of written invitations, he had been moving around, visiting people and trying to convince them to attend. The day before, he had explained that he was going to pick up his suit at the drycleaners. He would be wearing it in honour of the occasion. At ten o’clock, when the meeting was supposed to start, I found myself waiting outside the office in the shade of a mango tree along with a few practitioners. Quite upset at the situation, Mai Lafiya – the old Hausa man whose name was one of those on the union’s office door – complained that because there had been no official letter sent out inviting people, no one was there – ‘not even Jibril’. A bit before eleven he arrived,
not wearing the newly dry-cleaned suit but the dirty gown from yesterday. He looked very old; he was limping and held himself up with the help of his umbrella. He told us that he had woken at five in the morning with an asthma attack, and that he was now coming directly from the emergency room at Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH). He had received immediate treatment at the hospital; they had given him an adrenaline injection. Getting very excited, he announced several times, and with large gestures, that the injection had had a lot of karfi, force.

Everybody followed Jibril into the office and it was decided that there was not going to be a meeting. After some time it turned into some kind of meeting anyway, and it was decided that written invitations should be sent out for the following week’s meeting. As the secretary and the only one who could read and write, Jibril started drafting the invitation. After he had finalised the letter, one of the younger men was sent out to get it computerised and photocopied. Invitations usually had the union letterhead photocopied on them, but today there was no time for this. The letter stated:

Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners Plateau State Branch

C/o Dept. of Pharmacology, Room 22, University of Jos, Date --------

Sir/Madam-------

There will be an emergency meeting with the entire executive members of the above mentioned Union.

Scheduled as follows:

Venue: Dept. of Pharmacology UniJos

Time: 10:30 AM Prompt

Date: 1st of June 04----------

Signed............

By Management committee

The ‘emergency meeting’ never took place on 1 June as planned, and four Tuesdays later it still had not, despite Jibril’s efforts every week. It had been postponed because he had been ill, because people had not showed up, and because he himself had not attended. On the fifth Tuesday, I ar-
rived at the union office only to find that Jibril was the only one there. He was sitting behind the desk writing notes in the union notebook. Whether it was me or himself that he tried to convince, he told me that today people would show up for the meeting. But despite his hopes, they never did. There was nothing regular about the Tuesday meetings anymore; just like Jos, they had turned into matters of crisis and disorganisation.

Nevertheless, ‘emergency’ revealed itself as a way of organising an increasingly disordered world. The word – as in Jibril’s visit to the emergency room, the government’s decision to declare a state of emergency, and the invitations to emergency meetings – invoked ways to deal with unfavourable circumstances. Similarly, simulations, rather than just being signs of a ‘postmodern apocalypse’ with ‘floating images’ having no connection to reality, had an inherent creative potential as ‘a process that produces the real’ (Massumi 1987). Emergency and appearance – the pragmatics of the simulacrum – were tools to bring forth realities hoped for. Taken as tools, rather than as a state of affairs, they were not simply endured or experienced as impediments to overcome; they were employed as means to ends. As Dewey observed in relation to the unstable and precarious factors that intervene while we attempt to attain goals and ends:

> These intervening terms when brought under control are means in the literal and in the practical sense of the word. When mastered in actual experience they constitute tools, techniques, mechanisms, etc. Instead of being foes of purposes, they are means of execution. (1929:v)

When used as techniques and tools to bring forth things wished for, simulation and emergency became means instead of hindrances. Rather than being signs of a society falling apart, they became creative tools to deal with the emergent world. But like Jibril’s written invitations to the emergency meetings, their effects were unpredictable.
8. Wishful Doing

Fortune rather than our own intent and act determines eventual success and failure. The pathos of unfulfilled expectation, the tragedy of defeated purpose and ideals, the catastrophes of accident, are the commonplaces of all comment on the human scene. We survey conditions, make the wisest choice we can; we act, and we must trust the rest to fate, fortune or providence. [...] Judging, planning, choice, no matter how thoroughly conducted, and action no matter how prudently executed, never are the sole determinants of any outcome. (Dewey 1930:11)

Uncertainty is not just a sign of a time or characteristic of a situation, such as a crisis, but is a basic part of life, as outcomes are held in suspense. Nor is it in itself something bad. Its openness holds the seed for hope, luck, and miracles as well as for disasters (Dewey 1930:213). Still, for Jibril, as for most of Jos’s inhabitants, these were times when outcomes had become harder to foresee and misfortune rather than good fortune prevailed.

Forces appeared to be working against Jibril rather than for him. When we settled down to talk on a day in the beginning of 2004, it became apparent how his troubles were mounting. It was not just that the ‘illegal election’ had been conducted and that he was thereby no longer the unquestionably elected secretary of the Nigerian Union of Medical Herbal Practitioners, Plateau State Branch, but he had also come down with a very bad cold. He kept blowing his nose. At one point during our talk he was even forced to go out to buy more toilet paper since he had finished a whole roll. ‘Enough with this catarrh’, he stated after blowing his nose, remarking that his condition was caused by the cold wind. This was an illness that, like his struggle to regain his position as the unquestionably elected secretary, would stay with him for the whole year.

As he struggled to regain his health and position in the union, he found himself enmeshed in circumstances that were not only beyond his
control but directed by forces that were working against him and threaten-
ing his life. At this time, medicine as protection against misfortune and as incantations – hopes for futures wished for – emerged as a valuable tool.

Matters of Luck

Still, on a few occasions, forces – luck – appeared to be working for Jibril and directing events, choices made, and consequences brought about. One Tuesday in 2004, when I arrived at the union office some minutes past ten, Jibril was sitting behind the desk writing notes in the union notebook. This was the day he was finally going to have the ‘emergency meeting’ he had been trying to have for five consecutive Tuesdays. Even if no one but Jibril and I showed up, it was also the day when the forces were going to be on our side – a day when things did not appear as mere matters of ‘coincidence’. They were directed by benevolent forces.

Jibril showed me that this morning he had received two letters of invi-
tation to a national union meeting in Abuja. Even if they were not ad-
dressed to him, but to the chairman of the NUMHP and the Ministry of Health in Plateau State, respectively, he was very happy. He was in the position to decide who was going to be informed and who was going to be invited. Two days before, he had shown me a photocopy of an invita-
tion to this meeting, but these two were originals. It was a bit like old times; Jibril was a spider in the web, gaining information that others had not obtained. But for Jibril, the invitations were also signs that the forces were on his side. There were to be several more such signs on that day.

At around eleven o’clock, when no one had still shown up for the ‘emergency meeting’, Jibril started talking about wanting to go out to fetch some herbs that he was going to deliver to the professor at the pharmacology department. He took a pickaxe from a drawer in the office and put a note on the door that we were just out gathering herbs and would be back soon. As we gathered herbs in the bush next to the univer-
sity, we became aware that time was getting late for a planned visit with a Fulani practitioner, who lived more than an hour’s drive from Jos. We hurried back to the office and from there headed to one of the many pho-
tocopy places outside the main gate of the university, since Jibril wanted to photocopy the invitation letters. He needed copies for people he wanted to inform and was eager to get started.
It was the rainy season, and on our way through the university grounds Jibril remembered that he had forgotten his umbrella in the office. Getting a bit impatient with all these things that kept taking our time, I told him that the sky looked clear and that it was not going to rain. We continued without the umbrella. However, we did not get far. As we reached the front gate we heard someone calling Jibril. It was Danladi, another practitioner, to whom Jibril had given some herbs to boil for him that morning, a medicine against gonorrhoea that Jibril was going to give to the professor at the pharmacology department for analysis. So instead of the photocopy place, we headed for the professor’s office.

Leaving the professor’s office after delivering the medicine, we went out the front gate and went to one of the many small photocopy places outside the university. After we succeeded in getting several photocopies of the invitation letters, I told Jibril that since it was now past one, it was getting too late to go to the bush and see the Fulani practitioner today. He said it was my choice. I suggested that we go instead to the hotel bar opposite the university to have something to drink and organise our future movements.

After fifteen minutes or so, Jibril commented that there was someone he knew at the back of the bar. He seemed a bit nervous and told me that it was someone from the union and that he was going to go over and greet him. He returned after a few minutes with the message that we had been invited to join the man and his companion at their table. On our way, Jibril told me that they were the national union vice president and his secretary. We were going over to talk to them, but he emphasised that we should not mention the invitation letters we had received to the meeting in Abuja.

As we were settling down, Jibril almost immediately began talking about the problems in the union in Plateau State. For him, this was a golden opportunity to tell his side of the story. Positioning himself as belonging to the ‘indigene group’ in relation to the ‘Hausa faction’, he complained about the state of the union. He talked about the ‘illegal election’ and the fact that the Ministry of Health had sworn in, and only listened to, the ‘Hausa faction’. He emphasised that before the crisis in 2001 everything had been different, that this development would never have been possible. But now everything had changed. Jibril was very upset and outspoken. He talked continuously for about an hour; the vice president was able to put in some comments now and then, but otherwise the stage was Jibril’s.
The vice president then moved on to discuss politics at the national level, where they also had problems with different factions. They were trying to get rid of a leader whom they saw as an impostor. They had taken him both to the police and to court. The vice president brought out different documents as proof of different issues and discussions. Jibril ran off to photocopy them and came back with three copies of all documents – one for me, one for him, and a third for the union archives in Jos. The vice president continued, showing us papers regarding communications between the NUMHP and NAFDAC, so off I went this time to photocopy them. When I came back, photographs of the union’s national leaders and different meetings they had held were brought out as well as the new membership certificates and union letterheads they had designed and printed.

The vice president then told us about the national meeting in Abuja and gave both Jibril and me invitations, urging us to attend, as this would give us a chance to find out everything that was going on in the union at the national level. Without mentioning that we had already decided to do so, I answered that we would. Jibril was very happy that we had met the vice president and had received all the information about the situation within the union. He was also very pleased that we had been invited to the national meeting. We had now been properly invited. They knew that we would be coming and they would be waiting for us. He later told me that the vice president had even promised to give him some kind of position within the union.

Before we left, the vice president told us that his car had broken down just outside the hotel bar. Thus, his visit here had not been planned. He and his secretary had just come in to wait until three o’clock, when the mechanic around the corner was supposed to have finished repairing his car. A bit surprised at our presence, he asked Jibril who had told him that we could find them here. Jibril answered that we had just come here to rest and organise ourselves, and that was when we had noticed them. It was nothing we had ‘known’; it was ‘just luck’.

After we left the bar, Jibril started going over the series of events that had led up to our encounter with the vice president. He became quite enthusiastic when he realised how one thing had led to another. When we had come back from gathering the herbs, he had just left them and the pickaxe in the office and we had left. Then he had realised that he had forgotten his umbrella and we had started to walk back to the office to fetch it. But then I had told him that he would not need it, since it was not going to rain today. Jibril pointed out that I had been right and asked if I had felt it in my body. I answered that it was just that that the sky had
looked clear. He continued, noting that I had then thought it was too late to meet with the Fulani practitioner and had wanted to go to the hotel bar, where we had met the vice president. He explained in a serious voice that it was clear that I was in contact with my spirits – I was like a ‘traditional medicine person’. He added that God was presently on our side. It was God who had shown us into the hotel bar. Jibril felt that things were going to turn around and that everything would be solved. Things were no longer matters of ‘coincidences’; there was a logic behind unfolding events that was directed by the forces of God and spirits. Luck would be with us, and the time of misfortune and coincidences would just be a memory.

For Jibril, the national union meeting in Abuja was an opportunity to tell his side of the story. He wanted the national union to recognise his faction and declare the other faction’s election illegal. Through the whole process, as always, he carried his plastic bag with copies of important documents, and in the way his father had taught him, he kept two leather amulets fastened in his pocket with a safety pin. One was for protection when he travelled, the other for meetings and attacks by enemies. Once, when he showed me the amulets, he emphasised that if you moved around a lot it was not good to do so without protection.

Nor did Jibril ever attend meetings or travel without consulting his spirits, and a few days before the meeting in Abuja he told me that when he went to bed that night he would check with his spirits to find out if he would benefit from the trip to Abuja and if he would die or survive. He explained that he had enemies and that he needed to know who they were so he could know how to act. When he went to bed, he contacted the spirits by sniffing perfume and by bringing charcoal into the room. After sleeping for some time he would wake up with a message that the spirits had left in his head. He would write it down on anything, but preferably with charcoal. In the morning he would read the message that the spirits had given him.

The following day he told me that the spirits had said he should travel to Abuja but should not tell anyone what he was going to say at the meeting. That day Jibril also stopped by the office of a lawyer who now and then provided the union with legal advice. He wanted the lawyer to write down how he should formulate the problems within the union.

With all his skills as a secretary, the forces of the spirits and God, four different letters of invitation, and all the preparations and investigations backing him up, the journey to Abuja and attendance at the national meeting was still, just like the ‘emergency meeting’, never realised for
Jibril. He had shown the invitation letters to so many people, but he him-
self still failed to attend. I never got any answer why. Luck was just not
there.

One day in the middle of May when I was supposed to meet Jibril out-
side Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH) after he had gone for one
of his by then many lung X-rays, I found him already sitting and waiting
at the main gate at about ten o’clock. He had arrived at the hospital at
seven and had been able to go in for his X-ray at eight o’clock. I said that
he had been ‘lucky’, since several times before, he had waited for a long
time without getting in at all. Jibril replied that it had not been ‘luck’. He
‘knew the system’. You had to be there very early to get in. Luck was not
connected to your own abilities but depended on other forces being on
your side.

As Jibril’s struggles continued, it also became clear that luck was some-
thing that could be taken from you by enemies, witches, spirits, or God.
This was an actuality that was often talked about in the competitive world
of business, where you would not sell anything without luck, no matter
how hard you worked (see Bastian 1998; Masquelier 1993). In a similar
manner, it made no difference how much movement and work Jibril in-
vested – how many preparations, investigations, and precautions he took;
things still did not turn out the way he had planned.

Dangerous Movements

Jibril’s preparations and precautions in connection with the meeting in
Abuja highlighted the felt dangers that surrounded movement and the
importance of being prepared for and protected against unknown and
hidden dangers lurking along the way. As a Muslim indigene who spoke
both English and Hausa, Jibril possessed an ability to move between dif-
ferent groups of people and areas in Jos that surpassed that of most peo-
ple. But as new fears connected to invisible, unlocalised, highly movable,
and unknown forces as much as to visible, localised, and known forces
were infused into the landscape, his abilities turned into dangerous mat-
ters. His movements through the city became increasingly problematic,
and his lack of success in retrieving his position as a secretary as well as
finding a cure for his illness intermingled and both connected to his mo-
bility. Jibril’s own spirits told him at one point that he had to start taking
care of himself and stop running around so much. His spirits’ statement
was echoed at the time in diagnoses made by other practitioners in Jos
that also connected his stubborn illness with his movements in Jos and his struggles within the union.

One day in 2004, when we entered the room of Houwa (the bori queen), it was already filled, mostly with expectant and patiently waiting women. We all settled down and some of the women started preparing for the spirits to come. From a cupboard, clothes and other things were brought out for the spirits. For one of the spirits, an old mallam (Koranic scholar) by the name of Mohammed, a blue cloth, a blue hat, a white rosary, kola nuts, and perfume were laid out. The excitement in the room increased, and Houwa sat down in the middle of the floor with her legs crossed. She closed her eyes and started to breathe deeper and deeper. The women covered her head with a white cloth and an older woman kept telling the mallam to come gently.

After some time, one woman removed the white cloth and greeted the spirit. Everybody in turn moved forward to do the same. After the spirit had been with us for a few minutes, the women gave him his clothes and he moved to sit in a corner on a prayer mat with his face turned towards us. He was given the kola nuts, the white rosary, and the perfume. He poured the whole bottle of perfume in a semicircle in front of himself, then put a kola nut in his mouth and, in very traditional Hausa, started speaking in a dull and, because of the nut, somewhat slurred voice.

After a few different women had approached the spirit for advice, the spirit called Jibril to come forward. Jibril very humbly went down on his knees in front of him. The spirit told him that he had once done a lot of good things and people had listened to him, but today nobody did. It did not matter how much he worked and moved around; nothing would work anyway. The illness he had was not going to kill him, but all
these other problems might. However, there was a medicine that could help him, and the spirit told Jibril to take out a paper and a pen. The spirit listed five food items that Jibril should collect and then throw into running water. Jibril was totally silent the entire time, listening very respectfully and writing everything down. He ended by bowing very humbly and thanking the spirit. The spirit continued to give advice to a lot of different patients for two more hours, but then he started to get muddled and wanted to leave. He settled down in the middle of the floor once again and the women covered him with a cloth. After a while there was one sneeze and the spirit had left.

Not much later, at a visit in his home, David, who was not only a man with knowledge of many talismans but also the president of the Yoruba group in Jos, immediately started questioning Jibril. How could they follow him when they could not locate him? According to David, it could take half a year before he saw him again. He concluded by saying that the Yoruba group was prepared to follow him, but he was not organised. After being questioned, Jibril started to cough so badly that he almost could not breathe, and David gave him some salt that he said would help. The salt helped a bit, but Jibril’s cold was worse again. Like the spirit’s
warning that the problems he was having with other people might ultimately kill him, David declared that someone was causing the illness because Jibril was blocking the person’s way.

While looking through one of his many photocopied books and discussing the power of the talismans, David directed our attention to a talisman for protection against evil. The talisman looked like a diagram of a chemical compound. He pointed to the lintel above the entrance where he had attached two of those talismans and told us that nothing evil, neither illness, nor thieves, nor anything else, could enter when he had this medicine. He added that he had made the talisman into stickers that people could buy and put on their cars. He had one on his and he had never had any accidents or other kinds of trouble with the car. With the sticker, nothing bad could happen. David said that the talisman even worked on airplanes. If you had it with you and something was going to happen with the plane, it would not even take off.

Before we left, and in regards to the dangers connected to our constant travelling and movement, David gave both Jibril and me a medicine for protection against anything evil. It was a leather capsule with ‘Jahwoh’ written with a ballpoint pen on one side and ‘Jahovah’ on the other. The capsule was sewn together with white stitches and he told us that inside was a paper with a photocopied talisman that had been folded in a specific way. He sold this medicine for 25,000 Naira each. Jibril put the new protection in his pocket with his two amulets, showing us how he attached all three to the inside of his pocket with the safety pin. David explained that since no one followed the law in Nigeria, people needed this kind of medicine for protection. To show the power of his medicine, David took his own medicine in his hand and stood in front of his son. They both stretched out their hands and then David lowered his arm and raised it again. But each time he raised his hand again it was further away from his son’s hand. He explained that this was the way nothing evil could touch you when you were carrying the medicine.
That travels were dangerous business was a sentiment that was echoed by most of Jos’s inhabitants at the time. Like Jibril, most other people in Jos tried in different ways to protect themselves against highly obscure forces that you could neither hide from nor predict. Since they did not reveal themselves until they had already struck you, general protections were needed. As measures of protection, religious stickers, writings, and paintings decorated vehicles that passed through the streets. You would find hanging from rear view mirrors the Christian rosary with a cross or, if the owner was Muslim, the Muslim rosary or amulets with a Koranic verse. In the same spirit, a friend invited the pastor and elders of his church to come to pray for his newly bought car to make sure that it would not be involved in any accidents. Another friend, who thought that these practices were a bit ridiculous, commented that the only thing that would protect people from accidents would be driving safely, but instead they used stickers and thought that God would protect them.

Drinks as Matters of Hope

Around the same time we visited Houwa and David, Jibril told me one morning that he had also taken Mummy’s advice. Mummy was the wife in the family that I was staying with at the time. Mummy had told him that he should take vitamin C for his catarrh. If you went into a pharmacy in Jos you would find a great variety not only of vitamin C but also of other vitamins and multivitamins that were both imported and Nigerian produced. Jibril had bought thirty tablets and had succeeded in consuming them all in one day. He described having sat with a watch and taking two tablets every five minutes. He felt much stronger, even though he still had his cold.

Some days later Jibril stopped by and talked with Mummy about the vitamin C. He was still taking thirty tablets a day, and Mummy commented that it had to be expensive. He replied that it was only 50 Naira per day and he did not have a cold anymore. She told him that it could not cure a cold, only prevent it, and you needed to take it every day. She added that he should not take so many. He replied that he should and that there was nothing harmful about vitamin C. When Mummy insisted and said that he should ask a doctor, he replied that he was a doctor and knew.
Like the amulets in his pocket, vitamins became Jibril’s travel companions. By boosting his defence, the vitamins became a counter-medicine that was constantly fighting the poisons of the surrounding world from inside his body. They were protective amulets that, instead of keeping in his pocket, he consumed, like the water with dissolved ink from an Islamic verse prepared by a mallam. Through consuming them you made sure that the prayer was safely kept inside your body.

Time went by, and Jibril’s cold persisted. Our walks through Jos continued, and during our regular rests in Jos’s many facilities for food and drink, Jibril started to drink juice, preferably products enhanced with different health-promoting additives. One of them was Five Alive – the most common juice drink seen in Jos at the time. The word ‘alive’ brought with it connotations of a healthy body and future, and on the tetra pack was written ‘citrus burst: five fruit juice: with added calcium + vitamin C’. Another side carried the message ‘It’s a perfect start to the day and has calcium for added goodness’. By drinking the juice in the morning you would have an invigorating and stimulating future ahead of you.

Many people besides Jibril turned to medicinal food to try to boost their bodies and protect themselves against present and future ills. Jos was plastered with posters and large signboards advertising foods and drinks enhanced with various invigorating and health-promoting nutrients. Food containers were equally covered with long lists of vitamins and minerals. Nigeria was thus no exception to the global trend towards an increasing medicalisation of food. A very popular beverage readily available in the places where Jibril and I stopped to rest was the malt drink Maltina, which according to the print on the bottle was ‘a natural drink, rich in essential vitamins and minerals which provide the extra nourishment to build, protect and revitalize your body’. Its label listed seven different vita-
mins with which it was ‘fortified’ and ‘enriched’. Like an incantation for a future wished to be, it claimed to be ‘nourishment for life!’

‘Without reference to the absent, or “transcendence,” nothing is a tool’ (Dewey 1929:185). As tools to produce certain consequences, the enhanced food products, the vitamins, and the amulets in Jibril’s pocket were all ‘intrinsically relational, anticipatory, predictive’ (ibid.:185), directed towards futures feared as well as wished for. They functioned as incantations – portrayals of ‘a subjunctive world’ – a world of possibilities rather than certainties (Good 2005:153).

Whyte connected subjunctivity to the uncertainty that people experience when they embark on handling a specific situated concern – a mood of action that carries the signature of the explorative, worried, doubtful, and hopeful (2005:251, 263). Jibril’s actions, rather than being perfectly informed and exercises of mastery over his own future, were made in a subjunctive ‘mood of doubt, hope, will and potential’ (ibid.:251). In consciousness of possible failures – potentially ineffective, incorrect, fake, or even poisonous medicines – his use of medicines was a wishful doing: actions made with an awareness of the uncertainty of outcomes and future perils but with a hope of bringing forth futures wished for.

Jibril’s drinks continued to change as he tried to bring forth new futures he wished for. There was a number game going on in Nigeria in 2004. The idea was to collect soft-drink bottle caps that had a specific text inside the cap. After collecting them you were supposed to send them to the soft drink company along with your choice of numbers. Once a week, there was a nationally televised drawing of numbers and you could win one million Naira. At the time, Jibril started collecting these quite intensively. Every time we stopped to rest, he ordered soft drinks. He declared that if he won the million he would invest it all in shares and live on the
profit. He would not let everybody else beg from him, because then he would have nothing left.

In the nights, Jibril started asking his own spirits which numbers he should choose. He also found out later on that David had a talisman that could help him get the right numbers. He contacted David, who, after some convincing and after pointing out that he himself never would use this kind of medicine, gave him a photocopied talisman and instructions on how to prepare it. Jibril was supposed to take it with him when he went to bed. When he woke up in the morning the numbers would be there in his head. When we left David, Jibril was very happy about the talisman, but he also went on to talk about Indian medicine being very strong. Mummy had been born in India, and he wanted me to ask her for numbers to the lottery. I told him that she did not know anything about traditional medicine, but that did not matter; she was strong because she was from India. After some convincing, Mummy gave him the numbers 12, 13, and 17.

As Dewey put it: ‘Man finds himself living in an aleatory world; his existence involves, to put it baldly, a gamble’ (1929:41). The collection of numbers and caps was something that occupied Jibril for several months, but in the end none of them paid off. Luck was not with him.

Elusive Conditions

For Jibril, it was no easy task to find the causes or the cures for either of his conditions. Not only was the future uncertain, but so, too, were the present and the past. They were ‘hypothetical’ possibilities, a ‘possibly real present, past, and future’, that were altered as new presents emerged (Mead 1932:12, 173). For Jibril, the cure to all his troubles was to be found in correctly deciphering the past. Rather than a fact that imposed itself upon the present, the past offered itself up as matters of potentiality (Jackson 2005b:356ff.). By persistently trying to reveal the forces of the past that had created his predicaments, he tried to find medicines that would cure him and give him back his position as the unquestionably elected secretary of the union. As he reinterpreted the past with every new step, his predictions of the future were also revised accordingly.

With his steady intake of vitamin C Jibril started to feel better, but some weeks later when we were on our way to the Ministry of Health he declared that his catarrh had returned due to the cold weather we were experiencing. From his plastic bag he pulled out a package of Koflin, a medicine against colds that could be bought in any pharmacy in Jos. He
had used it before and knew that it worked well. At the ministry we bumped into Cheto, who took us to lunch. Cheto was the middle-aged ‘orthodox’ doctor who worked as a general practitioner at the ministry. When we arrived at the restaurant, Jibril described for Cheto how he often got tired after eating and experienced shortness of breath when walking up stairs. Cheto responded by explaining that it could have something to do with his heart. We should come to his office so that he could listen to his heart and take his blood pressure. He declared that he would treat Jibril’s high blood pressure with digitalis.

Two days later when we visited Cheto in his office, he immediately wrote a referral for Jibril to bring to the clinic downstairs, where his blood pressure would be taken. After a while Jibril returned with a nurse, who gave the test results to Cheto. Sitting in his revolving leather chair behind his desk, he looked at the results and commented to the nurse that she had written ‘Mister Jibril’ and not ‘Doctor Jibril’. Jibril laughed quietly and the nurse said she was sorry. Looking serious and facing Jibril, Cheto started talking about his symptoms, which indicated that he had a weakened heart and that it was becoming enlarged. He looked at Jibril’s feet and noted that they were not swollen, which indicated that his condition was at an early stage.

Cheto wrote more referrals for new tests and sent Jibril off for blood tests and urine tests. Cheto continued writing referrals for an X-ray and for a heart specialist at JUTH. He wanted to see the size of Jibril’s heart. After leaving Cheto, Jibril was very pleased about all the tests, and he talked for a long time about the finger-prick blood test. Later, when Jibril finally brought all his test results, Cheto explained that Jibril did not have a heart problem, but pneumonia, and prescribed antibiotics for him.

Even though Jibril’s health problems temporarily subsided during his intake of antibiotics, they soon returned with full force. Nothing seemed to help, and he let me know that he believed that the spirit had been right. He recalled that the spirit had said that the illness was not going to kill him, but all his other troubles might. Somebody was after him, and this was why nothing was helping. Another practitioner whom he knew had also told him that someone was trying to poison him, and Jibril added that he believed it was someone in the union. He no longer thought that it was his heart or pneumonia that was causing his problems. He stated that he had never been ill before, but now he could not get rid of the illness. This proved that someone was poisoning him.

Some weeks later Jibril was feeling a bit better. For six days he had been taking a medicine that he had obtained from yet another practitio-
ner. He mixed the medicine with charcoal, set it on fire, and inhaled the smoke. The man who gave him the medicine had told him that it was the spirits that were causing his illness. Jibril now adhered to this explanation and had ceased to believe that someone was poisoning him.

The following day was the day when, despite his long preparations, he made such a miserable appearance. Instead of showing up on time at the Tuesday meeting at the union office in his newly dry-cleaned suit, he arrived late in his dirty clothes from the day before. He looked very worn and was tired after spending the whole morning at JUTH. Gasping for air and shaking, he explained that he had suffered an asthma attack. After being treated by seven doctors and receiving a remarkably powerful adrenalin injection, he had dismissed the spirits as the cause of his illness. He was now convinced that he had asthma and needed asthma medicine. He had received two prescriptions for tablets and one for an inhaler. In his patient book from the hospital was a note that he should go for a follow-up on the following Monday.

After he had been to the check-up, Jibril recounted that the first person to see him had been doing his internship at the hospital. Noting that Jibril’s illness had not disappeared, he had called in a doctor. The doctor in turn had called in around ten different interns to look at Jibril. The doctor had asked if they could tell him what was wrong with Jibril. They had all answered incorrectly. From his plastic bag Jibril took out a paper from the hospital that stated that he had been given the diagnosis of bronchitis asthma. While showing me the papers, he described the tests the doctor had wanted him to take, which included a new X-ray as well as blood, saliva, and urine tests.

Illness stories, as Byron Good noted, ‘are stories that change as events unfold. They point to the future with both hope and anxiety, and they often maintain several provisional readings of the past and the present’ (2005:144), alternatives which keep an openness to a ‘subjunctive world’ of possibilities and miracles (ibid.:153). As Jibril reinterpreted the cause of his illness from cold weather, enemies, a heart problem, pneumonia, poison, spirits, to asthma, it was not only his view of the past that changed, but also his choice of medication. As Mead observed: ‘We determine what the world has been by the anxious search for the means of making it better’ (1932:90). He had tried a great number of different forms of medicine. Besides Cheto, Houwa, David, Mummy, and the doctors at JUTH, he had also taken medicine recommended by the Chief of the Hunters, an old bori woman, four Hausa men, Maryam, Samuel, Isaac, and himself. Among other things, he had used talismans, manpower medicine, powder that would make everybody like you, cold medicine,
antibiotics, vitamins, medicinal food, and herbal and Western asthma medication as well as talking and sacrificing to the spirits.

Still, after all the medicines Jibril had tried, his problems did not disappear. Since he had to be sitting up to be able to breathe, he had trouble sleeping. He also had shortness of breath when he was eating. When he explained his trouble to one of the professors at the pharmacology department, the professor seemed convinced that it was asthma, and he recommended that Jibril try the ‘orthodox’ medicine sodium cromoglycate. He should take one tablet a day, and he should also start exercising. Every day he should go jogging for ten minutes. It would be good for his lung capacity, and that in turn would help with his asthma.

The professor also said that certain things could trigger asthma attacks, such as changes in the weather, and added that Jibril should wear a vest under his gown. He thought that Jibril should be able to tell what caused his attacks, but Jibril did not know why they came. Jibril had a very hard time deciphering what was going on and what had passed. He could not pin down the causes underlying his illness and consequently could not determine the correct antidote or medicine either. He was constantly given new diagnoses and was prescribed new medicines accordingly.

Jibril constantly searched for new tools that could bring forth wished-for futures in the form of health and success. No matter whether they came in the form of a folded talisman or a tablet bought from a pharmacy, they became incantations that could be used in attempts to invoke futures hoped for and longed for. They were tokens of hope (Whyte 2002:178). On our way home from the professor, Jibril bought some honey, an ingredient in a new medicine that he was preparing from a recipe he had been given from yet another medicine practitioner. Already the next day Jibril told me that he had been running back and forth on one spot for ten minutes and that after doing this for three days he would increase it by five minutes. He added that the people in the village had laughed while he was running. He had also checked out the medicine that the professor had recommended. It would cost 45 Naira per day and he thought it was too much, but he would nonetheless try it for ten days.

A week later, on another visit with the professor, Jibril declared that the new asthma medicine had worked very well. Compared to previous medicines that had been based on incorrect diagnoses, the new medicine had a lot of strength. Jibril described how he was getting well and that he was jogging one and a half kilometres every morning.
Snuff

Jibril’s constant search for new medicines was tentative, exploratory, and speculative. The knowledge of possible problems and medicines that he gained through his struggle was an ‘experimental knowledge’ rather than an abstractly rational one (Dewey 1930:100, 160f.). It was tested over and over again against the consequences of his unfolding actions and adjusted accordingly.

One day towards the end of September, Jibril, after sneezing persistently, went to buy traditional snuff that he thought would help. He inhaled some and started to sneeze even worse; his asthma became severe and he experienced serious problems breathing. His inhaler was finished, and he kept taking tablets against asthma but got no relief. I told him that we should go and buy the inhaler and added that he should not take snuff again. He answered that he had never tried it before, but he had seen other people take it.

We soon found a pharmacy, but it had only tablets, so we continued on to another one but received the same message. Since his breathing was getting worse and worse, I told Jibril to wait for me to come back with an inhaler. After trying several pharmacies I finally found one and hurried back. He inhaled immediately and the asthma attack subsided. He blessed me and said I had saved his life. He ended by making the sign of the cross.

As Jibril continually reinterpreted the past to find new ways forward, misfortune rather than luck appeared to stay with him. Despite all his struggles, Jibril’s situation was very much the same when the year came to an end as it had been when it started. His position in the union was just as unclear and his health was still causing him a lot of problems. Regardless of all the documents, invitations, meetings, amulets, vitamins, talismans, asthma medications, etc. he had employed, he had been unable to solve any of his predicaments. The subjunctive mood is distinguished by doubt, as Whyte explained, ‘but more than that, the mood is subjunctive because it is full of conditionality and possibility, hope and desire. It acknowledges contingency but evokes possible futures’ (2005:254). As much as it was an experimental doing, Jibril’s pursuit was a wishful doing. He carried out his actions with fear and an awareness of the uncertainty of outcomes, but with a hope of beneficial endings.
9. ‘The End of the End Time’

In February 2002, just a few months after the crisis in 2001, the central, main marketplace in Jos – commonly referred to as ‘Jos Ultra Modern Market’ or ‘Terminus Market’ – burned down. In 2007, it was still only the shell of the once so proudly flourishing market that occupied its place. A contract had been awarded to rebuild it, but no actual work had taken place at the site. Outside the fence surrounding the abandoned market, the streets were crowded with market stalls that had previously been on the other side of the fence. Now and then, depending on the governorship of the state, actions were taken to control the spread of the market- ers. But if they were chased away one day, the next day would find their number growing again. With the cause of the fire still a mystery, the shell of the burnt-out multi-storey market just stood there as a symbol of the ill fortune Jos was experiencing.

Soon after my return to Jos in 2004, Houwa – the bori queen of Jos – commented on the burnt-out main market and compared it to a village market, which would be built out of wood and grass but would still last for twenty years without burning down. How could it be that a village market would last while the Jos market built out of concrete had not? It all had to do with maganin gargajiya, traditional medicine. Before you took over a place, the spirits needed to be appeased. When a village market was established, people came together and called on the practitioners of traditional medicine to come and make sacrifices; if they did not, the place would have no protection against, fires, robbers, or other threats to its survival and success (see Masquelier 1993). No such protection had been summoned for the Jos market.

Houwa explained that God had intended that the spirits should live among humans and benefit from them. Blood was the spirits’ food, and when you slaughtered animals they drank their blood; this was the reason you prepared sadaka, alms, so that the spirits could come and take part in the festivities. Nor had anything been offered to God since the opening of the market. The government had not said, ‘Come, let us pray and thank God for the place’. Instead, all the businessmen and customers had gone
on with their dealings without caring. All that time, the place had been left without any spiritual protection and had been vulnerable to danger at any moment.

Houwa stated that not only Jos but the whole world was in crisis. The world had started with war and it would end with war, she said, and the end time was approaching. The source of her knowledge was divine. Many of the signs described in the Koran and the Bible had appeared. Besides the antagonism of today’s world, certain modern buildings could be recognised from prophesies in the holy books. In addition there was the AIDS situation that was raging all over the world, and the fact that it had become very difficult for young men and women to find wives and husbands. ‘We are approaching the end of the end time’, she concluded.

For Houwa, not only the future of the marketplace but also that of Jos as a whole was in the hands of the practitioners. There was a relationship between the iskoki, spirits, and the problems in Jos. Everybody had an iska, and the spirit inside you could manifest itself and agitate you or calm

As an opinion piece depicted it, ‘The terminal illness of the Jos terminus market has reached a critical stage. The vast enclosure of one of the largest markets in West Africa has remained deserted, and like a tree which is almost sure never to regenerate, the collapsed structures of the terminus have remained on their knees, crying for a pardon’ (Ozohu-Suleiman 2003).
you down. If the right persons had performed the sacrifices that the spirits had called for, the spirits would have been able to suppress all the anger within people, and the crisis could have been averted.

She emphasised that the problems were not caused by the spirits. Two months before the crisis in Jos they had in fact come to warn her, in an effort to help the humans deal with the effects of the approaching end of the end time. The spirits had told her that sacrifices of cows needed to be performed by all the different religious and ethnic groups in Jos. If they were not performed, the crisis could not be avoided. No one would even know how it had started, but a lot of people would suffer.

However, people had not been able to unite and perform the necessary sacrifices. She had contacted the bori king of Jos and informed him about what the spirits had told her. He had proposed that they go to see the governor of Plateau State and tell him about the situation. Houwa had urged him to do so, but explained that she was a married woman and therefore could not join him. He had then accused her of lying about the message. In so doing, Houwa told me, he had also indirectly accused the spirits of lying. The spirits were displeased, and one night some days later the King had received a visit from a spirit from Abuja. In order to test the honesty of the King and his family, she let them know she was carrying money. The King’s daughter could not resist the temptation and stole the money from the spirit, who turned into human form and called the police to the house. The King and his daughter had been arrested, but later released on bail. As a punishment for their actions the spirits had chased the King and his daughter out of Jos and locked them up in neighbouring Bauchi State. The daughter had later died in Bauchi and the King had become paralysed. Unable to move, he was in exile without any hope of ever returning to Jos. The spirits were against him. Houwa added that as a leader of the bori practitioners he had done a terrible thing. The practitioners had given him a mission and he had refused to execute it.

Since people had not been able to unite to perform the necessary sacrifices, another spirit from Abuja had visited Houwa and told her that she should just make a small sacrifice to protect herself and the people close to her. Not being able to perform the proper sacrifices in Jos, she had travelled to Gombe State to organise sacrifices together with other bori practitioners for the sake of Jos. She had sacrificed eight chickens, two sheep, and some additional food material. As a result of her actions, the crisis had never reached the people living in her area in Jos.

Ever since the crisis, the spirits had kept visiting Houwa before new outbreaks of violence in Jos, and using her own money, time, and energy
she has continued to make the needed sacrifices on behalf of everybody. She had saved money to build a new house, but she was postponing those plans because she knew it was necessary to offer the sacrifices. She explained that she was doing it all because she believed that it created benefits for everybody and that God would reward her in the end. She had a special gift from God that no ordinary doctor had, and the government had to come around and recognise this. If the spirits told her that certain things needed to be sacrificed, the government had to give her the cows to keep Jos safe. She concluded that they, the bori practitioners, were working on behalf of everybody to keep Jos peaceful: Christians, Muslims, and traditionalists alike.

Jos’s Mythical Past

The fight over Jos was as old as the city. In his article ‘Who Owns Jos?’ Plotnicov drew attention to the fact that only Berom had been successful in claiming Jos in the sense of being its original occupants. However, through the years the Hausas, the Igbo s, and the Tivs had also tried at different times to claim the city (1972:3). He concluded:

One of the salient characteristics of Jos […] is its ethnic heterogeneity. That, together with the ideology of ethnic ownership and Jos’ own lack of a clear identification with the legitimate ownership of one ethnic group, produces a volatile situation that can readily be ignited. (Plotnicov 1972:4)

With the crisis in 2001, the struggle over the ownership of Jos was given new fuel. On one side were the three main indigene groups – Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere – who saw their ‘traditional lands’ converging in Jos town, and on the other were the Hausa-Fulani, who claimed that they were the first to settle on the virgin land that would later see the growth of Jos (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:245f.). The conflict was connected to the questions of who created Jos and who had been first on the scene. With the fight over ownership as a background, several different origin myths of Jos have emerged over time.

The myths point to the importance of naming as a performative act, as they all converge around the origin of the name ‘Jos’ and circle around mispronunciations, alterations, and abbreviations of words, which eventually turned into the present name. What was of importance was who had invented the original name. The myths were all attempts to erase and bring forth pasts – to produce a history (see Adetula 2005:222f.; Egwu 2004:263) – that would generate the futures and ownerships that the
different groups wished for. Being attempts to strengthen the ties of certain groups to Jos at the expense of others, the myths in different ways tapped into the indigene versus settler or Christian versus Muslim aspects of the tension in Jos. As such, they belonged and spoke to present rather than past conditions. It was the pasts that the present called for (Mead 1932:48). But, most importantly, they were constructed in anticipation of futures strived for or dreaded.

As tools in the competition over who Jos’s proper owners were, the myths, even if they used the same city name, invoked ‘radically different imaginaries’ (Amin & Thrift 2005:122). One of the myths, adhered to by descendants of the Hausa-Fulani who had come to Jos with the arrival of the British, had it that when they had settled down on the unoccupied land of present-day Jos they found themselves surrounded by people who were ‘pagans’. Consequently, they named the place Majus, Arabic for ‘pagan’. It was from this word that the name Jos was later derived (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:246).

Several other myths were also based on the idea that the name Jos came from a mispronunciation of a name given by one or another of the ‘indigene’ groups that laid claim to the ownership of Jos. One held that before the arrival of the British, there had been an indigene place called Gwosh that the British mispronounced as Jos (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:246). In another version, which Pam, the Berom practitioner, adhered to, there had been a spring at the present location of Jos, and his forefathers had called the place Jot, the word for spring water in Berom. When people from outside had started to arrive, ‘they turned it to Jos’ (see also Bingel 1978:2f.; Egwu 2004:263f.; Laws 1954:117, Smedley 2004:18; Taylor 1993:27; Zangabadt 1983:9-12).

Yet another myth carried a lot of force in Jos at the time, since it tapped into the religious dimensions of the tensions. In this myth, Jos was an abbreviation of ‘Jesus Our Saviour’, a name it had been given by a British missionary upon his arrival on the land (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2002:246). This was a myth that the German Pentecostal evangelist Reinhard Bonnke tapped into when he came to Jos during his ‘crusade’ in January 2005. Bonnke and his team not only identified Jos as named by Christians, but they also proclaimed themselves a second wave of missionaries entering Jos (Bradshaw 2005). Although they expected ‘considerable opposition’, they meant that Christians in Jos needed support and Jos a ‘divine visitation’ (Darku 2005).

Through the use of language – ‘the tool of tools’ (Dewey 1929:186) – people tried to bring forth different cities. The myths were all part of a
struggle over defining or conjuring pasts and futures hoped to be. Regarding some of the myths mentioned above, Danfulani and Fwatshak attributed different levels of credibility to them, ranging from ‘plausible’ to having ‘no historical substance’ (2002:246). But in the end, truth was a matter of consequences. As James put it, one can say of truth either that “it is useful because it is true” or that “it is true because it is useful.” Both these phrases mean exactly the same thing’ (1995:79). The importance of the myths lay in how well they tapped into the tensions in Jos – the conditions of the present – and how forcefully they acted for realities wished for. What would hold true in the future, only time could tell. But what was of importance for Jos’s inhabitants was what the myths did. If they enabled access to pasts and futures dreamt of, they held true from that perspective.

Saving a Divided Land

When Houwa was a young girl, Aisha performed girka – the initiation into bori – for her. Aisha, a Muslim woman now in her eighties, had been working with spirits since she was fourteen. She lived in the same village in the north of Jos that the King of bori had lived in. During a visit in her home in 2004 she told me quite a different story to what Houwa had told me of why the King had moved to Bauchi. She described how his children had forced him to move against his will, because they did not think that Jos was safe for him anymore. Regardless of this, her description of the situation in Jos was not that different from Houwa’s. Aisha had just attended a wedding, and she complained that the bori practitioners had not performed as was customary. There were no bori festivals in Jos anymore, because the practitioners there were not united. When they arranged meetings, either nobody attended or they were fighting.

It had all started around ten years before. Aisha had told the King that they should sacrifice a cow for the maintenance of peace in Jos, but it
never happened because the practitioners were not united. Some years later she made the same proposal again, with the same result. Then Houwa made the same suggestion in 2001, likewise in vain. Aisha ended by saying that they were now going to try once again to unite so they could sacrifice a cow to ensure that peace was kept in Jos. Sacrifices needed to be made on behalf of everyone, but it was hard to unite people, since they wished for different things.

Nothing seemed to change. When Houwa and I had a reunion in her home in 2007, no communal sacrifices had been made as an effort to save Jos, and her beloved husband had passed away. She went on to tell me that before the election in 2007, a politician from the House of Representatives in Plateau State had come to her when she was working with the spirits. He had asked how things would turn out for Plateau State and Nigeria after the election. The spirits had answered that things would go badly for Nigeria if the election was held on the day it was planned, but if the election was just moved one day, things would become better. This was never done, and the politician returned to Houwa afterwards to ask if there was anything else that could be done. The spirits told him that the only thing that now could save the country was if all the practitioners of traditional medicine were called together to pray and sacrifice for the nation. If this was not done, divided Nigeria with all its conflicts could not be saved.

In a Jos and a Nigeria felt to be on a path of steady decay, Houwa’s fears that the world was coming to an end were echoed in other Nigerian voices (Agbu 2004:18f.; Last 2008:42, 58). With hardships that seemed to have no end, ‘Only God can save us’ had become a familiar saying (Hackett 1998:260). People’s trust in the future was hanging on a thin thread. Shops and businesses that lined the streets of Jos carried the most fateful names – ‘God’s Will Modern Supermarket’, ‘God’s Time: Eye Wear, Optical and Clock Collection Centre’, ‘Miracle Curtains: A Div. of Miracle Shopping Centre’, and ‘God’s Miracle Ventures’.
‘In the end, words seem to be the only weapons one has to defend oneself against the city’, wrote De Boeck (2004:258). People were looking at the country as well as their city with both wishes and fears. A friend in Jos explained that all his children’s names in Igbo meant God’s will and similar things. He added that Nigerians liked names that meant something. Another friend, who gave birth to a child just after the crisis, named her child Peace as a way of praying that peace would prevail in Jos from then on. The names chosen for children, like the motto ‘Plateau: Home of Peace and Tourism’, the signboards advertising companies like ‘Peace Herbal Health Care Centre’ and ‘Peace Comm: Computer & Phone Repairs’, and car stickers with messages like ‘It is Well with Plateau State’ or ‘the Peace of God Shall Reign in Plateau’, were acts of wishful doing: creative actions of the imaginary – a wish-fulfilling mythmaking (Dewey 1929:346).

As spells that were invoked over and over again to overcome felt absences and to summon futures wished for, they were vehicles for desire and hope – ‘verbal missiles of magical power’ (Malinowski 1965:248). At the same time that the inhabitants were invoking Jos as a peaceful city, there was a deep-seated awareness of an absence of peace. The home of peace was a utopia, a dreamt-of Jos – an imagined perfect place, a future wished to be as well as a paradise lost.

The inhabitants of Jos were raising voices for peace, but this was done in a context where the words used often invoked strongly oppositional futures. Only the future could tell what Jos would become and what images and wishes would hold true. The world was still in the making – ‘still pursuing its adventures’ (James 1995:99). But it was a future dreaded, and people’s actions were many times made in a spirit of hopelessness as much as in hope. In the end of the end time, people were praying for miracles.

* * *

My fieldwork in Jos started out as a study of traditional medicine, but came to be about life in a city struck by violence and divisions. Central to the book has been uncertainty, interdictions, and possibilities, and the tools employed to find ways forward. As I write this, an uneasy calm prevails in Jos after a year of intense violence. It is election time and military helicopters are hovering over the city. Business is stagnant after months of curfew. People are eager to get on with their lives, but, wherever it leads, the city appears to be on its own path.
Short Biographies of Selected Informants

David

David, a Yoruba man in his fifties, moved from southern Nigeria to Jos when he was in his twenties. After starting his own family he began having dreams about dispensing medicine. In the end he understood that this was his calling, and towards the end of the 1980s travelled to a secret school in south-west Nigeria to increase his medical knowledge. David was the president of a group that organised most of the Yoruba practitioners in Jos.

Emanuel

Emanuel was an Igbo practitioner born in Jos. He decided when he left secondary school in the early 1980s to continue with the herbal work he had inherited from his mother. He referred to himself as a Chief Doctor and saw himself as the leader of all the Igbo practitioners in Plateau State.

Houwa

Houwa, a Muslim Fulani woman in her fifties, moved to Jos as a girl when she married. She had been ill as a child and was cured through an initiation into bori. Although she did not start working with the spirits and giving medicine until her menopause, she became a very prominent practitioner and she carried the title of bori queen of Jos. Before the crisis, she had been the treasurer of NUMHP in Jos.
Hadiza

Hadiza, a Christian Rukuba woman in her sixties, had been part of NUMHP since the 1980s and had subsequently come to be the only practitioner who was regularly compensated by the Jos University Pharmacology Department as a consultant herbalist. It was her name that was displayed on the small official university sign above the union’s office door.

Ibrahim

Ibrahim, a Muslim Hausa man, had been the chairman of NUMHP before the crisis. During the crisis his house was burnt down and he subsequently moved further north in Nigeria.

Idris

Idris, a Muslim Fulani man in his sixties, was born further north and moved to Jos in the 1960s. After living in the city for twelve years he bought land and built a house in Jenta Adamu. His house was destroyed during the crisis in 2001 and he ended up temporarily renting a house in Angwan Rogo together with Yakubu, another practitioner. He had inherited his father’s knowledge of medicine, but he subsequently acquired more knowledge through dreams and became a mallam. Besides his medical practice he also had a mattress shop in the centre of Jos.

Isaac

Isaac was born in a village in southern Nigeria in the 1940s and moved to Jos in 1997. Newly arrived in the city, he settled in Angwan Rogo. But during the crisis, Isaac’s house was burnt down and he moved to the south-western outskirts of Jos. While he had felt safer there, business did not go well at all, and in 2007 Isaac moved his business elsewhere and left Jos.
James

James, a Yoruba man in his thirties, was born in Jos. He was the chairman of the group that organised most of the Yoruba practitioners in Jos.

Jibril

Jibril was born in 1943 into a Muslim and indigene family in Shendam, in the southern part of Plateau State. His family moved to Jos when he was about thirteen. He learned at an early age how to read and write, and he also began learning medicine from his father and grandfather. However, it was not until he joined the army that he began to practice medicine. After retiring, he moved in 1996 to a small village about thirty kilometres outside Jos in the bush of Bassa local government to stay closer to his clients in the military barracks. Jibril had been part of the inner circle of NUMHP since its establishment in the early 1980s. Before the crisis he had been its unquestionable elected secretary. He was listed as one of three ‘consultant herbalist doctors’ on the union’s office door at the Jos University Pharmacology Department.

Mai Lafiya

Mai Lafiya, a Muslim Hausa man in his eighties, was born in Kano. His path as a bori practitioner started when he fell seriously ill as a teenager, and he later moved to Jos in connection with his treatment of a patient. During the 1980s, when NUMHP had an office at the cultural centre, he had been its chairman. He was one of the three practitioners listed as ‘consultant herbalist doctors’ on the union’s office door at the Jos University Pharmacology Department.

Pam

Pam, a Berom man in his sixties, was born and had lived all his life in what was today the Congo Russia area of Jos. He was not only one of the early Berom converts to Christianity, but also one of the few Beroms who had received a Western education early on. The medicine he practiced today was a mixture of ‘orthodox’ and ‘traditional’ medicine. He had pre-
ceded Ibrahim, the chairman who was in office before the crisis, as chairman of NUMHP.

**Samuel**

Samuel was a Christian Rukuba man who had lived all his life in the bush in Bassa local government. In 1998, he was elected chairman of NUMHP in Bassa local government.

**Yakubu**

Yakubu, a Muslim Hausa man in his late fifties, moved to Jos as a teenager from the more northern part of Nigeria. Before the crisis of 2001, he lived in Kabong in Jos. But his house was burnt down and he moved temporarily to Angwan Rogo, where he rented a house with Idris, another practitioner. After going to a Koranic school he had given up bori medicine, which his father and grandfather had also practiced, and he now exclusively performed the practices of a mallam.
References


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All photographs in this work have been taken in Jos and its environs, by either the author or Erik Trovalla.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Daniel Kyaruzi Ndagala</td>
<td>Territory, Pastoralists and Livestock. Resource Control among the Kisongo Maasai.</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
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<td>Perceiving Motherhood and Fatherhood. Swedish Working Parents with Young Children.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1999</td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Marie Perruchon</td>
<td>I Am Tsunki. Gender and Shamanism among the Shuar of Western Amazonia.</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Bernhard Helander</td>
<td>The Slaughtered Camel. Coping with Fictitious Descent among the Hubeer of Southern Somalia.</td>
<td>2003</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sverker Finnström</td>
<td>Living with Bad Surroundings. War and Existential Uncertainty in Acholiland, Northern Uganda.</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Charlotte Widmark</td>
<td>To Make Do in the City. Social Identities and Cultural Transformations among Aymara Speakers in La Paz.</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Michael Barrett</td>
<td>Paths to Adulthood: Freedom, Belonging, and Temporalities in Mbunda Biographies from Western Zambia.</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


