

Title

Religion, identity, and violence in Kaduna State Nigeria

What this Study Contributes

Our study sought to develop new concepts in the study of the social relations of religion by exploring how historically and socio-politically situated constructions of religion impact on the formation of gender identities and the significance of this for participation in violence.

Team

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University

University of East Anglia

Award

Phase 1 Small Grant £78,332

Research Partners

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

Approach

The Nigerian city Kaduna saw 'several serious episodes of communal violence' in 2000 and 2002, and there are ongoing tensions and localised outbreaks of violence within and between Christian and Muslim groups. It is, mainly young, men who participate in the violence. There is high unemployment, poverty, and subsequent stress in

families. The team used participatory action research and ethnographic methods to research linkages between gender identities, religion and violence and work with young people on mitigating future violence in Kaduna.

The main part of the project consisted of action research in the form of a participatory education project working with three groups – a women’s group with both Christian and Muslim members, a Christian youth group most of the members of which were men and a Muslim youth group, similarly consisting largely of men. Violence was one of the principle issues discussed.

Among other things, the participants were asked to unpack the meaning of masculinity and femininity within their particular religious groups, identifying constituent elements.

One way that this was done was through the use of drama, showing how easily masculinity could be used against men when attempts were being made to suck them into participating in violence. Themes chosen to concentrate on were fighting at a common water source, electoral violence, and problems with family relations. These dramas, with members of the two men’s groups as actors, were produced with the help of professional directors and performed as street theatre in the two communities where the young men lived. The participants further produced their own videos, in the form of interviews about the project, and addressing further problems they associated with rising resentment, such as the poor state of the roads in the Christian majority neighbourhood. The residents feel it is their religion that is preventing the local Muslim-dominated council from bothering to improve the infrastructure, despite the fact that neighbouring Muslim-majority areas have equally poor amenities. Such issues might facilitate renewed episodes of sectarian violence if nothing is done to redress them.

Ethnographic research was also carried out with men and women in Kaduna and particularly with religious leaders. In regard to the latter, the aim was to understand their attitude towards the other religion and to see how far this was likely to encourage peace or violence.

Findings

Project finished 31st October 2009.

1. The hypothesis that gender identities are influenced by religion was confirmed by the research in which the participants in the education segment were asked to identify the most important facets of gender identities in their own communities. However, it was noticeable also that in certain regards the dominant culture in the north – that is, the Hausa Muslim culture – influenced identities among local Christians in a way that distinguished them from Christians from the southern part of Nigeria.

2. The hypothesis that convincing young men to abandon violence would be the most difficult issue, turned out to be incorrect, at least as regards the youth with whom we interacted. The more intractable problems turned out to be feelings of hostility among religious leaders. This was both between religions and among sects within religions. There appeared to be only a few religious leaders able to rise above this and these were the highest level leaders, including the Anglican Archbishop of Kaduna, Dr. Josiah Fearon (a discussion with whom appears on the project website). There was also a high level Imam who was equally open and liberal in his ideas.

Concentrating on the young men showed, however, the importance of working with this cohort as they are the ones who actually carry out the violence.

3. The discovery-based education carried out produced a significant effect on both direct (project participants) and indirect (community members) beneficiaries. The dramas, both the more formal dramas directed by our theatre directors and the more informal dramas improvised during one education session by women as well as youth made a very significant impact both on those who acted in them and on audience members. After drama showings in our main target communities in the spring, a number of different aspects of violence in and between the two communities significantly diminished.

Perhaps the most important of the education tools used was deconstructing gender identities. It was examining their constituent components that helped the youth grasp the ways in which young men could be led to participate in violence.

Activities and Outcomes

The young men involved in the participatory education project have been inspired to continue the project work via registering their two groups formally and making plans to continue. The women have been unable to do this because of their home situations but they are carrying on the work in more informal ways in their own communities and families. However, the team was able to bring about quite significant behaviour changes in those who worked with them for some time. The women changed their family relations, in particular by reducing the amount of violence within the home, which had previously been at a high level, not only on the part of men but even on the part of women in particular towards their children. The youth changed their general behaviour to be more sensitive towards others, in particular the Muslim youth were more aware of the problems arising from some of their practices, such as polygamy and keeping girls out of education and had decided to behave differently in respect of such practices in their own future lives. The Muslim and Christian youth of our main two target neighbourhoods, who had previously lived in hostility, were collaborating in our dramas and working together to benefit the two neighbourhoods.

- Adie Vanessa Offiong 2009 'Kaduna youths get theatre training', *Weekly Trust*, Saturday, September 12.
- Jacob Onjewu Dickson 2009 'Videos as problem solvers: Collete Harris example', *New Nigerian*, Wednesday September 2. See <http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/publications/print>.
- Colette Harris and Oga Steve Abah 2009 *Policy briefing on community education for violence prevention* produced for the Nigerian government 1st October:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/publications/papers_reports.

Further Information

<http://www.uea.ac.uk/dev/kaduna>