

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

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The article is informative and well-written. It helpfully summarizes the history of conflicts in Nigeria and attempts to explain them through a combination of rational-action theory and collective emotions based on the transmission of collective memories. I am not an expert on Nigerian history so cannot comment on that part. The explanatory part that deals with the origins of the conflicts is, however, at some places redundant and too general. It is pretty self-evident that collective memories contain elements of past grievances and that mobilization strategies use a combination of rational and emotional elements. The real challenge is not to explain the constants but changes. In other words, all collective memories contain some elements of past grievances. However, they also contain pro-social elements and, most importantly, elements which are not necessarily seen as violence-inducing. The goal should thus be to explain the chain of actions which leads from the structural elements and power-relations to violence. If authors decide to use collective memory, an essential link in that chain, then the analysis needs to be much more precise in terms of identifying the actors, contexts, interpretative strategies, dissemination, negotiations and solidification of memories. In other words, it is necessary to explain how and why, from a waste pool of memories, only a small section of them becomes dominant in a certain period. How and why were the opposing memories silenced? How were the clashes between elite-memories (top-down) and grassroots-memories (bottom-down) negotiated and resolved? How potentially conflicting narratives were synthesized (for instance, conflicting elements in religious and ethnic narratives)? How do collective memories differ from other forms of violent political propaganda, i.e., are they any different from officially-sanctioned narratives justifying violence that do not make references to the past? How do collective memories evolve over the course of the conflicts? – Those are only some of the questions that would need to be addressed in an analysis of such a complicated issue. Stating that the memories of past have violent-potentials and are used by the political ideologues is really a truism that nobody questions. The point of an article should be to clarify when, by whom, how, to what degree, and with what effects. The article offers a good overview of potential factors and nodes in the network of conflicts. However, I would suggest clarifying which of these factors and nodes are most important and to describe more clearly the processes that link them. Thank you for your efforts and wish you a lot of success in your future work.