



Thinking Africa

RESEARCH PAPER

RESOURCE INEQUALITY DISTRIBUTION AND SEPARATIST MOVEMENT ON THE COMOROS ISLANDS

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Il achève actuellement un diplôme en « résolution des conflits et consolidation de la paix » sur : L'inégalité dans la distribution des ressources (économiques et politiques) et le conflit séparatiste aux Comores (1997-2008).

La fin de cette crise séparatiste a connu un débarquement des forces combinées des Comores et de l'Union Africaine contre le mouvement séparatiste en Mars 2008.

Ses recherches portent sur une plus grande compréhension des dimensions économiques et politiques des conflits internes. Ainsi, la mauvaise distribution des ressources économiques et politiques, les inégalités sociales et les conflits identitaires et communautaires dans l'océan indien et de manière générale l'Afrique australe sont au cœur de ces recherches. A terme Akim veut enseigner la paix à l'Université des Comores et dans l'océan indien.

Akim est actuellement membre du Réseau Amani, basé à Moroni, cette ong mène des activités en faveur d'une paix positive et durable dans la nation comorienne. Il a pris part au programme des formations pour 'le maintien de la paix' de l'EASFCOM (East African Stand by Force Coordination Mechanism).

PART ONE: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SCOPE

(a) Background of the study

“Inequality in the distribution of resources is meant to be structured differences in the distribution and acquisition of political and economic resources” (Piven and Clowards 2005 pp. 33-53).

According to Piven and Clowards (2005), political resources are viewed as a dimension of social stratification, including the ability to influence both governance processes and public policy. They added that, like economic goods and services, political resources are scarce, valued, and fought for. To that extent, Piven and Cloward (2005) continue by making the differences, which exist, between political resources and power resources by showing them in two perspectives: the distributional and the interdependency.

(i) Distributional: Resources are anything that can be used to influence an outcome. Resources are used, but they are not representative of power itself. Resources are distributed unequally. “Power resources” is a concept used to describe any resources used in the exercise of power. Political resources are resources used in political decision-making, or for all areas of social-life that make claims toward a legislative /decision making body (from school-boards to national government). Political inequality refers to structured differences in the distribution and acquisition of political resources. Power is an attribute of people.

The term “power resources” is misleading, as it suggests that power itself can be distributed. Most distributional theorists argue that power is relational. For example, one actor’s political resource is only a resource if the other actor perceives it in that light.

(ii) Interdependency: Resources are never strictly defined and can take the form of anything actors can do within an interaction. Resources are actions available to the participants in the interaction. These resources are valid because they are an integral part of the interdependent relationship. The nature of the interdependent relationship reveals the types of actions (resources) available to each participant. For example, in capitalist economies, ownership of land and wealth is a valid resource. Employers have power over their employees because the employees are dependent on the employer for their economic livelihood. Power is an attribute only of relationships, not people themselves.

The interdependency approach is different from the distributional approach because it assumes that each actor in the interaction has equal power resources.

Employers can only make employee work because employee agrees to work. If employees decided not to work, such as a work-strike, then the employees could be said ‘to have power over’ the employers. This approach does not adequately account for “force,” or physical coercion.

In this regard, the separation movement in the Comoros is a conflict stemmed from profound political and economic inequalities between the islands. The main island Grande Comoros, the seat of the federal government, receives more foreign aid without distributing resources to other islands of the federation. The perceived injustice in the allocation of political and economic resources, together with an extraordinary instability of government with 17 attempted coup d’états since independence in 1975, all contributed to the eruption of secessionist violence.

Tehri Lehtinen (1997) stated that the secessionist conflict in the Comoros islands between one of the islands, Anjouan (Ndzuwani), and the Comorian federal government constitutes a particular case of the secessionist part of an independent nation initially aiming at being re-attached to a former colonial power, namely France, and subsequently demanding an independent status.

The Comorian crisis constitutes a major challenge for the peace building capacities of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). *“The Comoros is one of the very poor countries in the world, with per capita GDP estimated around \$700”* (Yates, 1997, p. 62). Most of foreign aid goes to structural adjustment and debt relief. The remainder is spent principally in the capital Moroni, on Grand Comoro. Very little has trickled down to the other two islands of the federation. Most international donors have recently withheld funds, charging inefficiency and corruption.

“The geographic isolation and the small size of the Comoros islands have contributed

to their political dependence and vulnerability vis-à-vis foreign interventions, as well

as to great political instability leading to successive coup d’états” (Gaspart, 1983, p. 62). The weakness of successive leadership, the lack of political continuity, and traditional inter-insular rivalries constitute the background to the Anjouan secessionist crisis.

(b) Statement of the problem

“The seeds of secessionist conflict can be traced back to the mid-1980s when the usually prosperous Anjouan economy was rocked by a sharp slump in the international price of perfume plants, the mainstay of the economy. Stirring up the economic and political discontent by local politicians was not difficult, given

the poor conditions of life on the island, and the incredible instability of Comoran federal governments, having experienced 17 coup d'etats and mercenary interventions since independence in 1975" (Yates, 1997, p. 63).

Kamardine, (1998) argues further that *"In particular, the Anjouanais were deeply resentful of constitutional changes that reduced previous provisions for the island's autonomy"*, (Kamardine, 1998 p. 63). The inter-island conference, held in Antananarivo in April 1999 resulted in the Antananarivo agreement, stipulating a greater autonomy of the islands. The agreement articulates three principles: the unity of Comorian territory, the political transition within one year and good governance in the management of public affairs. The situation on Anjouan contrasts with neighbouring Mayotte, enjoying the privileges of French territorial status, and with neighbouring Grand Comoros, enjoying the privileges of the capital city, where most bilateral aid is concentrated. Moreover, even outside Anjouan, there was profound discontent due to salary arrears, which contrasted with President Taki's ostentatious spending sprees. The overall crisis reinforced the discontent vis-à-vis the Anjouan crisis and gave an excuse for the army to desert the interim president Tadjidine, who was said to have abused its powers by postponing the elections over his interim period, which expired in February 1999.

PART TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE (CONCEPTS, IDEAS, OPINIONS FROM AUTHORS/ EXPERTS)

(a) Unequal distribution of resources (political and economic inequality)

Piven and Cloward's (2005), to measure political inequality stated that: *"If political inequality is the unequal distribution of political resources, then the measurement of political inequality is dependent on the measurement of political resources"*, (Piven and Clowards, 2005 pp. 33-53). But, how can we measure "anything?" Dahl (1996) defines political resources as *"almost anything" – including money, reputation, legal status, social capital and knowledge, to name a few – that has value and can be used to achieve political ends. If we want to answer the question, "how much political inequality is there," "anything "is too vague a measure of political resources and too context dependent"*, (Dahl, 1996 pp. 33-53).

Sorokin (1959) defines political stratification this way: *"if the social rank within a group are hierarchically superimposed with respect to their authority and prestige, their honors and titles; if there are rulers and*

the ruled, then whatever are their names (monarchs, executives, masters, bosses), these things mean that the group is politically stratified, regardless of what is written in its constitution or proclaimed in its declarations". To Sorokin (1959), authority, prestige, honours and titles are political resources. Authority position seems to be the main determinant of who has power and who does not, (Sorokin, 1959 pp. 33-53).

Some have measured political inequality in terms of political participation, specifically "voter turnout." There is political inequality if there are divisions in who votes and who doesn't. Some go broader and define political inequality in terms of the level of democratization. Measuring political inequality with level of democracy assumes that the introduction of political rights and civil liberties leads directly to reduction of inequalities.

But, as Verba et al (1978) point out: *"for democracy to reduce inequality; rights and liberties are not enough; citizens must also be engaged in political participation. Thus, it is not democracy alone that matters, but what citizens do with the rights and liberties allowed by democracy. Democracy cannot be a measure of political inequality or political resources"*, (Verba et al, 1978 pp. 33-53).

Democracy as a measure of political inequality does not shed much light on the link between economic and political inequality, i.e. the degree to which nations are internally stratified in terms of political resources. Democracy does not have a relationship to economic outcomes, but it is not equivalent to political inequality.

According to Verba et al (1978), the relationship between participation and redistributive policies is further complicated by within-nation social stratification. Political participation is stratified, such that the advantaged tend to participate more than the disadvantaged. Economic distributive policy reflects the interests of the advantaged precisely because the advantaged are more politically active. Political non-participation of the disadvantaged leads to an increase in economic inequality, or maintains its status quo.

Other researchers have shown that there is a relation between economic inequality and political violence. Economic inequality figures prominently in the classical literature on contentious politics. Countries with a more unequal distribution of wealth or income are held to be more vulnerable to various forms of political violence, particularly civil war. For almost half a century, scholars have tried to test the assumption that economic inequality breeds political violence, relying on statistical as well as qualitative methods.

These efforts have not produced conclusive fin-

dings. In line with the earlier critics of relative deprivation theory, many prominent contemporary statistical studies have largely dismissed the role of economic inequality.

Many scholars found the rejection of the inequality-conflict linkage premature, arguing that the conflict inducing inequality cannot be reduced to individual level measures of income distributions, such as the Gini-coefficient. There is need to focus on group-based, rather than those individualistic measures of unequal access to economic or political resources, and on the role of 'horizontal inequality' (HI), or systematic economic and political inequality between ethnic, religious or regional groups, in affecting the likelihood of armed conflict. The concept of horizontal inequality differs from the conventional definition of inequality, often referred to as 'vertical unequal' (VI), because the latter type lines individual up vertically and measures inequality over the range of individuals rather than groups.

In brief, the horizontal inequality argument states that inequalities coinciding with cultural cleavages may enhance group grievances, in turn facilitating mobilization for political violence. Finally horizontal inequality is associated with armed conflict.

"The territorial distribution of resources, and especially foreign aid, in the Comorian federation is at the heart of Anjouan dispute underlying much of the unrest were President Taki's attempts to centralize administration of the archipelago, which was seen on Anjouan and Moheli as a bid for political and administrative supremacy of Grande Comoros" (Manley, 1999, p. 64; Yates, 1997, p. 63).

Even though the fundamental dispute concerned the distribution of economic resources, in practice, the fragility of political leadership and the lack of legitimacy of the federal government contributed to the violent expression of discontent in the form of the secessionist movement on Anjouan. The Antananarivo agreement attempts to respond to this fundamental problem of resource distribution and political autonomy, but its provision remain ineffective as far as the Anjouanese leadership refuse to sign the agreement and participate in the constitutional debate.

(b) Separatist conflict

Separatism is defined as the advocacy of a state of cultural, ethnic, tribal, religious, racial, and governmental or gender separation from the larger group. While it often refers to full political secession, separatists groups may seek nothing more than greater autonomy. Some groups refer to their organisations as independence, self-determination, partition or decolo-

nization movements instead of, or in addition to, autonomist, and separatist or secession movements.

"In 1997, the islands of Anjouan and Moheli seceded from the Comoros. On 3rd August 1997, Anjoaun declared itself the independent State of Anjouan with Foundi Abdallah Ibrahim as President. The island then asked to be integrated again into the French republic; but France refused. A constitution was adopted for Anjouan in a referendum on 25th February 1998...Initially, the secessionist leader Abdallah Ibrahim declared that the only concession he was prepared to make was the creation of a confederation of independent Comorian states, but the proposal did not meet with the federal government's approval. Subsequently, President Tadjidine proposed setting up a confederation and a "Council of the Republic", including members from all three islands...Thus, President Tadjidine took a consensual stance towards the opposition and secessionist movement. He promised an economic reform to tackle with economic grievances, which are the core of Anjouan discontent. However, some senior government figures were opposed to concessions to the opposition, qualified as "enemies of the Comorian nation-state" (AFP, 1998, p. 65). The opposition has also harshly criticized the Antananarivo agreement as it is considered endangering the territorial integrity of the Comoros.

(c) Inequality in the distribution of resources and separatist conflict

There is a correlation between economic and political inequalities and separatist conflict. According to Edward Muller (1987): *"misdistribution of land in agrarian societies is commonly thought to be an important precondition of mass political violence and revolution"*, (Edward Muller, 1987 p.425). Others argue that because of the difficulty of mobilizing rural populations for political protest, land misdistribution is irrelevant except as part of an in-egalitarian distribution of income nationwide.

These rival inequalities hypotheses have significant implications with respect to the kinds of reforms likely to reduce the potential for insurgency in a society. They are tested using the most comprehensive cross-national compilation of data available on land inequality, landlessness, and income inequality. Supports are found for the argument that attributes the greater causal import to income inequality. Moreover, the effect of income inequality on political violence is found to hold in the context of a casual model that takes into account the repressiveness of the regime, governmental acts of coercion, intensity of separatism, and level of economic development.

(d) Theoretical perspective

This study draws upon Mansoor Moaddel's (1994) argument that "*Explanations for the high levels of political instability and conflict among less developed countries relative to developed countries hinge on the question of whether political conflict results from internal domestic processes or external international relations. Modernization theory asserts that the destabilizing effects of industrialization on domestic institutions and actors generate political conflict in an inverted-U relationship. World-system theory argues that conflict increases in less developed countries when they become peripheral in the international division of labor*", (Mansoor Moaddel, 1994 pp. 276-303). Mansoor Moaddel further used structural modelling (LISREL) to evaluate this hypothesis cross-nationally for the years 1970 through 1981.

The results fail to support the curvilinear modernization model and show peripheralization to contribute to political conflict only indirectly through related increases in income inequality and vulnerability to the destabilizing effects of the world economy. Combining the two models and taking into account economic growth and ethnic separatism, the effects of peripheralization on political conflict are indirect, mediated by income inequality and regime repressiveness. Both peripheralization and modernization contribute to political conflict through their effects on domestic economic conditions, social stratification, and state structure.

(e) Related studies

When evaluating whether economic inequality breeds political conflict Mark Lichbah (1989) notes that "*Contradictory findings, that economic inequality may have a positive, negative, or no impact on political conflict, are a puzzle for conflict studies. Three approaches have been used to explain the inconsistent findings of the EI-PC (Economic Inequality-Political Conflict) nexus: statistical modelling, formal modelling, and theory building. Because analysts have tended to possess different research skills, these three approaches have been employed in isolation from one another. Singly, however, all three approaches have proved deficient and are unlikely to solve the EI-PC puzzle. The most fruitful approach is to combine the assumptions of the theory builders and the deductive approach of the formal modellers with the various empirical tests of the statistical modellers. Such an approach to the EI-PC puzzle produces a crucial test of the Deprived Actor and Rational Actor theories of conflict. The approach is also our best hope for sol-*

ving the other long-standing puzzles in conflict studies", (Mark Lichbah, 1989 pp. 431-470).

(f) A Conjectural Model of Political Conflict

When examining the impact of Political opportunities on the relationship between economic inequality and Violent Political Conflict, Kurt Schock (1996) argues that "*violent political conflict has typically been studied either from an economic discontent or a political opportunity framework. This study proposes a conjunctural model, which hypothesizes that the production of grievances due to economic inequality varies systematically and interacts with political opportunities to generate violent political conflict. Using multiple regression analysis, this cross-national research examines the interaction between economic inequality and political opportunities, and their direct effects on political violence. Findings provide support for the conjunctural model propositions that political opportunity structures moderate the relationship between economic inequality and violent political conflict*", (Kurt Schock, 1996 pp. 98-133).

Specifically, the positive effects of income inequality and separatist potential on political violence are enhanced in weak states. The impact of class exploitation on violent political conflict is moderated by regime structure and political institutionalization. Findings suggest that political opportunity structures may operate in different ways for challenges rooted in class as opposed to ethnic inequalities.

TOWARDS A THEORY OF ETHNIC SEPARATISM (ANTHONY SMITH, 1979,).

"*One of the most volatile and dangerous global issues today is the growth of political separatism. In Africa it has become a major factor in the East-West power struggle, where it threatens the integrity of fragile new states. In Asia it has provided intractable problems for the many military regimes, and even in democracies like India it can evoke a military response. The effects of this efflorescence are both external and internal. At the international level, these movements often provide the seedbed of larger conflicts, which drag in the superpowers and afford them political bases. They are also catalysts of political boundary changes. Internally, separatism provides an important outlet for the expression of ethnic identity and social regeneration. Politically, too, it affords a new set of avenues to power and privilege for members of strata hitherto excluded from a share in both; and I shall argue here that in this circumstance we encounter one of the chief sources of separatism's continuing appeal*", (Anthony Smith, 1979).

To that extent, Anthony Smith (1979) analysis brings us to conclude by summarizing the paradigm of the separatist conflict in the Comoros. In Comoros the separatism has affected the integrity of the state, socially, economically and politically.

Officially the separatist conflict is now over in the Comoros, because the Fomboni agreement signed on 17th February 2001 has given a legitimate shape of the country and declared the end of separatism.

In spite of this new development, the leaders of Anjouan has not fully accepted the truce and continues to challenge the federal government by not respecting the main points of the agreement. This has necessitated the use of force as witnessed in 2008 when the Federal government working alongside African Union carried out a military operation in Anjouan to dislodge Mohamed Bacar who was leading the insurgents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, the federal government of the Comoros should learn from the sequence of events in this conflict, to first and foremost, effectively take all legal and appropriate actions against any separatist tendencies. This can help articulate the grievances and also reveal the different players on all sides both internally and externally.

Secondly the government should foster the peace building projects to ensure the continuity of the current peace efforts. For instance DDR (demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration) project was implemented under external funds, and should to continue until the desired goals are achieved. Accordingly, the peace building process should involve a lot of campaign in good governance, reduction of inequalities, fair and equal distribution of resources (economic and political) between the islands, prevalence of social justice and a true fight against corruption.

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