

Review of: "The Past In The Present Carnage In North Central Nigeria: The Role Of Collective Memory On Conflict Persistence"

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This interesting manuscript begins well with the author's emphasis on the question of how people's emotions, shaped by collective memories, influence the persistence of eco-violence, specifically the "violent conflicts over water and other agricultural resources between state or non-state actors that lead to mass murder and the destruction of nature and infrastructures." Using a combination of rational choice theory (with its emphasis in individuals' pursuit of wealth, power, and "predatory elite incentives [that] foster conflict"), along with "symbolic politics theory [that] posits that myths, fear of extinction and chauvinistic leadership cause war," the author seeks to provide historical bases for the continued violence in North Central Nigeria.

In this area, also referred to as the Middle Belt, there are many different indigenous ethnic groups, along with Hausa-Fulani political leaders associated with the Sokoto Caliphate and with the British colonial regime. However, there is considerable discussion of the Tiv people, one ethnic group who reside in the Middle Belt. While the author provides a brief history of eco-violence in North Central Nigeria, it would be useful for readers to learn more of the historical context of Tiv society and its political organization. The disputes between the Tiv and Jukun are discussed but it would be good to know about the consequences of British colonial installation of a Tiv paramount chief.

As the author makes clear, Tiv collective memories of Hausa-Fulani overrule have contributed to the continuing violent conflict between the Tiv and Nigerian post-independence rulers. Yet eco-violence between Tiv farmers and Fulani herders might be clarified, particularly as the Fulani who herd cattle are socially distinct from Fulani who serve as traditional rulers in Kaduna and Kano states. A more detailed focus on the specific historical relationships between these ethnic groups (Tiv, Jukun, and Hausa-Fulani) could be stated at the paper's outset. Nonetheless, the author is correct in the approach used to understanding the causes driving the persistence of such eco-violence. It would be possible to expand this with a more focused discussion of these ethnic groups by omitting some of the repetitious explanation of rational choice theory and also the very brief mention of triune brain theory, which seems a bit beyond the purview of the social and political history of the Middle Belt which the author is pursuing.

The author concludes the manuscript with the consideration of different approaches that would facilitate peaceful resolution of conflict and eco-violence in the Middle Belt, as "it appears that a culture of violence has developed among the contending groups, which is supported by the collective memory that preserves the experiences and their meanings."

While eco-violence in the area revolves around competition for water, land, and related agricultural resources, the author rightly argues that "it is essential to settle concerns about the contending parties' collective memories" of historical

confrontations and ethnic fears. By addressing these memories and fears through cognitive reappraisal, “a process of emotion regulation involving exposing people to emotionally-charged scenarios whose meaning has been altered to modify their emotional response to such a scenario, ..such an approach could reduce inter-group animosity.” Perhaps, then an “increasing conciliatory response to past violent episodes and decreasing aggressive reactions in intergroup relations” would be acceptable. The author might consider providing a relevant strategy based on techniques used in other nation-states (such as Colombia) that would support public participation in cognitive reappraisal by different ethnic groups living in the Middle Belt, an important concluding addition to the manuscript.