

WEST AFRICAN REGIONAL WORKSHOP 2006: SESSION NOTES

IV. CURRENT CRISE RESEARCH: Ethnicity and communal conflicts

Chair: Dzodzi Tsikata

1. Rachel Diprose: Communal conflicts in Nigeria and Indonesia

Rachel Diprose presented an outline of her proposed doctoral research. She said her motivation was to investigate why violent conflict occurs in some contexts and not in others. By comparing the experiences of Indonesia and Nigeria, she intends to find out whether there are conflict trajectories that are general or specific to each case. The study is the first to include both cross-country and sub-national comparisons.

The choice of case studies is justified because Nigeria and Indonesia are similar in terms of demography, resource base and the presence of incidents of small-scale violence that do not threaten state survival. Significantly though, Nigeria has a federal system while Indonesia is a unitary state.

The study will seek to examine the linkages between local and national conflicts. The evidence of the study will be based on case-study analysis, tracking conflicts through newspapers and examining processes of breakdown of order. Hypotheses that will guide the study are:

- Violent conflicts are likely to occur where there is a correlation between elite interests and perceived grassroots injustices
- Inequalities are likely to manifest as grievances (i.e. perceived or felt injustices) if there is a 'resonance' with identity consciousness. No group mobilisation is possible without identity consciousness and a perception of a shared group grievance.
- Violence will be likely to occur where there are few effective mediation mechanisms that are trusted, and considered legitimate.

2. Julia Jonson **The Overwhelming Minority: Traditional Leadership, Ethnicity and Conflict in Northern Ghana.**

Julia Jonson said her main objective was to interrogate the prevailing view that presents Ghana as a peaceful country with effective state institutions. The study focused on the Guinea Fowl War in northern Ghana, which was triggered by the Dagomba/Nanumba/Gonja paramount chieftaincy conflict. The largest outbreak of violence in 1994-5 led to the death of over 2,000 people and displacement of 178,000. Some 440 villages were burned down. The severity of the conflict is better appreciated given that the population of the region is 1.8 million. The conflict has reinforced stereotypes in southern Ghana of northerners as belligerent and tribalistic.

The major conflicts in Ghana are linked to access to land and the status of ethnic groups, even though succession disputes and intra-ethnic conflicts also occur. The ethnic conflicts in northern Ghana can be traced to the Colonial policy of classification of ethnic groups which led to the emergence of minority and majority ethnicity groups. This

classification had nothing to do with the actual size of populations. Majority ethnic groups (called the 'chiefly') were those that had pre-Colonial centralised chieftaincy institutions. On the other hand, the minority ethnic groups were the so-called 'chiefless' or acephalous societies. The chieftaincy institution is important because it enhances access to land. As a result of this, all ethnic groups have acquired chiefs, though the Colonial classification and indirect rule policies still affect perceptions of group status. Thus, Kokumba is the second largest group but considered a 'minority' group.

There have been various incidents of conflicts in the region which were suppressed through military intervention. The response of the Ghanaian state can be explored from both an effectiveness and normative point of view.

Effectiveness:

- The army response simply froze conflicts without addressing underlying tension.
- It led to polarisation along party lines.
- The negotiations were unsatisfactory; they were biased and secretive. The government did not publish the results of the commissions of inquiry it appointed and the recommendations of such commissions were not implemented.

Normative:

- The army response was ethically unacceptable.
- The processes of mediation were not transparent.
- The chieftaincy institution is not ethnically inclusive.

3. Adam Higazi: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos

The context of Adam Higazi's study is the increasing incidence of ethno-religious conflicts in Jos and Plateau State, central Nigeria, as the so-called indigenous population increasingly assert their influence after years of marginalisation. The dominant Hausa appear to have lost some power. The conflict could be better understood from the context of the indigene-settler dichotomy.

Population is defined along state lines – political rights and state rights related to a state in which people had 'ancestry'. Residency does not count. The indigenous population claim they were displaced during the Colonial period as a result of tin mining and large-scale immigration of the Hausa, who were mainly Muslim. Immigrants became more influential economically and politically during the Colonial and post-Colonial period. Indigenes have, allegedly, been 'marginalised' by 'non indigenes', who theoretically should have fewer rights

Hausas claim they are 'indigenes' because they have been there 'from the beginning' i.e. from the period of Colonialism. Thus, the whole question of 'autochthony' is contested

Party politics is driving the struggle. Different ethnic groups ally with different parties. Middle Belt identity is seen as common to indigenes opposed to 'Hausa domination'.

Minority groups in the north as a whole see themselves as trying to throw off Hausa domination – yet Hausa domination is declining politically if not economically.

4. Discussion

Discussant: Sam Egwu

Sam Egwu pointed to three cross-cutting issues:

- The central role of the state in these conflicts.
- Land and its ownership are linked to citizenship and indigeneity.
- The role of traditional institutions.

Jos study

The nerve of the Jos problem is the question: ‘Who is a citizen in the Nigerian case?’ The two groups are contesting citizenship from the same perspective, namely, who came to Jos first? This is the weakness of the claim of the Hausa community. If they had claimed citizenship of the Nigerian state, it would have served them better. This leads to weighing one historical narrative against the other. In such circumstances, resolution is difficult.

We need to be careful about questions of identity. For instance, when we look at people referred to as Hausa Fulani – they may not be by blood but may be Middle Belt people who have become ‘Muslims’. We need to be more specific about this identity. The so-called indigenous groups – Birom, Jarawa, Aguta – also include a number of Muslims. There is no ‘uniformity’ in their position as ‘minorities’ in the Jos crisis.

The Colonial state played an important role in what appears to be the crisis of citizenship and indigeneity in Jos. What they tried to do was to replicate a Native Authority system practised elsewhere. The Hausa became the ‘owners’ of Jos with segregation of ethnic communities, giving the Hausa the false impression that Jos belonged to them. Between 1902 and 1947, the chieftaincy title of Sarakin Jos was given to Hausa people. This is part of the ‘history’ that Hausa are telling. The Colonial state was a big factor and it is important to emphasise the role of the Colonial state.

The important role of military rule should also be stressed. The Hausa in Jos wanted new local governments. Indigenous communities wanted local governments with different boundaries, but the ones eventually created favoured Hausa in 1991 and 1994. When a sole military administrator of Hausa origin was appointed, the indigenous peoples claimed this was because the military was dominated by the Hausa/Fulani. Thus we see how the issue of ethnicity in national politics is linked to local politics.

Another important issue to address is the rise of a new set of elites amongst minorities. Up to the 1990s, the Middle Belt elites did not question Hausa domination. However, since 1990 these new actors have been involved in ethnic identity mobilisation aimed at challenging what they regard as historical Hausa domination.

Ghana Study

The Ghana study is very interesting but some issues need to be clarified:

- In the northern part of Ghana, is ethnicity territorially distributed?
- Were there cases of Colonial invention of chieftaincy and did they unsettle previous patterns of hegemony?
- When there are disputes over land, what is the role historically of the courts and what is the premise for deciding such cases. Are there two legal systems operating side by side, and what is the 'standard' of judicial determination of cases?

Nigeria-Indonesia Study

This presentation was very interesting. There was a sense in which the review of basic literature and theory tried to address some of the questions raised earlier on the role of agency. The strength of the study also lies in the commitment to study processes and conflict pathways as well as looking at the localised nature of violence. We should however not neglect the national. The local situation is often reinforced by national discourse. We should not privilege one over the other but see how they are mutually reinforcing.

It is good to have clarity on culture, but we must not ignore economic factors. Cultural issues are important but also important is people's perception of which ethnic group is economically more prosperous. Discourses of citizenships feed into perceptions of economic inequality.

Other questions from the floor:

Ukoha Ukiwo addressed Julia Jonson's comment on government's attitude to commissions of inquiry. We shouldn't dismiss the importance of such efforts because it would seem that the objective is not to use them to resolve the issue but to bring about a truce. For as long as the commission of inquiry is sitting, the combatants will stop fighting. Their recommendations tend to give the story of one party and the other party would never accept the result. The government tries 'to play an impartial role' by not being seen to take sides. The government tries to be cautious, because some of the things happening today are the results of earlier Colonial decisions – those groups not favoured then go on to challenge court decisions. The government achieves its objectives by at least bringing a truce.

Yusuf Bangura commended the presentations. The paper on Nigeria and Indonesia reinforced the point made by Sam Egwu – on the need to take account of the national setting. We need to know the relative distribution of ethnic groups in Indonesia and in Nigeria for comparison. The way the groups are classified in Indonesia was not clear to him. This would help in understanding how local conflicts are shaped by national conflicts. Are we dealing with one dominant Javanese group or is it so fragmented that it does not look like Nigeria at all? It is also important to show the way the religious cleavages operate. Is the ethnic structure bipolar or multipolar?

The issue of indigeneity needs more contextualisation. When does it emerge? When is it a problem and when is it not a problem? It seems that where the rate of migration is limited and at a small scale, immigrants get absorbed into the local culture, taking on local names and values. In such a case, indigeneity may not really become a problem. In fact, this is how ethnic groups have been formed historically. Take Temne identity in Sierra Leone, for instance. Less than 3% of the people so classified are actually of Temne ancestry. This is evident from the most common names, such as Bangura,

Konteh etc...which can be traced to Soso and Manlike ethnic groups. It seems that there is a problem where there is large-scale migration that disturbs the ethnic structure, such as in Fiji, for example. Indian immigration to Malaysia is also instructive. There is also the case of Latvia, where the Russians became very hegemonic and also Trinidad. Such migrations lead to a bipolar situation. It is clear that migration in Côte d'Ivoire is reinforcing the divide in a very unequal way, reinforcing disequilibrium and raising concerns, especially in the context of democratisation, where every vote counts. If you compare this with Sierra Leone – the 'Madingos' and 'Fulas' – settlements did not affect the ethno-regional divide. They were not an issue – even with the north-south bipolar divide.

Raufu Mustapha highlighted the need to look at the nature of minorities. In Colonial Africa there were numerically small minorities that were politically dominant, for military, ideological and religious reasons. But with the modern state and democracy, it becomes problematic, with challenges amongst groups that they had hitherto dominated. We talk of minorities simply in terms of numbers, these days, but clearly it is a matter of challenge to hegemony that we are talking about.

Rachael Diprose's presentation is rich and will contribute new insights into conflict pathways. However, it seems that she is looking at elites in terms of interests – but what of political marketing of identities, personalities, and ideologies? Having too close a tie between interests and what elites do will limit the investigation.

The impression he got from Julia Jonson's presentation is that the groups she discussed were structured around chieftaincy. But were there similar dynamics of people becoming something else rather than what they started out as being? Some cultures are good at absorption, while others are not. What are the bridges? Is there any cultural glue that we can find that binds people together, apart from state action? We need to know what the cultural dynamics are. There is also the issue raised by Dzodzi Tsikata concerning the districts. Have there been attempts to use the districts to create capacity for autonomy of certain groups or to defuse tension by creating alternative locus of action?

Kathryn Nwajiaku asked whether there were state policies determining the rights of people to become 'indigenous'.

Frances Stewart said it might help if we studied how the state has reacted to these situations. This could entail a comparative study of the state at different points in time or different levels or institutions of the state. As for Rachael Diprose's interest in assessing the role of local negotiators, is it possible to identify their existence and whether or not they were effective?

Ogoh Alubo raised concerns about the comparability of Indonesia and Nigeria on the basis of some similarities which in his opinion were not self evident. Could we not talk about the nature of conflict, without forcing similarities that don't exist?

Historical experience is important. It came out clearly in Julia Jonson's presentation but not so much in presentations by Rachel Diprose and Adam Higazi. Take, for instance, the Zango Kataf experience. This minority territory was hitherto part of Zaria. The people forged a new identity and united against a perceived common enemy. This gave rise to a new form of consciousness – '*zit man zit*' – 'mine is mine'. It is also important to

note the economic factor. In Zango Kataf this comes out clearly in the struggle over control of the market, which Hausas have traditionally controlled but which the Katafs are challenging. Added to this is the issue of perceived disenfranchisement. People around Zango Kataf feel that the northern part of Kaduna, which is Muslim, has more polling stations than the southern part, which is predominantly Christian, because the Muslims want to win elections at all times.

We also need to emphasise the role of the state in the escalation of conflicts. In the Tiv/Jukun conflicts for instance, the state, for reasons of political expediency, had no will to do anything to resolve the crisis. The state 'scorches the fire' and is not able or willing to extinguish

Daniel Inkoom said it might help to examine the extent to which patterns of human settlement affect ethnicity and identity. Regarding Rachel Diprose's study, can anything be gained from studying Nigeria first and following up with Indonesia?

Said Adejumobi said Rachael Diprose's idea that democratic countries are less likely to channel conflicts in peaceful ways is contestable.

Julia Jonson needs to underscore the role of chieftaincy in rural political economy in power and control in rural areas. This will contextualise why the struggle over chieftaincy is so explosive.

Adam Higazi needs to address the important point that Sam Egwu raised, namely why are the conflicts happening now? These groups have been together for ages, why is there this outbreak? Probably it can be located in the crisis of citizenship and deepening material shortages from the mid-1980s. The nature of military rule, which depended on divide and rule as a way of maintaining power, should be considered because the conflicts gained momentum during military rule. There is also the issue of the construction of citizenship by the state itself. In Nigeria, indigeneity is the entry point into citizenship. Who you are in the Nigerian citizenship construction is determined by where you are from – determined by your indigenous identity. One needs to look at it in a national context to explain why the problem is so profound on the ground.

Responses from the speakers:

Adam Higazi

In the Jos case, citizenship is contested by both sides on the same grounds. This is why it has become intractable. The objective is not to portray ethnic boundaries as static. Of course, there is intermarriage and religious conversion – e.g. becoming 'Hausa'.

The profile of the new elites and why they became assertive in the 1990s is possibly connected to military rule. The elites of Plateau State did not see themselves as benefiting from the military dispensation and that was expressed.

The state is not somehow separate – it is implicated. The role of the state in producing conflict is clear, but not responding to it is another thing. There is a crisis of legitimacy and authority. He wants to look at the real basis of authority, where does it lie? This entails study of social organisations and the way that people mobilise more generally. People often refer to traditional authority, not simply the more visible political figures.

The counterfactual question is pertinent. What would happen if the whole official recognition given to indigeneity was discarded? Would this create chaos? Can you have a broader notion of citizenship? That is an open question

Julia Jonson

Regarding territorial distribution of ethnic groups, the Kokumba were a large group in their own territory but in the 1930s they moved into Nanumba area as settlers. But since they were not given power in their own area, their minority status was reinforced. They now outnumber the Nanumba, exploit land that Nanumba were not exploiting and just want to be citizens of Ghana

Citizenship is obviously affected by ties between land and ethnicity. It is not always clear, however, that demand for the position of chiefs is demand about land. The effects of state policies are contradictory. Intra-majority tensions that are not being resolved may actually generate more acute conflicts than inter-group tensions.

Rachel Diprose

She is not ignoring the national question. This is why she is looking at the relative contribution of different factors. Most of the conflicts take place along multiple lines.

Why Indonesia first then Nigeria? That is about the implementation of her field methodology. She may switch the order when it comes to analysis

History, culture, institutions and states are part of the process. She is trying to map the process. But this doesn't mean ignoring the processes specific to each case.