

WEST AFRICAN REGIONAL WORKSHOP 2006: SESSION NOTES

I. CURRENT CRISE RESEARCH: Managing ethnic politics in West Africa

Chair: Yusuf Bangura

1. Francis Akindès: **Socio-history of political violence and horizontal inequalities in Côte d'Ivoire**

Akindès argued that the existence of horizontal inequalities does not mean conflict is automatic. 'Political work' is needed to transform HI into conflict. This paper looks at the political production of horizontal inequalities – through a phenomenological analysis of conflict – and the marketing of identities through the style of leadership of each leader. It looks at the correlation between leadership style and conflicts that explode into violence, and political marketing, which focuses on the logic of the 'insider versus the outsider'.

2. Arnim Langer: **Horizontal inequalities and conflicts in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire**

This paper asks why Côte d'Ivoire has experienced violent conflict when Ghana has not. Despite the existence of severe socioeconomic divisions between north and south in both countries, how has Ghana managed to manage its north-south cleavages peacefully?

Langer argues that we must look at cultural and political horizontal inequalities not only socioeconomic ones. This means taking seriously perceptions of difference as well as actual differential treatment of groups on the grounds of their ethnic, religious or racial background.

The presence of these three types of inequality, together with feelings of religious inequality and unequal treatment, has created an explosive situation in Côte d'Ivoire. In Ghana, in spite of the north-south divide in developmental terms, the image of national unity, cultural equality and inclusion of northern elites tempers the potentially explosive nature of socioeconomic inequalities. Since February 2005, however, a process of creeping 'Akanisation' of the government has been taking place. The Ivorian situation is in stark contrast. Since the Gbabgo era, from January 2001 onwards, northern Mande and Voltaic groups have been excluded or underrepresented i.e. northerners are not only socioeconomically excluded but also politically excluded.

3. Abdul Raufu Mustapha: **Institutionalising Ethnic Representation: How Effective Is the Federal Character Commission in Nigeria?**

Mustapha's paper explores how effective the Federal Character Commission in Nigeria has been in producing a balanced bureaucracy and removing the problem of ethnic inequalities in the public sector, and the policy implications of its activities and impact.

Nigeria is a deeply divided society, with four major cleavages that need bridging:

1. Differences between the three major groups
2. Differences between majorities and minorities
3. Differences between north and south
4. Religious cleavages between Muslims and Christians

Each exists alongside persistent patterns of inequality leading to social perceptions of each cleavage and having an effect on life chances.

Northern zones with the majority of the population have relatively few university places and cannot generate manpower sufficient for the public sector. The educational inequalities hence lead to inequalities in the composition of the public sector. Social inequalities affect access to education, child mortality etc.

The northern zones are underrepresented in the general bureaucracy, but have more representation at the directorate level, because decisions on directors are politically driven. Those who control the bureaucracy often come from minority groups. Nigeria has tried to develop mechanisms to deal with the crisis that these imbalances have provoked.

The first round of reforms in 1967 dismantled the regional political infrastructure – to undermine cleavages between majority ethnic groups and to give minorities more autonomy from majorities. This was done by taking power away from the peripheries and concentrating it around the centre and through the introduction of formal quotas in the cabinet and extending them to educational institutions. There were also conscious attempts to manage the generation of elites.

In 1979, the notion of a 'majoritarian presidency' was introduced, whereby the presidential aspirant was obliged to enjoy a threshold of support in different parts of the country – to encourage the generation of national, not ethnic or regional, parties. Consociational power-sharing mechanisms were also introduced that forced the government to reflect the country's 'federal character', known as the 'Federal Character Principle'. A Federal Character Commission was set up to ensure that the principle was given effect.

How effective has it been? The Federal Character Commission designed a formula for the composition of the Nigerian bureaucracy – each state was to have a minimum of its people represented in the federal bureaucracy. The criticisms levelled against it argue that it is only about sharing existing educational facilities, rather than creating new ones. The World Bank and others have also argued that it is inefficient and encourages mediocrity. Others claim that it favours a tribal character, but does little to promote a collective Nigerian citizenship and does not address the problem of ethnic minority exclusion. This is because representation in federal institutions is on the basis of states, which are often mixed and in which majority groups are often in a controlling majority. Since the Federal Character Commission was set up, the proportion of the bureaucracy represented by constituencies it was supposed to help has declined.

Can the commission really do what it set out to do? It suffers from a major conceptual problem about the nature of representation. It is trying to achieve the most difficult type of affirmative action. But the existence of the commission has at least produced

important data which allows these issues to be discussed; prior to that it was always contentious because data was produced by different regions. The data have created norms that can structure debates. The Federal Character Commission has also made changes in the bureaucracy which have the potential to bring about positive change.

4. Richard Asante: Ethno-regional inequalities, conflict management and democratic consolidation in Ghana

This paper aims to understand why Ghana has remained a so-called 'oasis of peace' in the West African sub-region and prevented HI from escalating into violent conflict. What strategies have been adopted to manage diversities?

Against the background of a north-south socioeconomic dichotomy, successive governments – from the south mainly – have tried to include northerners in government and in bureaucratic institutions. Even though economic policies have favoured the south, they have tried to compensate the north by distributing basic resources (e.g. electricity and water). Institutions have been put in place to manage ethnic tensions and to ensure fair representation; the constitution has been supportive of this – aiming to ensure a 'reasonable balance' in the composition of government. Although governments have not been able to achieve 'proportionality', they have made attempts. The political parties' code was intended to give parties a 'national character'. Asante emphasised the role of civil societies, notably the developmental and international NGOs.

5. Discussion

Discussant: Rotimi Suberu:

He pointed to links with other papers on horizontal inequalities. Akindès' paper was enlightening in suggesting that there is an important role for politics and political management of what might appear to be structural problems.

Regarding communication and the marketing of horizontal inequalities – brought out in Akindès' paper – he suggested parallels with Mustapha's paper on Nigeria. It would seem that different versions and visions exist amongst the population: political marketing; mass-based perceptions; and actual realities and data. Political marketing underscores the existence of different versions and visions of HI.

Langer's paper highlights two important points:

- Demographics: the general consensus was that Ghana was more peaceful because the demographics were not conducive to violent combustion; and
- The boundaries between HIs are not very clear cut: when we talk about bureaucratic HIs, are these political or socioeconomic inequalities? In Nigeria, the north is politically dominant but in terms of bureaucratic representation it is disadvantaged.

The key question is how to measure cultural HIs. Are they to be equated with representation of religious interests or representation of religious communities? What do 'cultural HIs' mean?

He noted that in the Nigerian perceptions survey, religion was less important as a factor, except where it coincided with ethnicity.

Referring to Mustapha's paper and the Nigeria/Ghana perceptions survey, he noted that perceptions of HI in the south were greater, even though people there were more advantaged. Mustapha's data showed massive inequality that affects the north. Yet the sense of group favouritism and inequality was stronger amongst those that were advantaged. This is crucial and links back to Akindès' point about the importance of political marketing. This suggests that political horizontal inequalities are more visible and explosive and contentious than economic inequalities.

Suberu could not understand why there was such a strong sense of inequality amongst groups that are socioeconomically advantaged. In Nigeria, although the north is educationally underdeveloped and backward, there is a sense of northern domination in terms of the presidency, as there is in the distribution of legislative seats, states and local government areas, all of which are regarded as favouring the north.

Mustapha's paper contained important data which helps us look at perceptions and reality in the context of ethnic entrepreneurship (as Akindès suggests). Mustapha's paper also urged us to give credit to the idea that attempts have been made to resolve imbalances in Nigeria.

Distinctions between Nigeria and Ghana are often exaggerated. Because of the reforms in Nigeria, a lot of conflicts are intermittent rather than sustained. Could we argue that these mechanisms mean that Nigerian integrity is less at stake?

Formal and informal mechanisms have been tried. Although subject to slippage, they have been very important. Informal mechanisms include, for example, the assumption that if the chairman of the Federal Character Commission comes from the north, then the executive secretary must come from the south – this is not formalised but needs to be borne in mind.

Asante's paper points to the need for a systematic comparison between Nigeria and Ghana, on a number of themes:

- The impact of extended military rule: Is June 4, 1979, to be celebrated or not? There needs to be an audit of military rule. The verdict in both countries is likely to be mixed.
- The role of the electoral commission: Here there has been a major difference between the two countries. The electoral commission commands little confidence in Nigeria, yet in Ghana – although it is appointed by the president as in Nigeria – the commission is generally recognised and respected, and has been able to take decisions that have hurt the incumbent government. We need to know some of the mechanisms through which the electoral commission in Ghana has secured independence.
- The party system: the 'national character' of the Ghanaian party system sounds very much as if it has been 'lifted' from Nigeria – yet despite this, it appears that ethnic voting patterns still operate.

- Regional inequalities disadvantage the north in both countries; the main difference is that the economically disadvantaged north is politically dominant in Nigeria, but not in Ghana.
- The issue of constitutional reform. Should it remove immunity from past officials as in Ghana – and what of the impunity enjoyed by current officers in Nigeria?
- The issue of the need to reduce and/or rotate the power of the presidency.

Other questions from the floor:

Isaac Albert, commenting on Mustapha's presentation, said that Nigerian scholars argued amongst themselves about these issues. This is the first time that there has been concrete data about the situation in Nigeria which would contribute towards gaining a better understanding. Scholars now have the challenge of supporting or challenging what Mustapha has said.

Ogoh Alubo asked Akindès: what is *Ivoirité* about? What percentage of the population do foreigners represent? Would Akindès explain *nettoyage*, or 'cleansing'.

In response to Suberu's comments, Albert noted that part of the Nigerian situation in the military and post-military era was perceived as 'northern dominance', with military rulers working with northern elites and traditional rulers. The data might show this or not, but there was a groundswell of opinion that a power shift had recently taken place – that national control of power had shifted from the north and from those domiciled in the north (this was popularly reflected in the way people wore their 'power shift' cap!). Some perceptions have recently emerged that some of the key appointments were going to the southwest, to woo the region because it did not vote for Obasanjo in 1999. Of 40 key appointments in parastatals, over half have gone to the southwest, according to the Daily Trust newspaper. Many people would find the view of northern dominance contentious now.

Suberu suggested that most current conflicts do not threaten the Nigerian state. However the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) is fighting to free Asari Dokubo, while the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) is pushing to resurrect the Biafra idea. During the 'trial census', many people in the east did not want to be 'counted' as part of Nigeria. In Yobe, a group of youths called 'Taliban' have attacked all the symbols of state – including police stations and tax officers. While this may not be on a wide scale, such groups do threaten the existence of Nigeria.

Dzodzi Tsikata commented that Akindès' graphic depiction of individual leaders and their origins is intriguing – it is not the case that in every country at all times ethnic origins are important; e.g. under the military, the focus is not on a person's origin but on their military status. She was therefore curious about Akindès' emphasis on the origins of leaders

Tsikata stated that it was difficult to define and measure cultural inequalities. She said that in Ghana the north was marginalised in terms of cultural symbols, but more work was needed in defining cultural inequalities. People from the south were often offensive towards and looked down on the north. But she generally agreed with Suberu that inclusion in political terms had meant that north/south confrontation was unlikely. One

should analyse how northern elite groups approach the issue of north/south cleavages, and the behaviour of the northern caucus in Parliament.

She commented that at no point had Asante problematised the role of chiefs. In his paper they came across in a positive way – but much of the conflict in Ghana has centred on them. Her and Wayo Seini's work on decentralisation suggested that they represented a very problematic institution in the Ghanaian political space.

Said Adejumobi argued that we should return to the essence of the project. In his view, inequality was inherent in group relations; what we were dealing with was the management of diversity in plural societies. In this respect there were three major factors to be explored:

- the political skills and actions of the political leadership;
- the legal framework; and
- institutional structures and mechanisms for mitigating inequalities.

He was intrigued by Akindès' idea that HI in and of itself does not lead to conflict and that political translation is important. He commented that it was therefore desirable to distil further the major elements in HI – first the background and context factors (inequalities in themselves) precipitating trigger factors. The issue was how a group changes from being a group *in* itself to one *for* itself – i.e. the development of group consciousness – through elite manipulation and social group conscientisation so that even a small child knows which group they belong to and where to 'point the accusing finger'. In other contexts, people don't even know what they are fighting for. It is important to look at this process whereby a group transforms itself from a group in itself to a group for itself.

He was not clear what was meant by cultural inequalities. Culture is everything, which implies it means nothing. He commented that it was a very tricky concept that we needed to deconstruct in order to be able to measure it.

On Mustapha's paper, he asked what is the relationship between political inequality, social inequality and economic inequality? What is the interface between the three? In the Nigerian context, it is the north that has controlled political power over the years, and there is a major perception that political power is important for leveraging other social-economic goods. Yet, the north has not gained economic power. What is the role of the elite in this? If the north has not been able to use its political power to obtain economic goods, then there may be a situation in which the elite is completely cut off from society as a whole. How do we problematise the issue of representation? Elite sharing of public goods only tells the story at a very superficial level – only about elite circulation and consensus.

Kone Gnangadjomon stated that Langer's approach to socioeconomic inequalities could explain instability. It is true that in Côte d'Ivoire there are inequalities between the northern and southern region. But these inequalities are 'natural' – because of the geographical situation in the northern region, farming is not possible. But Felix Houphouët Boigny developed a mechanism to compensate for the situation of the north. The land law established the principle that land is for the person who farms it. This allowed many in the north to move to the southern region. Inequalities between regions

are not the same as inequalities between people. Many people from the north live in the south.

Sam Egwu agreed with Akindès that there is a sense in which the way leaders managed might be the intervening factor explaining peace or war, given the same underlying situation. But as well as political manipulation, the economic crisis in Côte d'Ivoire also played an important role. Where does it feature in the framework?

Frances Stewart noted that it would be good to try and reproduce Akindès' work on 'political marketing' in other countries in order to give a comparative perspective. It was also important to try and document informal mechanisms to correct inequalities – which is difficult precisely because of their informality. She noted that as a group we might think about these mechanisms so that we can begin to create a database as a useful starting point.

Responses of the speakers:

Richard Asante commented on the role of chiefs, a formal institution traditionally considered as a stabilising and unifying factor. In his paper, he discussed national situations where chiefs intervened and assured a political resolution. For example, in the 2000 elections, in connection with the political violence between the parties and the military and police, the chiefs went far in calming things down. Afrobarometer (Round 2) suggests that Ghanaians have strong confidence in the chieftaincy institution for resolving violent conflict. This raises questions about the role of the courts and other institutions. People do not have confidence in these institutions; when cases are sent there it takes a long time for them to be resolved. This does not negate the fact that, in some instances, chiefs are the root of conflict (re: access to succession of stools and land) and/or engage in partisan politics which is against the constitution, and this has undermined their integrity and impartiality.

Abdul Raufu Mustapha noted on the theme of conscientisation or 'group consciousness', CRISE is analysing the situation in Latin America. He said that if anyone wanted to look at this in relation to West Africa, CRISE would welcome proposals.

There are different types of representation: for example, descriptive (i.e. an organ must be representative of the society), but this has limits – i.e. one would not want each organ to contain 'morons', even if this reflected society; while token figures could be included in an organ without any genuine representation. In the Federal Character Commission there is a serious lack of an outcome measurement – what impact does having more representatives of previously unrepresented groups have? It is necessary to identify the interface between political power and socioeconomic investment. He had explored this issue in other contexts. There is a structural problem of dealing with natural disadvantages and socially constructed disadvantage. An example is colonial educational policy in northern Nigerian – the most wasteful and most expensive in the whole of the British Empire, combined with cultural resistance to Western education based on Islam. The structural problem is that once independence came, everyone became aware of the educational deficiencies of the north. The northern response to this changed over time. In the 1950s and 1960s, the north was seizing control of politics to build up educational institutions in the north so as to produce the people needed to compete. After 1967 there was a shift, with a decoupling of political and socioeconomic

inequalities. Those who take power in and from the north satisfy their own economic interests but not those of the rest of northerners.

Suberu agreed with Alubo with respect to the position of the Nigerian state relative to these threats. But all threats to Nigeria are not systemic – MEND ‘are not challenging the Nigerian state’, but the state’s internal organisation, based on their own recent statements, which said: ‘We are still organising within the same framework’. MASSOB is seriously challenging the Nigerian state but who does it represent? The Taliban? This is a really threatening idea but they are not even a ‘fringe’ organisation, they are infinitesimal. The Federal Character Commission is helping us to take care of these matters – he disagreed with Alubo’s analysis about what the Obasanjo presidency has done to the ethnic/regional bias in Nigeria’s institutions. There has been a shift; there are some institutions that are ethnically loaded, e.g. security, which is controlled by Yoruba people, but the dominant Yoruba political forces are opposed to Obasanjo. Obasanjo represents himself and a very narrow group of people. It is necessary to explore the structure of Yoruba politics. We need to know who Obasanjo represents and what he is up to. The figures from the Federal Character Commission do not help us on this.

Arnim Langer said that the question of cultural horizontal inequalities had already been fiercely debated in the CRISE seminar and were controversial. He agreed that it was somewhat intangible and overlapped with political and socioeconomic issues. ‘Culture’ is useful, however, to help us pick up on something that is not captured in the political or economic sphere. For example, how national holidays in Parliament are debated and introduced. Yet many of the measures towards cultural recognition are informal. Much has to be done to rework the concept, but he believes it has to be thought through not just as a trigger to conflict, but in generating conflict in its own right. It is also useful to see how perceptions of cultural exclusion compound responses to socioeconomic or political inequalities.

Houphouët Boigny did bring more power to the north. He agreed the economic crisis made it more difficult to distribute to the north. Houphouët’s strategy ended with Gbagbo. The Northern Charter – an anonymous document circulated at the beginning of the 1990s – made many demands, including, notably, that more should be done for reduction of regional inequalities and the recognition of the Muslim religion.

Bangura argued that culture should not be underestimated. This came up in an UNRISD study in Trinidad, where there is a very serious struggle over symbolism, over national awards and national holidays, over things that look innocuous like the steel drum. This is not a ‘national symbol’ i.e. it is not a symbol for the Indians, but it is one for the Afro-Caribbeans. Cultural horizontal inequalities are difficult to measure but something that we should try to come to grips with

Francis Akindès replied to the question of what the role of *Ivoirité* had been in the Ivorian scenario. The first meaning of *Ivoirité* was a ‘cultural’ one, but this was not how it was being used at present. Previously it denoted a characteristic of Ivorians vis-à-vis other Africans. But in 1999, when political competition began, some politicians started using it to mobilise and hide their ‘interests’. Now *Ivoirité* came to be about ‘national preference’, i.e. Akan interests. The principal challenger, Ouattara, was from the north – and the northerners were always presumed to be likely to be foreigners. There was a report on the danger of disequilibrium arising with immigration. If northerners were

included, this could increase the size of Ouattara's electoral base. Behind proponents of *Ivoirité* was an ideology mobilised by Akan elites to exclude politicians from the west and north – a big project of political engineering to secure power.

The political crisis seems to be at the first level a citizenship issue – but this hides its economic aspects. The political crisis is rooted in economic decline, because it became more important to know who was inside and outside, as the size of the national cake was increasingly reduced. *Ivoirité* was a political instrument to organise 'cake sharing'.

The background to his study was a sociological model concerning the political marketing of identity. There were ontological aspects (about space and religion) and dynamic aspects (about memory, events, colonial rhetoric, historical relationships, ethnic prejudice, and political interpretation of indices of socioeconomic differentiation). It is in the process of managing identity that politicians use the data on horizontal inequalities to sensitise the people to support them because of the perceived danger of political challengers. They construct the feeling of 'insider' against 'outsider' – if we lose elections, then we become 'outsider'. This underlies the intensity of the struggle in Côte d'Ivoire today.