

Addressing Long-Term Conflicts in Sustainable National Reconciliation in Chad

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Abstract: This contribution draws above all from the historical depth of its formulation. At first glance, its purpose is to be able to explain, from the conflicting historical facts, the relationship between Chadians. These are reports made of violence on a daily basis, based on a little-known past or one that is ignored or refused, knowingly or unconsciously, that it is known. It then expands to the dynamics of Chadian communities as a whole, grasped in their socio-cultural, political and historical aspects. Finally, it provides an analysis of the conflicts in a long-term perspective based on the experience of one case, that of the conflicts between the Mouroum and Kabalaye communities in Eastern Tandjilé province in Chad. The analysis of this type of conflict spread over a long period becomes a contemporary issue, in that it addresses the problem of living together within a community and the quality of relationship within a country. By putting into context the complexity of the relationships structuring the interactions between state actors, traditional authorities, and local communities over the long term, it allows us to understand the political dynamics at both the local and national levels.

Keywords: Communities, Long-term conflicts, Peace, local power; Reconciliation, Living together.

Introduction

The analytical framework of this article is located in the field of historical sociology, which allows explaining the social phenomena from their genesis and their intrinsic relationships, considered as other structures and mediation processes. Historical sociology also favors case studies with their specific problems and the use of secondary sources, especially oral. It theorizes institutions, structures and culture as a temporal phenomenon: time and space are considering as culturally defined openings that provide essential frameworks of meaning for social action. The past is like a mirror to read the present. Here history is seeing as imbedded in the present, due to the rooting of current structural arrangements in past practices. Historical sociology focuses on the continuum and trajectories of both ideas, concepts and socio-cultural groups studied. We follow Charles Tilly (Tilly, C., 1985) for his work on stato-genesis.

Bhambra (Bhambra, 2010), looking at recent developments in historical sociology, read three important shifts. The first is inducing by neo-weberian theories that emphasize the analytical approach of human civilizations. The second slide is carrying by schools known as multiple modernity. These are inspired by the work of Shamael Eisenstadt (Eisenstadt, S., 2005), who postulates that revolutionary changes occur very quickly in the history of humanity and recognizes above all two possible paths: what he calls the ancient axial age and the event of modernity as a new type of civilization. However, one should not omit the important contribution from Skocpol (Skocpol, T., 1984). He focuses on culture as something that can accommodate difference. Bhambra further notes that the third wave is causing by cultural change in American historical sociology that increasingly favours institutionalist studies. It is more culturally oriented.

In our context, the state figure often perceives, both negatively but above all as a producer of violence and destabilization of social dynamics. Such a reading makes it possible to understand the tensions working the various local arenas, and the origins of these tensions often sink their roots in distant times, like the difficulties of past events that refuse to pass and still organize community action. These tensions become more intense when individual or inter-group interests diverge. Chad is facing an upsurge in daily violence. First, there is inter-tribal violence and violence against various social representations of the state. Above all, however, there is a lack of political will to harmonize inter-community relations on a lasting basis, making it possible to seriously initiate a kind of communal catharsis. Yet it is important to repair the memories touched by such events.

In this way, the problems of powers, conflicts, putting communities and figures of power in a face-to-face relationship at the local level are inscribing in the genesis of the Chadian state, a legacy of French colonization. These are conflicts of all kinds - conflicts over territories, conflicts over power, conflicts over access to vital resources, etc. This communication attempts to grasp these questions through the anachronisms contained in the daily declination of the values that the Republic is supposed to promote. In fact, in Chad, the

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difficulties of living together are always evident, resulting in the manifestation and trivialization of daily violence in the political field, but also at the community and symbolic level (Gondeu, L., 2020). The understanding of these processes could be achieved through an understanding of both the constitution of the Chadian territorial area and the political processes dealing with issues of national integration.

In wanting to do the archaeology of the embodiment of these different levels of power, we were leading to work on the Mouroum-Kabalaye conflicts in Tandjilé. Our field observations as well as the localities in which we collected information (ranging from 2015 to 2020) sought to identify these two areas. The first analyses allowed us to understand that the development process is only a consequence of the much deeper and symbolically catalytic processes of social relations in everyday life: conflicts organize, in fact, the power relations within the same community but also at the intercommunity level, and then at the state level.

At any time, or during the implementation of a development project, we realize that it is difficult to put communities together; other variables intervene to disrupt relationship and complicate the interpretation of the displayed intentions: mistrust between communities is nourished by the feelings extracted from the past, sometimes distant. It is then necessary to understand the gaps between these communities, often preventing them from acting together. Indeed, to observe closely, we see that the stigmata of these ancient conflicts are still present in the minds and therefore in the interactions. The realities of the past continue to impose themselves on individuals, to organize their daily relationships, and to structure their community action in the long term.

1. Rejecting Past Wounds: The Experience of Reconciliation in the Tandjile East

In conducting this research in the field, one fact becomes clear: what could be described as a denial of the realities of the past, both by local populations and by the first colonial administrators who produced writings on these localities. Several times, we have encountered threats from the interlocutors whose objective was to discourage us from continuing this work:

Why do you want to continue such research? We must not rub the wound in. The past is the past. Our parents are currently living in harmony; there is no point in trying to bring up the forgotten memories, etc.

1.1. Silence about the past or not “reopening the wound”

These are not statements made by individuals without a social base. On the contrary, they come from well-informed political actors, leaders and executives. On the administration side, there is simply a silence about these disturbing aspects of local political management. Denial goes as far as writing their memoirs. This is the case of Le Cornec (Cornec, 2003) who, by devoting more than five hundred (500) pages of books describing his life in Chad, did not consider it useful to bequeath to Chadian posterity (at least!), the negative experiences that took place before his eyes in Lai at the time of Markinzaye for example. These denials represent an important gap for the memory work of African societies in general and those of Chad in particular.

The same *essentializations* of social realities also exist in the understanding of Chadian communities, as does the desire to erase the past memory of a given social category. Abélès (Abélès, 2012), in his analysis of the phenomena of globalization, provides some keys to understanding emerging societies like those of Chad. Chad as a country is seeking for itself. The same goes for the communities that make it up. These communities are living today the consequences of the globalization of the world economy, to the point that they have not yet succeeded in building a State of law, let alone a Nation that gathers and “excludes” none of its children:

The transformation of a kinship-based mode of production into a dependent mode of production has affected many aspects of Aboriginal life, destroying lineages, and upsetting the relationship of authority (Abélès, 2012 pp. 28-29).

It is this transformation that is "at the origin of a migratory flow towards new territories (...), and has sparked a war of extermination (...)," he continues. In Chad, these upheavals have been profound. The social subconscious still keeps the traces of these traumas.

1.2. Long duration and shaping of local memories

In Chad, as everywhere in black Africa, wars and raids (Martin, 1973 pp. 312-313) formed great empires. The settlers had broken up most of the groups, in order to cause them to lose any collective memory of their distant past. The creation of a new social memory relating to ethnic groups has gradually emerged. However, the population groups were not formed in one step. The wars and other violence of the masses have certainly caused phenomena of decomposition then of random recomposition of communities yet varied in a new socio-political entity.

There is a conceptual shift from understanding that colonization has reconfigured community territories for its own benefit into myriad small social spaces that will then be built into as many races, tribes and ethnicities (Dozon, 1981). These territorial divisions will initially be taken over by ethnologists. They would

treat these groups as ethnic subjects. While in reality these populations were divided into much smaller units (marital, tribes, federation of villages, territorial groupings of secret societies, etc.). Or they were included because of their dependence on states or international trading networks, in much larger entities. Or, what seems to be the most common, they combined these two characteristics.

1.3. In West Tandjilé, the importance of reconciling communities divided by historical conflicts

Our involvement in the reconciliation processes between the Muroum and the Kabalaye in south-western Chad not only sheds light on the importance of the long term as a tool for a global understanding of local processes, but it also provides a way in which it is possible from this understanding to build a sustainable peace process.

The process of reconciliation at the grassroots level in Tandjilé, based on conflicting historical facts. It was an experience of repairing the historical memories of communities that perceived themselves with distrust. Because of an untreated historical dispute: the alliance of one part of them (the Kabalaye of Tagbian of Lai) with the French colonization, against the others (Mouroum, Gabris, Mbeuri, Mbaye, etc.). This strategic alliance has contributed to the deceleration of local social bases through the establishment of a certain hierarchy between individuals and groups, some under pedestal and others reduced to the state of beasts of burden. This contributes to the production of violence, organized by the colonial administration with the complicity of the authorities it has chosen to side by.

The reconciliation of long-term conflicts allows an understanding of the drivers of Chad's current political instabilities. These can be grasped on one hand, starting from a reading from the bottom, having as a prism the local communities, and on the other, by inscribing these conflicting dynamics into longer historical and socio-political perspectives, and taking the global and therefore state level as the basis for reading. The local and global perspectives make it possible to highlight the relationships, if not the antagonisms that structure the Community territories. They also allow us to show how Chadian society is affected by dynamics of openness and closure during various attempts of hegemonic domination (before, during and after colonization).

It becomes clear that conflicts at the local level have many ramifications and overlaps. This reading establishes a rupture between the different registers of power in order to arrive at a courageous perspective by which the communities agree to treat the roots of their divisions, and together, decide the new conditions of their being-together.

In order for all this to take place in complete peace of mind, it is important to overcome the debates, to avoid a kind of fixation on historical facts whose main actors are no longer present. On the contrary, participants must be made to accept a shared responsibility to assume the common past in a spirit of dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation. From the outset, we must commit them to accepting and supporting the implementation of the recommendations that will come out of the resolutions of the forum, of those resulting from their restitution. The forum should end with the development of an integrated action plan or roadmap.

At bottom, it is a question of anticipating the future, with solid foundations, hearts appeased, reconciled and objectively informed about the realities of this common past. At the end of the Forum, the Kabalaye, Mouroum, Gabri, Soumraye, etc., in a spirit of peace, in search for harmony, will commit themselves to own or suck up] this common past with a shared responsibility by turning this dark page of their common history.

The role of facilitation that has been recognized is to help shed light on the past, stimulating brotherly talks and opening a relational dynamic in a spirit of citizen dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation. To do this, we proposed a working methodology during the forum as well as thematic axes to be discussed in small groups.

2. Conflict and Long-Term State Building in Chad

Reading the oldest writings dedicated to it (Stojanov, 2005), Chad displays a face of a country with a mysterious name that was the object of a thousand attentions and interpretations by French colonial circles. These authors often content themselves with the relationships of prevailing forces in order to build theories. These writings have sometimes helped to turn power and possession into a device of punishment and retribution:

Thus the political strategies of the actors and representations they have of themselves are largely influenced by the legacies of the colonial state. But this legacy is not sufficient: it has been reappropriated by interested parties who have often exacerbated it. The long time of Africa, which we will not forget to idealize, but which we can notice it did not produce massacres on such a large scale, was deliberately hidden by colonial ideology and by the political strategies of local postcolonial actors (Leiris, 1981).

Today, Chadians--although the foundations of the Nation are fragile--are proud to present their country as "located in the heart of Africa". They also say that it is a country of contrasts, recognized as the cradle of humanity.

The different configurations of the communities' response to the changes in the spaces they occupied at the time of the colonial conquest thus give rise to clashes of cosmovisions, between different spiritual, political and economic aspirations. This deconstruction work makes it possible to expose the stereotypes conveyed on the various components of Chadian society.

2.1. The timeliness of the phenomenon of the influence of the past on the present

In most documents from the colonial period or from the administrators, depending on the findings, the authors often account for their memoirs, respond to administrative orders or are trained to immerse themselves in African realities within the framework of a thesis for example or simply «to kill time». In all cases, they focus on the peculiarities of the communities studied, distinguished from their neighbours and rarely seek to nourish the socio-cultural foundations of their resemblance and similarity. The partial narratives they could find influenced their views looks, and their imagination, in contact with the studied populations, did the rest. These documents are about well-identified communities, about power facts or ritual practices, about distant or near eras, all in a never-ending spatial division. The country was the subject of a careful dissection, as if one were necessarily trying to establish differences in order to oppose absolutely one community to another.

The question of political manipulation of identities of interest to the social sciences is one of the keys to reading social dynamics. Many conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, like as elsewhere in the world, are rooted in the diversity of community identities. These conflicts can be of several kinds (religious, cultural, economic, and political, etc.). In Chad, all these conflicts are intertwined and have as local name farmer-breeder conflict, land conflict, inter-communal conflicts, organized armed clashes, etc. They have local polarizations and explanations but they are also actors games, as a hegemonic strategy for the preservation of state power.

Independent Chad has clearly failed to preserve the process of forming national identity. The successive regimes it has known have given more or less attention to preserving their power than to building the state. The preservation of power was accompanied by the establishment of repressive apparatus, which in itself produced violence. The idea of reconciliation has been around for a long time. Political actors prey on inter-communal conflicts to establish their legitimacy; hence the permanent crisis situation in Chad.

However, beyond conflict, there is violence, which is a more aggravated form of coercion whose ultimate goal is to obtain submission from a person or group of people. Violence is often arbitrary, and diverts legal instruments for illegal actions, contrary to all rights. It is possible to place this violence in the long term. The long duration allows us to understand the crises that are going through the communities as a whole, given that the conflicting historical facts represent trauma at the local level, from the moment they sustainably structure social interactions in daily life:

Although the monopoly of coercion and the legitimate use of physical force is one of the classic attributes [the state], the theme of violence has been one of the most abused of African studies. Yet the facts are massive and the devices aimed at total coercion varied. Most dive into the long term. The slave trade, for example, has left its mark on the imagination of some of the peoples of the Atlantic coast (Bayart, et al., 2008 p. 47).

Indeed, as Michel Wieviorka points out, it is therefore necessary to try to understand how these territorialised communities have developed strategies of cooperation, resistance, cross-dressing sometimes to resist in the face of powers that wanted their assimilation, otherwise their disappearance. Finally, it is a matter of emphasizing the capacity of Chadian communities to resist adversities, while trying to understand the conditions of this resistance and destabilization (Wieviorka, 2018). In this book, in the face of violence, identity withdrawals, hatred and contempt for others, Michel Wieviorka invites not to the proclamation of a harmonious society nor to the promotion of the social bond, of republican unity, etc.; but rather, openness to dialogue, to the multiplication of debates around the conflict, to recognize it, while condemning the violence. In other words, conflicts are not a brake on integration but an opportunity for countries emerging from wars like Chad to recover, to restore themselves to their being.

This perspective underlines the need to analyze the relations in Africa between long time, short time and strategy of actors:

The Africa I traveled in the period between the two wars was no longer the heroic Africa of the pioneers, nor even that from which Joseph Conrad drew his magnificent Heart of Darkness, but it was also very different from the continent we see today coming out of a long sleep and (...) working for its emancipation [...] (Leiris, 1981 p. 500).

2.2. Moving beyond conflict, building endogenous approaches to reconciliation

A careful observation of Chadian society would encourage us to see here and there a return to the withdrawal identity. This phenomenon of withdrawal would be noticeable throughout the national territory. Some argue that the phenomenon has become widespread, with repetitive social crises against the backdrop of poor political governance that Chad has been experiencing for some years. For them, these crises profoundly affected living together and placed the issue of identity at the heart of North-South conflicts/tensions in that country. Others believe that the social conflicts and rebellions that took place after independence have cultivated and installed in each Chadian an identity withdrawal based on ethnic, linguistic, regional, denominational and political considerations.

Post-independence African states are still experiencing deadly conflicts due to civil wars or state power challenges. These often-political conflicts involve communities that have been opposed for a long time, with roots sometimes plunging into a very distant past. At the global level, these conflicts can be considered as identities, or even due to what Bayart calls “the general movement to open up societies”, under the effect of globalization:

There are only identity strategies, rationally led by identifiable actors – [...] and identity dreams or nightmares that we embrace because they enchant or terrorize us (Bayart, 1996 pp. 9-10).

At the local level, they refer to the daily realities of communities in which violence is often trivialized. Stepping back to the Chadian case, we can say that conflicts are destroying our communities and calling into question the efforts made by the highest authorities of the Republic to build living together. This is why we must invent another method, combining political imperatives, serious academic research and endogenous practices.

Conclusion

Ignorance, if not the excessive presence of the past in intercommunity lives, concretely complicates relations between various spheres of power (state, traditional, military, civilian and symbolic). Individuals and communities find it difficult to remind a third party of the facts related to this painful past and opt for forgetfulness, a forgetfulness that does not pass decisively. Very often, relationships of power or hegemonic domination are based on the conflicting elements of the past and contribute to the political manipulations of communities against each other. Communities are not only victims, they often become actors in the perpetuation of this past, because they live there, they get symbolic and political benefits to act on their behalf.

This structuring of communities by historical conflicts widens the field of analysis on the historically long time, going here from the pre-colonial period to the postcolonial state, going of course through the moments of colonization. Conflict is an essential key to state building in Africa and there is a global and African body of reflection on the issue. It is a question of political governance, of the responsibility of the State to build itself and to instill civic virtues in its populations, beyond their diversity of belief and culture.

Apart from an inclusive national dialogue for reconciliation, it is a matter of putting the issue of reconciliation at the base of a permanent political agenda. It is possible by setting up an independent structure whose mission is to work with communities at the base on the root causes of conflicts. The endogenous mechanisms can be implemented to build a better life together. Thus, it is a question of reconciling the memories of the past with the present and building a future desired together in truth and peace.

By allowing communities and individuals to look back on this past, to talk about it with others, categorized as executioners or victims, it helps to heal this past and creates a climate of trust that is more beneficial to communities, and therefore to the entire country. It's really about starting a process of collective catharsis, through inclusive approaches to reconciliation. Reconciling communities through a long-term perspective means enabling them to live together with complete confidence and to calmly envision a common future, without great difficulties.

Working to understand the root causes of Chadian conflicts is another way to address them. The conflicts that plagued our societies deserve to be removed with their roots. Beyond the structural and conjunctural causes, it is important to mobilize our communities around various conflicting historicity to overcome them, building bridges of fraternal conviviality between them.

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