Gemma Vriens
Jeroen de Zeeuw

Democracy under Fire
Seminar Proceedings

Disaster Sites, no 3, 1999
Wageningen Disaster Studies

"The no-party democracy prevents ethnic conflicts"
-President Museveni, Uganda-

"I would like the West to give Africa some time to find their own way to Coca Cola"
-Julius Nyerere, former President of Tanzania-

"Donor countries should continue pressure on third world authoritarian regimes, for the sake of human rights"
-Ali A. Mazrui, Professor Political Sciences-

"Development requires democracy"
-Bill Clinton in Beijing, President of the United States-

Abstract

This issue of Disaster Sites is devoted to the seminar "Democracy Under Fire. Governance and Intra-state Conflict", held on November 19th 1998 in Wageningen. This report is the edited version of more than five hours of tape, recorded during the seminar. The report summarizes the lectures of the three keynote speakers; Raúl Rosende, program co-ordinator of the Organisation of American States, Professor Kingsley de Silva, director of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Sri Lanka, and Achille M'Bembe, executive secretary of the Council for Development of Social Science Research in Africa in Senegal. Each lecture is followed by a discussion with a Panel and the audience. In the final chapter the editors[1] of this report will give some brief concluding comments.

With the end of the cold war, a new era was welcomed. It was believed a future dawned where ideological strife was obsolete, military conflicts rare, and liberal democracy the sole system of governance for all countries of the world. Hardly ten years later, this worldview has been overtaken by events. A situation has evolved where the number of current conflicts, mostly intra-state, is estimated at 155. What happens to governance in these cases? From various parts of the world, the 'universal' concept of democracy is under fire. One bone of contention is the force and speed with which democracy is imposed on countries in the South. The analysis of intra-state conflict raises serious questions about governance and the role of the state. Upholding democratic institutions can contribute to peace making. On the other hand, the risk of democracy becoming void of meaning is also obvious in a number of cases.

According to Raúl Rosende, democracy is a *conditio-sine-qua-non* for peace building and development. He emphasises the important role the international community has played in conflict resolution in Central America. Kingsley de Silva is emphasising the success of the well-established British system in India and Sri Lanka. Although there are still conflicts in these countries, he rejects both the idea of authoritarian rule and intervention of the international community. M'Bembe stresses the need for an African system of governance and conflict resolution. Africa should no longer be governed by external initiatives.

In the discussion the state seems to gain ground compared to civil society. How and when does the state capacity need to be strengthened? Who is protecting us from the state? The relationship between civil society and the state needs to be closely looked at and be developed further.

---

[1] Gemma Vriens and Jeroen de Zeeuw are both M.Sc. students Rural Development Sociology at Wageningen Agricultural University. They are affiliated to OtherWise, Interdisciplinary Research and Education on Sustainable Development. Gemma Vriens and Jeroen de Zeeuw can be contacted at the following email addresses respectively: ow@permag.antenna.nl, japdezeeuw@hotmail.com

Contents

1. Introduction

We will start with introducing the seminar and the participants of the event. The mayor of Wageningen, Mr. Jaap Sala, welcomes the guests and officially opens the seminar. Thea Hilhorst, the chair of the day, introduces the theme of the seminar by firing her first questions on conflicts and democracy

About the seminar

"Democracy under Fire", the seminar about governance and intra-state conflict was organised by the student organisation OtherWise, Disaster Studies, Studium Generale and Educational Centre "Hotel de Wereld". While intensively discussing the topic of the seminar during the preperations, Clingendael- the Netherlands Institute of International Relations- held a conference titled: "Intra-state conflict and options for policy ". Many respected politicians, scientists, and representatives from NGO's, specialised on the topic of democratisation and conflict resolution participated in this conference. A number of the participants was invited to share their ideas with participants from Wageningen Agricultural University (WAU) and other interested persons.

The first chapter contains the opening speech of the mayor of Wageningen and a brief introduction to the theme of the seminar. The subsequent chapters are edited proceedings of the presentations given by the three main speakers. In Raúl Rosende's presentation the role of the international community in mediating as well as triggering conflicts in Central America is highlighted. This is followed by short comments from Kees Biekart. In the third chapter Kingsley de Silva explains the reasons for the relative success of democracy in South Asia, especially in Sri Lanka and India. Achille M'Bembe addresses the problems in Africa by questioning the Western concept of democracy and trying to find African responses to governance. Some final statements from the participants conclude the seminar. This is followed by some concluding comments of the editors. Jeroen de Zeeuw discusses the ambiguous role of the international community in recent conflicts in Central America. Gemma Vriens focuses on the efforts of Africans in dealing with topics such as democracy and other forms of governance.

About the Participants

Raúl Rosende is co-ordinator of several programmes of the Organisation of American States (OAS). The OAS is an intergovernmental organisation that is recognised by all governments in Central, South and North America. It has been created in 1948 and is currently carrying out activities in the field of peace making, peace keeping and peace building in different parts of Latin America. One of the tasks of the OAS is promoting and facilitating democratisation in post-conflict situations in Central America, for example by organising elections. Raúl Rosende originally comes from Uruguay. He arrived in Central America in 1990 to work on the peace process in Nicaragua. Furthermore Raúl Rosende has been working in

peace-keeping missions in El Salvador and Guatemala. He will be focusing on strengthening the institutional capacity of the government and civil society in post-war zones.

Kingsley de Silva is the director of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), based in Sri Lanka. He has been professor at the University of Ceylon and Peradeniya. He taught in the United States and Great Britain. The ICES institute where he is currently working was established in 1982. It is the only institution for the study of ethnic conflict in the whole of South Asia. He has written a large number of publications about post-independence governance, ethnicity, ethnic conflicts and multiculturalism in Sri Lanka and India.

Achille M'Bembe is the executive secretary of the Council for Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), based in Dakar, Senegal. He was born in Cameroon, studied in Paris and taught for nearly 10 years at the universities of New York and Philadelphia, USA. In 1997 he went back to Africa to join CODESRIA. This intergovernmental organisation is active in policy relevant social research, training and publication.

Kees Biekart works at the Trans National Institute in Amsterdam. This is an international network of researchers. He has been working in Central America since the early 1980s, doing research related to peasant organisations and democratisation processes. He recently published a book on the role of NGO assistance in the process of democratisation in Central America.

Jeroen de Zeeuw is a student member of OtherWise, Interdisciplinary Research and Education of Sustainable Development, a non-profit organisation formed by (former) students at the Wageningen Agricultural University. It focuses on development issues within education and research programmes at WAU.

Jude Kehla works at the political-cultural centre De Balie in Amsterdam. Originally from Cameroon, he studied issues of democracy and intra-state conflict.
Jude Kehla and Jeroen de Zeeuw form the panel, which will react to each presentation of the three speakers.

Thea Hilhorst works at Wageningen Disaster Studies. This group studies issues of natural disasters, conflicts and humanitarian aid in the Third World. Thea Hilhorst chairs the seminar.

Opening speech by Jaap Sala

Distinguished guests, dear ladies and gentlemen,
As the mayor of the town of Wageningen I have the honour to open this seminar officially. The name of this seminar is "Democracy Under Fire". Democracy is always vulnerable and needs continuous concern and care. Sometimes we have to come to its defence and there have been and unfortunately there are still many examples in which democratic rights of people have been taken away, or have been crushed by dictatorships and cruel regimes. Today we are going to discuss this issue with special reference to countries in the developing world. I am indeed very happy that we have distinguished guests from that part of the world, who can share with us the very problems at stake. They also can inform us on how democracy could be protected in those places where it is functioning but at the same time at risk, for example through ethnic cleansing and violence. In other places the question is more how democracy can be restored. We also have to realise that democracy is basically a Western concept. Perhaps it needs some adjustments for situations with their own traditions of governance.

Professor de Silva, Dr. M'Bembe and Mr. Rosende, you have all been involved, through your studies and your daily work, in the problems we are discussing today. It is a privilege to have you here as our main speakers. I am also honoured that Mrs. Oliver, representative of the Arias Foundation has been able to join us. Your experiences certainly will enrich our debate.

Though the focus of this debate will be on other parts of the world, it is also good to remember that Europe, including the town of Wageningen, has known the terror of war and violence. Wageningen was severely damaged and partly destroyed during the Second World War. Many people of Wageningen were killed or executed during the war. In this very building, negotiations took place between the allied forces and the Germans about the conditions for the German capitulation. The generals Foulkes and Kitching and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, negotiated here with the German general Blaskowitz. The negotiations took place on the 5th of May 1945 and are still commemorated every year in front of this building. The signing of the capitulation took place one day later, on the 6th of May, next doors, in the building of the Agricultural University. In this former "Hotel De Wereld", activities are being organised to discuss issues of peace, justice and human rights in the present day context.

The historical role of this city and this very building in the ending of the Second World War gives an extra dimension to this discussion. We are aware that such issues need to be discussed time and again, to be put into the minds of each new generation. The presence of the Agricultural University and the active involvement of its staff and students facilitates this enormously. Many of these students are going to work in other parts of the world. They will be confronted by the questions and concerns addressed in today's seminar. Again I would like to thank you very much for coming here in such a large number. It is indeed very encouraging to see that today's topic does raise such an interest. I also would like to thank our distinguished foreign guests for coming to Wageningen, and I declare this seminar opened.

Introduction by Thea Hihorst

The theme of this seminar is "democracy and intra-state conflict". There are numerous intra-state conflicts in the world today. Many of these conflicts have to do with the failing of states and governance. Many of these conflicts centre around issues of people feeling that central governments are denying their identity, are discriminating against them or not allowing them any participation in governance. The themes of governance, intra-state conflicts and democracy are very closely related. Democracy is "under fire". On the one hand, one can see democracy is on the agenda as never before. International institutions, including donor agencies, care about democracy. Consequently many developing countries experience all kinds of conditions, imposed upon them, that have to be fulfilled before they can actually avail of development aid: conditions regarding governance and their democratic institutions. On the other hand, one could say that democracy is indeed "under fire". For one, because of the critique from different sides of the world that has been formulated against these policies of development institutions imposing governance and democratic institutions on countries all over the world. According to these critiques "The West" -to speak in those old-fashioned terms- imposes its own version of democracy on the rest of the world. The other thing is that democracy is not always functioning properly if one looks at the empirical reality. There are countries nowadays, where one can wonder whether there is any state at all. In some other countries, one can wonder what is behind the façade of democratic institutions. There are many questions to be raised. To start the seminar two particular issues will be highlighted.

The first issue concerns the right to put conditions on development aid programmes. At the Clingendael conference this week somebody said: "It is an irresponsible act, to give aid to governments which are involved in violent conflict, even if it is just neutral development aid. Development aid should not be given to countries that use violence or fail in governance". Is it indeed an immoral act; is it irresponsible to give development aid to those countries where we feel governments do actually not comply with what the donor agency thinks is good governance? The second question relates to the nature of violent conflicts. Is conflict always a bad thing? Should policy always be focused on prevention, mitigation and resolution of conflict? Should that always be the first intervention in multilateral and bilateral dealings with governments before even thinking of other forms of stimulating development? These particular questions form the framework for today's seminar.

2. Raúl Rosende: Foreign assistance in the peace process in Central America

Raúl Rosende is the first guest of the seminar. In his view, the lack of state institutions has played an important role in the conflicts in Central America. Economic, technical, but most of all political international assistance is of crucial importance in establishing a lasting peace in Central America. Kees Biekart in his reaction to Rosende, is stating that the international community is not only playing a role in conflict resolution but also plays part in triggering conflicts.

The peace process in Nicaragua was the first peace process in the region. Moreover it was the first peace process after the Cold War in the entire world. In Nicaragua the OAS carried out tasks referring to human rights verification, one of the most important activities in peace-keeping procedures. In Guatemala, monitoring activities concern peace building. The activities focus on, for example, strengthening the institutional capacity of the government and civil society in post-war zones. The OAS is also developing strategies addressing the former combatants (the guerrillas) of Guatemala.

There is a very broad range of activities referring to peace-making, -building and conflict resolution. Human rights verification, strengthening institutional capacity of state and civil society, integration of former combatants are only broad categories of activities. In addition, the importance of electoral observation should be stressed, not only in peace keeping, but also in the consolidation of the democratic process. The role the international community has played in Central America has been of crucial importance for peace and stability in the region.

Three basic levels of international co-operation in peace and conflict resolution processes will be discussed: economic assistance, technical assistance and political assistance.

Economic assistance implies basically the transference of funds from the international community to a particular country with the principal purpose of achieving recuperation of post-war zones. In Central America post-war territories generally have three very typical characteristics. First, these are the areas with the highest level of violence and with the worst standards of human rights. Second, the war zones have the highest level of poverty. Finally, the state is totally absent in these areas. These three characteristics, violence, poverty and lack of state institutions define the structure of conflict in Central America. The former two, violence and poverty can be the result of a lack of institutionalisation. They are directly linked to the causes of conflict, since they can serve as a trigger for war. International economic assistance can help mitigating these inflammable conditions. It can try to enhance the economic situation and to improve the social conditions of the people who live in war zones. Economic assistance can also help strengthening the institutional capacity (for example police, courts, electoral commissions) of the state.

Technical assistance may add to the little experience in reconstruction and conflict resolution Central American countries usually have. International organisations are in a better position to transfer experience and to enhance the capacity of the state to deal with the problems derived from the conflicts.

In the third place there is political assistance. This is probably the most important field of activities of a peace-keeping and -building mission of an international organisation. It contains 1) negotiation and mediation, 2) dissuasion, and 3) verification and observation.

1) Negotiations between the conflicting parties can take place more easily if facilitated by an international mediator. In the first place, the parties in conflict usually have more confidence in an outsider than in a third national party. In Central America the Catholic Church, being an insider, has often tried to play this mediating role but unfortunately failed. Having the support of a greater international community, an international organisation can also contribute enormously to legitimise peace processes. The international community is often able to neutralise internal forces that may oppose the peace process. Of course, opposition to peace is very common, and almost natural when a country is about to start developing a peace process. Usually not all the political forces in the country agree with the conditions of peace or with a certain peace agreement. International presence, then, can strengthen the legitimacy of the peace process.

2) An international intervention also has a dissuasive function. The presence of an international mediator discourages the conflicting parties to recommence fighting, since their actions against a peaceful resolution will be condemned and sanctioned by the international community.

3) The verification and observation tasks have to do with the fulfilment of commitments established by a peace treaty and the protection of human rights. The international presence in the most violent zones discourages the parties to violate human rights or non-compliance, since the international community is verifying their conduct.

Kees Biekart: The role of the international community in conflicts in Central America

Kees Biekart gives a detailed reaction to the presentation of Raúl Rosende. In the presentation above, the three basic causes of conflict in Central America mentioned were poverty, violence and the lack of state or institutionalisation.

The causes of war and conflict of the 1980s in Central America according to Biekart, in the first place have to do with economic restructuring policies. The economic modernisation that started after the Second World War was very export-based. In this period of economic prosperity, wealth was distributed unequally; a small group benefited a lot. The large majority did not benefit from that period at all, particularly in these rural areas, where export produce like cotton, meat and coffee was produced. Profits could be made, to say it bluntly, through strong political pression, low salaries and in general social and political exploitation. When talking about causes of conflict in Central America this should be mentioned.

The causes of poverty can be directly attributed to the causes of the conflicts of the '80s in Central America, which were basically efforts to postpone the call for democracy. In the 1940s and 1950s there were movements advocating democratic rule in the region. The reaction from different regimes (supported by the United States) was basically to stop these democratic movements, often by military means.

In fact, there was a building up of military power. The military became the central authority. If one calls this violence, one can say that violence is a cause of war.

Social and political exclusion and militarisation of society do not per se point to a lack of state. The state in Central American countries existed, but it had the wrong kind of presence. The existence of a state by force is very undemocratic.

In the presentation above, three forms of international assistance in peace processes are mentioned. But what role was the international community actually playing? The majority of aid in the 1980s in Central America consisted of military aid that came from the United States! Over the past decade a huge amount of more than seven billion US dollars has been sent to governments throughout the region, especially Honduras and El Salvador, the majority of that assistance being used for military purposes. This, of course, had its aggravating effect on the domestic conflicts.

Of course the international community can contribute to a peace process, particularly in a diplomatic way. The United Nations have played a crucial role in mediating in El Salvador and Guatemala. The European governments have contributed also to give the Latin American governments and the OAS more room for manoeuvre by being a sort of counterweight to the US. However, the role of the international non-state community should not be underestimated. Churches, human rights organisations, non-governmental aid agencies and solidarity movements have been very important in Guatemala and El Salvador for putting the violation of human rights and the establishment of a truth commission on the political agenda. Civil society has also been very important in giving support to the opposition. All these forces have contributed to the transition from conflict to peace.

The transitions to democracy, economic liberalisation and peace have to be discussed in relation to each other. Economic transition, peace building and democratisation took place in more or less the same period. Democracy never existed in Central America prior to 1948, when the first democratic transition started in Costa Rica. Elections were held, but that is not the same as having a democracy. In El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua up to the 1980s there was no democracy. However, a start has been made towards a more democratic political system, even though there is not a consolidated democracy. The whole process of trying to incorporate citizens into decision-making and making the state more accountable, is still going on.

Finally, there is a problematic relationship between democracy and poverty. Extreme poverty is undermining democracy. The impoverished majority does not have confidence in the political system as they have seen it over the past years or they rely on clientelistic politics. In both ways, it is difficult to attain democratic change.

Discussion

Raúl Rosendeúl Rosendeúl Rosende

South and Central America are very similar. Basically one can find the same social conditions: poverty, inequality, authoritarianism and a lack of democracy. Nevertheless, in Central America there has been war, whereas in South America there was not, at least not structurally. The structural social conditions being more or less equal, perhaps the basic causes of war can be found at the local level. At local level

differences between South and Central America are obvious. In the rural areas of Central America there is an absolute lack of state. If there is any state presence, it is weak and authoritarian, dominated by the military. Very often the army is the only state institution. And even nowadays, the only state institution one can find in post-war zones is the army. This is a central problem in Central America at the local level.

After the Cold War the international mechanisms have changed enormously. Of course international organisations, NGOs, churches, etc, have been playing an important role in the peace process in Central America. Co-operation of the international solidarity movements was very strong and very important. Over a long period of time the Central American countries have built up networks with NGOs in Europe and especially the US. Unfortunately the strength of these movements is decreasing at the moment.

Audience

It is questionable to say that democracy is the cure for poverty. Is there a direct correlation between the two? In Europe, Australia, and America, you can see an increase nowadays in the levels of poverty and a widening gap between the rich and the poor while these are so-called consolidated democracies. If you talk about democracies in terms of empowering local communities and giving them resources to improve their environment and livelihoods, yes that could perhaps be a cure for poverty. But democracy as an institutional solution for poverty is not very likely. Democracy is not just a procedure or a principle, democracy is also a practice. By this time we see an effort by the world community, including the Third World to accept the principle of democracy, but not the practice.

Kees Biekart

Poverty is undermining democracy, but that does not mean that one could solve the problem of poverty by establishing a democratic structure.

Audience

In Guatemala this issue is very different from other Central-American countries, because of the existence of an ethnically pluriform society. How do we construct democracy while respecting ethnic differences? The issue of collective rights comes into the picture. People try to manufacture some sort of system that respects differences. Most popular organisations in Guatemala did not opt for a ministry of indigenous people, but for insertion of indigenous people and other ethnic groups within the very broad political system.

Raúl Rosendeúl Rosendeúl Rosende

The only country with an important ethnic differentiation in Central America is Guatemala. El Salvador and Nicaragua for example are mestizo countries. Guatemala has an indigenous majority. It has the same characteristic as some Andean countries, like Bolivia, and Ecuador. If one refers to conflict in Guatemala, one should refer to poverty, lack of state, and to discrimination of ethnic groups.

Kees Biekart

In Guatemala the issue of collective rights is of crucial importance. Without having it made one of the key issues in the negotiations, the Guatemalan peace process would never have come this far. The negotiations about the Indian rights agreement were the heart of the peace accords. Everybody knew that if there was an outcome that was not acceptable to the Indian majority of Guatemala, there would be no point in even thinking about conflict resolution, peace processes or democratisation. Up till that very moment Indians had been totally and legally excluded from the Guatemalan civil society. For its implementation, however, the Indian rights agreement needs international support.

Audience

Raúl Rosende focussed his presentation on conflict resolution and the role of the OAS. International assistance should focus on poor post war zones in the rural areas. Kees Biekart on the other hand, was talking about the causes of conflict. These are different subjects that have to be separated.

Thea Hilhorst

We cannot just separate all the causes of conflict and its resolution. Kees Biekart questioned the role of the international community. How intra-state is intra-state conflict? If one thinks about the international community as a conflict resolver, it is easy to forget that the international community can also be part of the cause of the conflict, especially in the case of giving military aid.

Audience

What makes people go into conflict? If we know the answer, this might give us some guidance on how people can live together peacefully. Then we can start talking about democracy or about other instruments.

Raúl Rosendeúl Rosendeúl Rosende

Research with former combatants in Nicaragua and El Salvador, pointed in the direction of large ideas such as lack of democracy and poverty. Most former combatants are very poor peasants, living in the poorest parts of the countries. This is the social profile of Sandinistas and Contras and state armies alike. The particularity in Guatemala is that these peasants are indigenous. The zones where production is structured, is not strictly capitalistic, it is pre-capitalistic. There is no combatant who came from the capitalist zones of these countries. Lack of all kinds of basic resources move people to go to war.

Audience

But who is starting a conflict? Is it the people or their leaders? In India, for example, Mahatma Gandhi mobilised poor people for reconciliation. Poverty is not always ending in conflict. Elite leaders use the poor people to support them, to be able to stay in a powerful position.

What we are using as a remedy for a conflict does not always address the causes. Raúl Rosende stated that more than 95% of the combatants in conflicts in

Nicaragua and El Salvador were peasants. This can be seen as a rejection of a development model oriented towards the few rich in the country, rather than towards the majority of the population. The majority in these countries was probably left out of this model of development. Democracy can be part of the cure, but not the total medication. Conflicts are also linked to models of economic development and solutions should also be sought there.

3.   Kingsley de Silva: The success of democracy in South Asia

Kingsley de Silva is emphasising the success of the well-established democracies based on the British system in India and Sri Lanka. Democracy, according to de Silva, does not require a high standard of living. Although there are still conflicts in India and Sri Lanka, he rejects both the ideas of authoritarian rule and (conditional) assistance by the international community. The discussion focused on the relationship between democracy, (including lower caste mobility) and the prevalence of conflicts. Are enduring conflicts in South Asia a by-product of democracy? Are they merely imperfections of a weak functioning state or should they be seen as a test for the success of democracy?

South Asia is, of course, a very different place from Latin America. It is an area in which the state is alive and well. States in this area did not fail. However, they do find it difficult to cope with a number of problems. South Asia, whatever the definition of democracy, has a reputation of having established democratic forms of governance. This is certainly the case in Sri Lanka and India. Looking at South Asia in the early 1950s, there were only two democracies: Sri Lanka and India. At the moment almost every country in South Asia, including Nepal, has some form of democratic governance.

We will first take a historical perspective by looking at these different forms of governance in South Asia. The roots of democracy in South Asia go back to British times. Whatever else one may say about British rule, the fact of the matter is that wherever you look at the ex-colonial world and you find democracies, you will find that the bulk of them are ex-British colonies. The roots of the democratic structures -such as representation of local people in the national legislature, representation, first by nomination and thereafter by small electoral systems- were established in British times.

The position of Sri Lanka was unique. In 1928 the British State started to introduce a form of representative governance in the colony. This was a revolutionary step. Representative governance before independence means coming to terms with universal suffrage. Universal suffrage came to Sri Lanka in 1931. It was an amazing development at that time. It meant that all men and women at the age of 21 were qualified to vote. Women in Sri Lanka had the right to vote long before women in for example France, Belgium or Switzerland. That was a revolutionary step taken by the British, a very pragmatic decision to compel the political elite to look at the problems of the people.

That was the first step. To put this decision in perspective you have also to remember that the very first British election under universal suffrage came in 1929, universal suffrage came to India only in 1952. In Sri Lanka the bulk of the population, some 70 % was illiterate, and having elections was something quite revolutionary. The second salient fact was that Sri Lanka had three general elections before independence. The adaptation of universal suffrage did not come because the Sri Lankan elite wanted it. It came despite the Sri Lankan elite.

The response of the elite to universal suffrage, had in fact a negative impact on the system. They appealed to people on the grounds of ethnicity and religion. In that appeal lay the roots of some of our current problems. Nevertheless, there was

also a constructive part of that appeal. From 1936 to 1947 more than half the budget was spent on three major sectors of expenditure. First of all, primary, secondary and tertiary education was funded entirely by the state. In Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka has the highest levels of primary and secondary schools. Second, the state invested in public health. Third we witnessed a relatively high expenditure on food subsidies in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the diversion of resources to the military in the last ten years, the proportion of money spent on education and public health has continued unabated. Statistics show a literacy rate of 92 % and a life expectancy for men of 72 and 76 for women. Infant mortality has dropped to 11 per 1000 live births. It is the cumulative effect of a decision taken by the British in 1928 to install universal suffrage.

The other part of the story relates to India. Despite the horrors of the establishment of a democratic system in India from 1947 onwards, they did things the British never attempted to do, in bringing the princely states together into one uniform state structure. One of the features of British rule, despite all constructive effects it had, was the fact that there were periodic famines. The last of these took place in 1942-1943, a period during which food was available, but the British were unable to distribute it. Whatever the reasons, this last major famine in Bengal led to 3 à 4 million deaths. Deaths by starvation, while food was available in the stores. Whatever defects exist in Indian democracy and although poverty is still a serious problem, India has not seen another large-scale famine after independence.

This is the feature that the Nobel laureate Sen has pointed out, by comparing India and China. He attributes the difference to the fact that India is operating a democracy where people are able to intervene in instances such as this.

The difficulties, however, that both India and Sri Lanka have, can be ascribed to two major processes. On the one hand they are trying to run a democratic government and at the same time they are engaged in the process of state building. In India that process has been much more difficult than in Sri Lanka. In the 18th century this process of state building was already a very violent process. If you look at violence and elements of instability in India today you have to remember that they are trying to do something now which has never been attempted by the British during the entire colonial period. Nevertheless, one cannot assume that democracies could be run without conflict. Democracies are as prone to conflict as any other form of governance. Both in Sri Lanka and in India there are very high levels of violence. Those levels of violence, however, have been a feature of the 1970s and 1980s, not of the past. In fact the transition to independence, both in India and Sri Lanka, was very orderly in the first 10 years.

The second point is that both these countries with quite stable democracies have refuted most of the Western theories about the fundamental requisites of establishing a democracy. Whether you read Robert Dahl or Barrington Moore, they all assume a high level of economic prosperity and development as essential and even as prerequisites to the success of a democracy. In a recently published book it was stated that "bad economic performance in poor countries makes democracy particularly vulnerable. In a declining democracy of less than $1,000 GNP democracy can be expected to last on an average of four years". Now, if this were the criterion used, a lot of countries in South Asia would not be able to develop a democracy. Sri Lanka has a per capita income of $800 GNP, and India less than half of that. And yet they have sustained a form of democracy on that basis. Therefore, it is a challenge,

which many Western societies have found impossible to accept or even imagine that on such a level of mass poverty it is possible to sustain a two party system in which you have regular elections. Surely these elections may sometimes lead to violence, but after all South Asia is not the only part in the world where elections have been fraudulent; the same goes for large parts of the so-called developed world. However the response in Southeast Asian countries to these fraudulent elections has been remarkable. India, for instance, has an election committee, which is now being regarded as a model for the Western world. Great Britain recently said that we have to look at India's Election Commission to see ways in which it can be possible to handle some of the problems of Western democracy, like the use of money in elections coming from various sources. Moreover, the Indian Election Commission also insisted on inner-party democracy. They compelled ministers for instance to account for the money they used for running an election campaign.

The failure of democracy in our part of the world has been the inability to cope with ethnic conflict. In Sri Lanka you would say that it is a matter of a privileged minority fighting for its declining privileges. In India, it is the whole issue of class. The fact of the matter is that democratic structures have been unable to cope with these pressures. That is the principal flaw of South Asian democracy. It is not a hopeless failure, however. On the contrary, I would argue that the levels of violence have been less than in many other parts of the world.

Looking at the experience of Asia I would argue that if you want to have economic growth you have to have some form of authoritarian rule. If you look at South Korea, Singapore or even Malaysia where people have a much higher standard of living than in India or Sri Lanka, it has had a certain price. The price has been terrifying in countries like South Korea. Singapore has transformed itself from being the slum of Southeast Asia to a First World state. A First World state, however, without a first world democracy. Malaysia also has given its people a remarkable level of prosperity, whatever the problems they have at the moment. One visit to Malaysia will give you an idea of how much can be done by one man in political power for ten or fifteen years. This is not the record of India or Sri Lanka. In 1961 Sri Lanka had the same per capita GNP as South Korea, twice the GNP of Thailand. In Sri Lanka and India the economic successes have been postponed, maybe for investing more time and effort in more democratic political structures. Whatever the ideology, the fact remains that there are high levels of inefficiency and corruption in India. And it is only now that India is making small improvements in its performance.

Still one question remains. What should be the role of the international community in dealing with countries in crisis? My answer is simple: we cannot assist India. India is too proud to accept any assistance, and will tell you to go fly a kite. They have said that more than once. India is too big to accept the sort of conditionalities that the IMF imposes. The smaller democracies like Sri Lanka have learned the game, and the name of the game is simple: turn to Japan, the principal aid donor now. As far as the IMF and the World Bank are concerned, it is necessary to negotiate with the American government. That is exactly what is happening in India and our part of the world today. In a few years time there will be another player in the aid-game: the Peoples Republic of China. They will generate a surplus which will be available for South Asia and Southeast Asia. Moreover they will have a political agenda which will have nothing to do with democracy anymore.

Comments by Jeroen de Zeeuw and Jude Kehla, panel

Jeroen de Zeeuw

Although the developments sketched above all sound rather positive, it is also a fact that there are still many violent conflicts in the South Asian region. An important question in this respect could be if these conflicts can be a sign of too little or even too much democracy. We should also ask ourselves if political empowerment through the process of democratisation is an adequate instrument for addressing the issues of inequality and the integration of ethnic minority groups in the state system.

Secondly, attention should be drawn to other successful mechanisms of power sharing in the history of South Asia. Were there any other types of governance before the British colonial period, from which we can draw experience to deal with conflicts in today's plural societies?

Jude Kehla, Panel

Apart from certain similarities between Sri Lanka and India, we should be careful comparing two very different countries, which both need a very different sort of analysis. Furthermore, it is important to include groups, like the Untouchables and pariah communities and topics such as dynastic rule in the analysis of these countries.

A second thing is the big impact by doing small things. The implementation of school milk in Sri Lanka e.g. has probably contributed more to health care in such a poor country than most foreign aid that has been sent to African countries in a ten-year period. This says something about the possibilities of a ruling class actually recognising what the basic needs of people are.

Focus should also be laid on the conclusion that economic growth is impossible to achieve without some form of authoritarian rule. This seems to be a tendency in most of Southeast Asia, where the state or the ruling elites are not challenged. Nowadays in attempts to solve crises in the international monetary market, it can be seen that in these countries there is an incredible redistribution of resources away from poor people, through taxes, to elites who have mismanaged the system through the banks and large corporations that are almost intertwined with the state.

Kingsley de Silva

The question of dynasty indeed is important, especially during some episodes of Sri Lankan history. Here we have one family which has controlled one political party. From the time it was established in 1951 to the present day, it still has public support. On the other hand, we can see also that the political system has been opened up more and more by the opposition. President Premadasa, for example, belonged to a very low caste. His appointment was the first time in hundreds and hundreds of years that a person from that caste became the head of government and the head of state. In India you had the three-generation leadership by one family. Nevertheless, these are democracies, which permit the survival of this sort of families. In the case of Nehru it is the point of credibility and acceptance they have. This comes essentially from the whole decade of India's experience with the British. Before that it was Nehru's father and his colleagues, which comprised two centuries of collaboration, first with the

Dutch and then with the British. Then they suddenly became democrats, and actually succeeded. They succeeded in presenting themselves as populist democrats, introducing a level of populism, which undermined the economic system by e.g. generating strikes.

India is generally coping very well with the important question of castes. Much of the instability in India today, yet derives from the fact that lower castes, or so-called Untouchables, are up in arms and trying to gain access to the political system. This is a very ugly process, because they have taken a corrupt system and made it much more corrupt. The more constructive part of it is that India's present president belongs to the lowest of the lowest in the caste system. To that extent it is a demonstration that the system has really opened up and that the elite of the Brahmans will not automatically be able to dominate India's political system

Jude Kehla
This is just symbolic. We have to be critical about the value of having someone from a lower caste as prime minister without anything sipping down in terms of welfare and social and economic opportunities. You can act in a soap opera or whatever is famous in India and on the basis of that get an amount of reverence which permits you to go to parliament. What is the quality of this kind of democracy?

Kingsley de Silva
Although this is true, we have to recall that a great filmstar was president of the United States! The processes in which the lower castes are coming to power are an important reason for India having such an unstable political system. All over India, the issue now is the upward mobility of the lower castes. It is not only violence that is coming up, but also corruption. People from the lower castes assume that the state belongs to them, and given the ineffectiveness of the Supreme Court and the legal system in India, it will probably take more than fifty years before you can successfully prosecute one of those guys. The point is that India's political system has recently been democratised in a way it was not democratised under the Nehrus. The process is not very pretty, but still, there is genuine affirmative action on behalf of these people. Therefore, the democratisation process in India is flourishing, but it has certain ugly features, features which will become more prominent over the next fifteen, twenty years. The problem is that now we cannot go back to the days of the Nehrus anymore.

Jeroen de Zeeuw
As we have learned from the presentation, the roots of democracy go back to British times. What was there before that time? It could not only be anarchy and chaos? Was there not any other sort of governance, which also functioned?

Kingsley de Silva
There were monarchical forms of governance, with their own systems of getting the allegiance of the people. However, these were not very democratic. It is very comforting for Indian and Sri Lankan academics that we can say that we had forms of democracy prior to British rule. There were forms of democracy at the local level, the

village, but when it comes to structures bigger than the village, it would take a very bold man who could say that there was democracy. What the Sri Lankan and Indian politicians did was taking up the challenge which the British threw out. From abroad the assumption right through was that these guys cannot run a democratic system, and in a way it has come true. At the same time you could argue that they ran the system under very difficult circumstances. There were no democratic systems, which had wide prevalence over wide regions or empires, but there was democracy at village level. You have to remember that the glue that held this system together at the local level was the caste system.

Discussion

Audience

Do we really need democracy? Why should democracy *not* be on fire?

Kingsley de Silva

The question if we really need democracy is not something we bring into question. The fundamental fact is that whoever rules a country has to have some level of legitimacy. One form of gaining this legitimacy is obtaining popular acceptance in elections. To that extent we cannot exclude democracy. We cannot raise the question whether we need democracy, it is a given. The problem is that we have to make it creative, to distribute the benefits to the people at large. Those benefits have come. Both in Sri Lanka and in India there have been systematic social changes, and it has come from below. Governments and social structures will have to adjust to that. Social change in Sri Lanka for instance has come through the government-induced education system. Social welfare from the part of the government and the ability of people to come up to that process and challenge the rulers. What is still lacking is inner party democracy, the lack of which keeps the dynasty in power. The second thing is to protect the civil and political rights to a much greater extent than what we have succeeded in doing. These civil and political rights survive during periods of peace, but when there is tension, ethnic and religious conflicts, the state tolerates levels of violence which no state should tolerate. Especially in putting down armed rebellions, even rebellions which are not very well-armed. That is the crisis of democracy. In those instances, if you call independent Indian lawyers, part of civil society, they will demonstrate the effectiveness of the legal system. In India, under jurisdiction, there is the right to compel the police to arrest somebody. However powerful that person might be, if the Supreme Court orders the police to arrest that man, to bring him before court, it is done. There are cases where the Supreme Court has ordered the state government to investigate high levels of corruption. At the moment there is an Indian former prime minister on trial for corruption. There are not many countries in which that will happen.

Jude Kehla

Sri Lanka is a very good example of an intra-state conflict which is armed and very violent. But what are the reasons for this intra-state conflict. There must be something wrong with the state as it is. There must be something wrong with the ability of state institutions to stand between conflicting parties.

Kingsley de Silva

It has been the failure of the state to deal effectively with the problem of minorities. It is complicated by the fact that it is to a certain degree an inter-state conflict as well. Both in India and Sri Lanka it is the failure of the elite to understand some of the problems that have led to these problems. Now, the difficulty in dealing with an armed conflict in parts of Sri Lanka is partly because there are some measures that the state cannot take because of fear of reprisals; if not from India, than from Tamils. It becomes complicated when another democracy intervenes in the affairs of a neighbouring state.

Thea Hilhorst

It is interesting to see that the discussion focuses on the question whether conflict is simply the effect of a weakness of democracy or if it should be seen as the ultimate test of democracy.

Audience

The issue of human and cultural rights has not been mentioned yet. Especially the question of cultural rights is important here. In parts of the world like Australia and New Zealand people are confronted with the problem of having dual sovereignty within a nation-state. This seems to be an equally important question in Sri Lanka and India, with the Tamils and the Sikhs.

Kingsley de Silva

There is much greater recognition of cultural rights in India and Sri Lanka than people might think. In India the Muslims in a political form first challenged the question of cultural rights. The prolonged conflict over that eventually led to the partition of India. But ever since that, India has found it extremely difficult in coming to terms with the whole issue of cultural rights. The Sikhs e.g. , in raising the issue of cultural rights, have found it extremely difficult to separate those rights from religious rights. The Sikhs have a right there, because they refuse to be recognised as a sect of the Hindu religion. The state argues that they form a sect of the Hindu religion. In that case the question of religion has come into the picture as well, and has led to problems. A problem which can often be seen in India as well as in Sri Lanka, is that the minority which challenges the majority does not itself practice the same rights whenever they are in power. Despite all the violent conflict Sri Lanka has had, the only instance of ethnic cleansing was when the Tamils threw out the whole Muslim community in the Northern Province. Those people now live as refugees among the Singhalese, unable to get back.

As we can see, until now we have not been able to devise an effective way in handling that sensitive problem of cultural rights. This is also where the question of religion comes in. In Sri Lanka there is basically no problem on the part of cultural rights, because it is multi-cultural society. It is a society, which has a long tradition of religious tolerance. Sri Lanka is unique in the whole of South Asia in facing the intolerance of Christianity. Christianity, which came to Sri Lanka through the Portuguese and the Dutch, brought with it the aspect of religious intolerance in Europe. Therefore the battles of the Reformation and Counterreformation were fought in Sri Lanka. People were not permitted to practice Indian indigenous religions. Temples were destroyed and churches were constructed. The memory of that still survives. And yet while that happened in one part of the country, in the other part Roman Catholics were permitted entry and permitted the right to build churches. Muslims were thrown out of the Portuguese areas and were allowed to relocate in the Singhalese area. As far as cultural rights are concerned, if it includes religious rights, it includes the right to use your language in schools and universities, you have it all. Arguing that those rights are disregarded in our part of the world is unfair.

4. Achille M'Bembe: The African experience. In search of an alternative

Achille M'Bembe pleads for a new paradigm needed to understand the African situation. This new framework could assist in putting up systems of governance based on African experiences. The discussion focused on the multiplicity of forms of governance and external intervention on the continent.

Two sets of remarks will be made. The first set of remarks will be an attempt of characterising the present moment we live in Africa today. It is an attempt at least in highlighting some of what seem to be fundamental issues African societies are struggling with. Of course, Africa is not homogeneous or monolithic, the continent has a plural character. This presentation should be taken as a way of organising the discussion. The second set of remarks will be an attempt to start developing a new paradigm that is needed to study Africa's present day society.

Several major processes are going on today, which force us to rethink both the African identity (who we are, where we come from, and where we want to go) and the role Africa plays in the world. Basic questions of identity receive their translation into debates about democratisation, conflict resolution and economic transformation. Democracy, conflicts and economic transformation refer to basic issues of what a political community is or should be, and under what conditions people can construct a social life.

Under what conditions are societies societies? Under what conditions do they stop being societies and do they fall into some other state? For example a state of war or a state of nature. Behind the whole rhetoric of crises, the terrible media images show the dramatic Africa. That is just one part of the picture. Beyond the media images, important processes of social change are going on, affecting life in those societies. We have witnessed in the last twenty five years major changes in social formations and coalitions.

To understand the dynamics of these societies today, we need to look at their history. What did these societies become since independence? First, one can see for example a rapid urbanisation: African cities with an African character are appearing and growing fast. Second, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) have become a major feature of economic policy on the continent over the last fifteen years. Third, important changes are going on in terms of organisations; institutions and societies develop to streamline relations between the group and the individual. A reactivation of all kinds of forms of social organisation and rehabilitation of older practices (in terms of health management, or rotating credit associations) has taken place. A social memory that has always been there, despite having been suppressed by the post-colonial state, could make this revival of older practices possible. They have been waiting in the back-stage, being reactivated today, for purposes of coping with contemporary hardship. Fourth, one can see changes going on in terms of consciousness, fostered both by religious organisations and the proliferation of churches. Their work tends to give people a sense of self, of who they are. This sense of identity, of purpose, of inscription in the contemporary framework, goes beyond the here and now. Religion becomes a locus of reinvention of the social link, of the self, of the nation, of the community, including a reinvention of what the world is all about. Religious movements are

providing people a way of making sense out of what otherwise would make no sense at all.

This very brief and incomplete sketch of African society today however indicates that there are a lot of complex processes going on, that are important in any attempt to understand what is going on in Africa today. These processes cannot be reduced to the pictures we see on TV. Some changes are very dramatic, others are very creative. Africa experiences an important moment of social experimentation, which has positive sides and negative ones.

The second important point of this presentation has to do with the current absence of a clear idea for an alternative to the present situation. An explicit vision of what a good African society should be is not yet fully developed. The debates on democracy are part of those attempts at formulating a vision. The intellectual frameworks that are at hand, the categories used, fail to account for such complex realities and take the simplistic versions of neo-classical, Marxist or nativists paradigms. The nativist paradigm attempts to believe that there is something like an African tradition, which has always been there. One just has to rediscover it and exploit it in order to make sense of the present. None of these paradigms is offering a fundamental basis out of which an alternative for present day crises could possibly be formulated. Until this present moment, the task of rediscovering fundamental values necessary for societies to have a certain level of cohesion, has been taken care of in a very trial and error way.

If we talk about democracy, we talk about regulating a society by putting in place mechanisms which first of all protects life against forces of death, whatever forms those forces take. Second they have to heal life where it is hurt. A democratic system is more likely to do this than a system where brutality and abuse of human rights are everyday practice. At a time when people die so easily, we have to start from that basic distinction between life and death, and develop both a political and an ethical reflection on the fundamentals. Fundamentals in the ways societies organize themselves, and emerge as communities.

Therefore a new paradigm to study the African complexity is needed. In the attempt to do this, violence is one of those things that requires our intellectual and political attention. This means not only referring to the various (intra-state) conflicts in Africa, one should also take into account the (economic) violence inflicted upon those societies by market forces. After fifteen to twenty years of structural adjustment programs the social fabric has been dismantled and the states have been weakened. Structural adjustment disintegrated social structures at least in certain parts of the continent and consequently paved the way for anarchy, which, in itself has brought new forms of violence Africa was not used to. This 'new violence' is inflicting on those societies a human cost only comparable to what happened in the time of the slave trade. Within that context, the poor, those who are the most vulnerable segments of society, are paying a high price in the war of economics, inflicted by market forces. Within that context it seems to me that any attempt of imagining a good alternative vision of where we want to go, should begin from a reflection on the distinction between these basic categories: life and death.

Part of that new paradigm should also be concentrated on the relationship between the individual and the community. What we have witnessed during the last twenty years is that certain aspects of economic life are emphasising the

polarisation between the individual and the community whereas African societies generally have managed, over a long period of time, to establish a certain complementarity between the individual and the community. This complementarity has proved to be necessary to survive in the fragile environments in the tropics; fragile environments where you are never really sure that you have built something in an irreversible manner, where the gains of today are always likely to be reversed tomorrow. That complementarity, the equilibrium between the community and the individual, has helped to make sure that the dangers of big polarisation between those two elements was not mortal to many African societies. If the increasing gap between individual and community interests is not managed properly, we will give way for the new kind of violence we were talking about at the beginning of this seminar.

Comments of Jeroen de Zeeuw and Jude Kehla, the panel

Jeroen de Zeeuw

Different processes of identity are outlined: where we come from, where we want to go and who we are. Africa has a lot of countries with different identities and cultural values. Do you think democracy is the best system of governance that caters for all these differences? Or are there other forms of governance, apart from Western liberal democracy, that have come to the fore in African history, and that have shown their value in successfully incorporating different political ideas into one government structure? Julius Nyerere, formulated this in a different way: "I would like the West to give Africa some time to find their own way to Coca-Cola".

Jude Kehla

I question the idea that disintegration of social structures is a result of Structural Adjustment Programmes or market forces. The disintegration we see at the moment in Rwanda, does that have to do with SAPs? Furthermore I want to make some comments on the African situation as a whole. Identification with the group in my opinion means a substantial loss of personal identity. Some conflicts today have their basis in tribal identification. The tribe as it is nowadays might be part of the problem. I believe that if the tribe had been given the opportunity to develop, it might have had come into conflict with itself earlier than the colonial state. The tribes therefore have searched for different kind of solutions to solve their own problems. The modern state however intervened into that history of tribes which are still developing. What is needed now is good leadership. The question remains however what kind of characteristics these good leaders should have.

Achille M'bembe

The West has been interfering in African affairs for as long as we know. Africa has been contained and instrumentalised, used for personal political gains. At the level of the elites, there has been a system of penetration between the West and Africa. You can see penetration that is quite gross, or colonial, but there are also more sophisticated forms exercised through market forces. You can also see a penetration by exploitation of basic strategic minerals, of diamonds, oil, timber etc.

The wars in Congo-Brazzaville or Angola, for example have been going on for a long time now. This penetration brings together local African actors with transnational actors, around a whole web of simulation where disorder is created. The easiest way to make a profit today is through creating chaos. Where you create chaos you get more profit and at a quicker pace, then where you have so-called market economies. Therefore, there is a contradiction between the policies of international financing institutions, such as the Worldbank and IMF, trying to set the prices right, and the real logics of these societies that go absolutely against those processes.

Discussion

Audience
Africa is a continent that is no longer for Africans. It is a treasure for the entire world. Recent conflicts are fought around goldmines. "All people get the governments they deserve". Blaming everything on the colonial past doesn't help, let's move forward.

Achille M'bembe
In Africa there has always been a multiplicity of forms of government and philosophies that changed over time. Chiefdoms, or social orders that were regulated in the absence of the state. One did not need a state, or prisons. One hardly needed a bureaucracy. These were societies that have been able to invent forms of self- management, which responded constantly to what was perceived as the demands of their times. In the big variety of African identities the concept of political life -or of democracy- needs to be reconceptualised, reinvented, according to local conditions. African post-colonial governments always used to say: "Democracy okay , but African democracy", by which they meant a delusion of the fundamental principles of democratic rule. These advocating democracies turned away from contextualisation or indigenisation of democratic forms.

Audience
Problems in Africa cannot be dislodged from slavery and colonialism. Africa has had a rich history with a variety of forms of governance. Forms of governance, or democracy that were interrelated with religion and other aspects of social life. Before colonisation there was no death sentence, no prisons. We deny ourselves too much; we adapt ourselves too much to western philosophies. Implementing Western models of democracies in Africa is like trying to put a square object in a round hole.

Achille M'bembe
Talking about liberalisation of markets and SAPs is of course, not the only thing what is going on today. Nevertheless salaries have not been paid to government officials and soldiers. The changes in economic policies have considerably affected the way countries are governing. Regimes used to buy obedience. They may have

been authoritarian, using coercion, but they did have some form of legitimacy. At least they brought some form of stability and they were able to control violence between more or less reasonable limits. At the moment that basis is no longer present. There is potential for individuals to privatise public violence. The potential to exercise forms of coercion, taxation, to control the central bureaucracy or to put their hands on critical resources, within a problem context which is precisely favourable for deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation. This situation is not conducive for harmonious relations in society. It is in this context that issues of identity and ethnicity gain prominence, and are mobilised and politicised by various actors who are not necessarily looking for the common good.

Audience
Whatever the history, every place needs a leader. One also needs the vision to establish democracy and power sharing, which in itself is a system that can put aside the leader. Often leaders do not want to share power and then they need will need violence to exercise it. I think we have to get rid of our romantic picture about African traditions. Let's not forget the black periods. One of the problems now is that there is no link between the elites and the local people. For who is democracy?

Achille M'bembe
The debate on the past (slavery and colonialism) is framed in a context of guilt and blame. There should be other ways in coming to terms with the past and connect with the present. We have to find those ways. Colonial rule took only one century, nevertheless, it managed to transform societies in a structural way. At the end of colonial rule these societies were neither what they were before, nor what colonialism wanted them to be. They were some forms of hybrid formation and a multiplicity of legal systems, with a variety of norms. There is a variety of systems of legitimisation in which people can pursue their interest. When you cannot find a solution to your problem in a Catholic church, leave one foot there and put the other one in for example an ancestral cult. You go to church in the morning and in the evening you go and see the healer. Sociologically speaking it is that combination, that capacity to bring together elements taken from a variety of pasts and combine it in a way in which you can become an efficient actor in the present day society. This in fact is a creative process. Our task today is to combine all those elements to produce a political subject who is part of a world in which he or she is efficient. We have to reconcile our pluriformity if we want to be effective in the world today.

Audience
Why are we not doing that? Why are we not combining those elements? We are still listening to others. When the West is asking for democracy, you go and establish democracies. When they ask NGOs, you make sure you have them. When they ask IMF, you accept that money. Why don't we do what we think is best for us?

Achille M'bembe

I think we are doing it, on sides where you would least expect it. For example in terms of languages. The French they speak in Abidjan, is not the same as the French they speak in Paris. It is not the same as the languages of the ordinary of Abidjan. It is a mixture of something absolutely African. Just like the Pidgin they speak in Lagos or Douala. In the same way we are combining elements of governance. In the West of Cameroon you can see a reinvention of Chiefdoms, with a set of elements; titles, investments, new forms of taxation to build schools or hospitals. If you go to visit some elites in Abidjan on Friday in their offices, they won't be there. They are all in their original villages, since a variety of institutional transactions are going on there. Unfortunately we do not pay enough attention to those social dynamics. These people are not waiting for foreign aid. If they were waiting for foreign aid, to do what they have to do, they would have disappeared a long time ago. Foreign aid is a minimum. People are taking care of themselves, through a whole variety of ways we would be inspired to look at. If we want to build a new society we have to build it on the basis of those dynamics and that creativity.

Democracy is both a technology of governance and a set of values. It is also a system whereby some people are excluded -in the USA e.g. there are many-. The violence that is exercised on them by the market is such that, the political rights makes them non-citizens. So we can not have a theological understanding of democracy. It's something that is there to make sure that violence is exercised in such a way that maybe those who are victims of it, blame it on themselves, or do not blame it on the system. It is that method whereby you delegate the exercise of violence to instances and institutions which at the end, deresponsibilises everyone. This can be a way of finding peace and stability. What we have to do in Africa is to see in what way one can shift from that kind of raw violence, where Charles Taylor goes to the bush, fights for ten years and then gets elected, to ways of civilising violence.

5. Final discussion

In this seminar conflicts in Asia, Central America and Africa have been discussed. However, Thea Hilhorst is emphasising, we should not only focus on violence. Raúl Rosende is optimistic about building a lasting peace in Central America. Kingsley de Silva stressed the strong points of the democratic system in his part of the world. Achille M'Bembe has mentioned the creativity of people, who are looking for room for manoeuvre to reinvent society and social practices. How they are trying to accommodate the past in face of the relations with Western countries nowadays. Given these sorts of processes and conflicts, where do we go from here? Should we proceed within a democratic framework or outside of it? What is the role of the state? The final statements of the participants will try and answer these questions.

Raúl Rosende

I want to emphasise the mechanism of international conflict resolution in Central America after the end of the Cold War. In discussions at the Clingendael conference I have realised a very important element. Central America is perhaps one of the parts of the Third World with the lesser identity particularities. Having listened to the speakers from South-Asia and Africa I think that the particularities in those parts of the world are much stronger than in Central America. In fact we may even say that Central America is one of the most "Western" parts of the Third World. The colonial history in Central America already started in the 15th century. Moreover the influence of the United States in Central America determined a much more Western orientation in our societies. This is important in a future perspective, since in Central America the kind of state that people ideally want is not really an issue. People are familiar with the Western state, with Western representative democracy and its values. The issue is more how to complement the state, how to improve the institutional capacity of the state. The model of a Western state as such is not a topic for discussion.

Kingsley de Silva

The state capacity of countries in South Asia differs a lot between different countries. Where states have the capacity to deal with problems of identity, poverty and conflict, there is no need for NGOs to take those responsibilities. Then you are providing a parallel set of services.

Thea Hilhorst

That is quite provoking. You say that the state itself should be strengthened rather than NGOs (civil society), which is the trend today.

Achille M'bembe

It seems to me that in order to determine where do we go from here, we have to identify quite clearly what in the African context today is posing the major threats to the existence of communities as communities. What are those threats which, if we let them develop themselves, will put in jeopardy the very fabric of those

societies. One of those threats today lies in the weakening and disintegration of the state. There are various reasons why it has come to this. The Western tradition has invented three mechanisms for social regulation; one was God. Then they killed God at some time and two other mechanisms remained. One is the state and the other one the market. Beyond those two Western tradition has not been able to imagine any other mechanism. With Western hegemony over the world, we, coming from marginal places, we are caught in this kind of dictatorship of dualism between the state and the market. The last fifteen years we have seen an assault, calculated, organised towards a dismantling of the state all over the world, including Europe. The effects of which, in places like ours, are quite dramatic. Where the state has collapsed and where anarchy has emerged possibilities of violent death have increased. Therefore the possibilities of social relations and the norms have changed. Now we need to reinvent the state; not the kinds of states we had before. We need states that are capable to provide security for people. Security and protection have become major issues.

The second thing is that where the state has disintegrated there also has been anarchy and violence; but not everywhere. There are also places where there has been a total atomisation of the society, an organisation around micro entities, small autonomous institutions that today are there and then disappear. NGOs have come and have tried to build on that, but you can not build a society that is so fragmented with no central force to organise collective life and public interest. There is something to do there which is something totally different from the romantisation of civil society or NGO organisations which is prevalent today in most parts of our discourse. We need to have a realistic approach on how to rebuild civil society and institutions.

Jeroen de Zeeuw

It is also important, especially when discussing issues of identity and ethnicity, that people have the room and possibility to discuss these issues on the local level. That is where the strengthening should be. Here in Holland you often hear that a lot of people are not interested in politics, as they say that it is beyond their reach, that they do not have any influence on political processes. That is where the problem is. Not only in African villages or in South-Asia or Central America, but also in Western Europe, more discussion has to be at the local level.

Jude Kehla

Concerning the state, I think that one of the problems in Africa is that in many cases the state was actually too big. We should find ways of making the state smaller, to take it back to its main task and make it more accountable.

What to do next? I believe that you should resolve costs where they occur. For example, when there is a violent conflict you should be able to let those people pay for the costs they cause, things they destroy so not the international community. Second is the point of judicial responsibility; people should pay for crimes they have committed. It is time we have means for making people responsible for acts committed while in government, like Pinochet.

What I want to say is that it is extremely important that you should write down what people's rights actually are.

Audience

Where and how should the institutional capacity of the state be strengthened? Is it a question of the state that has to perform better or is it a question of the representativeness of the state and its governance; is it a question of legitimacy of the state in several ways? In the whole context of the state being dismantled how are we going to work in these directions?

Jude Kehla

Regarding the last question, for me I would be very much satisfied if you have, what we are calling, a constitutional state. If only the state in Africa would obey its own laws to begin with.

Audience

We should not place democracy in a vacuum, it is related to other things. It is connected to some kind of model of development, which does not always fit the majority. Democracy can be part of future solutions to problems, but not only that. We should pay attention to the model of development too.

Thea Hilhorst

Something has changed. A few years ago, everybody would always talk about strengthening civil society. Now, when we ask five people for comments, the answer is strengthening the state. That is quite a change in atmosphere. However, that leaves open a number of other questions. How can the state be strengthened, and what exactly do we need to strengthen? However vague it is, some reinvention of the state has to be done. Additionally, we need to reinvent the market and even the concept of development as well. Then there still are many other elements that have an effect on the state, like the environment. How can we in the future deal with minorities, who want to express their identity within the context of the state? This means that we have to ask ourselves how far we can go in allowing people to express their identity. What we need is a rethinking of the state.

6. Some observations by the editors

The seminar was preceded by two student debates about the very concept of democracy. In the process of organising the debates and the seminar, a position paper and reader were produced. In this process the very idea and practice of democracy have been discussed intensely. Referring to the contents of the seminar and some literature on the topic Jeroen de Zeeuw and Gemma Vriens will give their personal view on some of the remaining questions of the seminar.

Jeroen de Zeeuw: Strengthening the state and the role of the international community in Central America; Betting the right horse?

Jeroen de Zeeuw will discuss whether the state should be strengthened in the democratisation process, bearing in mind that the same state has played a major role in triggering conflicts in Central America. However, betting only on civil society might not be such a good idea either.

As made clear in the presentation by Raúl Rosende and the articles of Jenny Pearce and Rafael López-Pintor, the state in Central America has for decades been equivalent to the army. The strong military presence both at ground level in rural and urban areas and its political representation at government level has had a pervasive effect on Central American society. If we take the history of Guatemala as an example, we can see that of all presidents in office from 1960 onwards -the year in which the 36-year war between the army and its paramilitary squads and insurgent movements like the Rebel Armed Forces- only two of them, Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo and Jorge Serrano Elias entered office through fair elections[2]. Other presidents were either put in place directly by the military elite in the government or managed to take power through fraudulent elections or coup d'états. Civilian government officials were merely puppets of the military elite, who catered mainly for their own interests and that of the economic elite. This militarisation of the political system also had its effects on the entire society. All forms of popular protest and organisation were violently oppressed. Not until 1987, with the signing of the Esquipulas II Accord by five Central American countries, it was possible to conceive of a cease-fire between the military government and the Unidad Nacional Revolucionaria Guatemalteca - URNG, the structure formed by the four rebel movements in 1982. The period of civil war finally came to an end at December 29th, 1996 with the signing of the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace, the last of the so-called "Peace Accords".

  The role of the international community has been very important in facilitating the negotiation of such a peace agreement. As Raúl Rosende rightly states, the international pressure towards the military governments regarding the violation of human rights has probably been instrumental in the whole peace process. In his article

---

[2] Clingendael report on "Causes of Conflict in Central America: Guatemala", Causes of Conflict in the Third World Project, Netherlands, Institute of International Relations, Clingendael, The Hague.

"Foreign assistance in the peace process in Central America", Raúl Rosende is highly optimistic about the future role that the international community could, and to his opinion, should play in promoting democratisation and the strengthening of the state in Central American countries.

However, we must not forget that that same international community, especially the US, also played a crucial role in fostering the Guatemalan conflict. Backed by the CIA, a mercenary army overthrew the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in 1954, which was the beginning of a long and violent period of military rule. Assistance provided by the international community during that period has mainly consisted of financial aid to the military, as Kees Biekart argues. This can also be concluded from Jenny Pearce's article for the entire Central American region:

> "President Reagan took office in January 1981 with a declared intent of turning back the tide of communism in the US backyard. (..) Legal and illegal methods were used by the US government in a bid to overthrow [communist regimes and insurgent movements]" (Pearce, 1998: 587-588).

So in praising the role of the international community we also have to be aware of the actual role it played earlier in the history of a particular conflict.

Another interesting point is that in Raúl Rosende's as well as in Kingsley de Silva's presentation, attention is drawn primarily to strengthening the democratic state institutions. This should be done both at the policy level as well as at the local level. Strengthening the state is considered to be one of the key elements in the process of ending the violence and encouragement of democratisation. Both speakers focused attention on helping state institutions to become more democratic, transparent and responsive to the interests of the poor, who in a country like Guatemala comprise more than 80 % of the population, the majority of which comes from rural, indigenous areas.

This emphasis on strengthening the state is rather striking, since the topic of recent discussions on democratisation and the subsequent renewal of the state, mostly centres around the role and importance of the 'civil society', consisting of all kinds of associational activities and local grass-roots organisations aimed at empowering people from the local level. Again, in her article Jenny Pearce argues that e.g.

> "The peace process in Guatemala has reflected the new wave of discussion on the need to strengthen citizens' organisational capacities as a means of democratising the state and delivering development" (Pearce, 1998: 612).

Considered from this angle it somewhat amazes that two speakers solely emphasise the importance of strengthening the state in the process of democratisation. It has to be remembered that the state in the first place created an undemocratic and authoritarian society. Stimulating the capacities of the local population seems to be a requisite for a balanced and equitable democratisation process.

> "The legitimisation of autonomous and voluntary organisations which is implicit in the discourse around 'civil society' is an important step forward for a region which has only recently won freedom of expression and association, and where civil rights are accepted only reluctantly by conservative civilian and military elites" (Pearce, 1998: 613).

On the other hand, if this preference for an institutional reinforcement of the state results from scepticism about the concept of 'civil society', we indeed have to be

aware of the danger of idolising the area of social life where all sorts of grass roots activities take place. To pretend that the enormous amount of different local organisations could lead to a coherent policy, is quite naive. 'Civil society' is not a homogeneous group of organisations which all reflect the needs of the local population. On the contrary, these organisations often have conflicting interests and rarely form a united front. In this respect I again like to join the opinion of Jenny Pearce:

> "There is a danger, however, that 'civil society' as used by international donors in Central America reifies the concept as something essentially homogeneous, and its strengthening as a 'win-win' process for all that can only contribute positively to democracy and development. Viewed thus, it may become just a series of projects, which, as they compete for donor funds, look more towards donor agendas than to the social and political dynamic of their own societies and to their own capacities to bring about change without funding from outside" (Pearce, 1998: p613-614).

In this way these local-level organisations may become more of an answer to the needs of donor organisations, rather than interest promoting organisations that have been built from within.

Also, it is not a case of exclusively promoting either 'civil society' or the state. It is equally important to help state institutions prepare themselves for greater participation by non-governmental and indigenous organisations, by promoting fair elections or emphasising the renewal of the state. Therefore, both strengthening of the state and the 'civil society' will be needed to benefit from their different contributions. Just as democracy can not be achieved by merely some grass roots ideas of ideal governance, state pressure towards a dominant form of governance is not working either.

Concluding, we can say that although the international community can do some of the pioneering work by stimulating and guiding the state as well as the 'civil society' in the difficult process of democratisation, eventually it is the people themselves who should be the real pioneers. In other words it should clearly be an endogenous process of government officials and the local population, as can be extracted from López-Pintor's comment:

> "If the purpose is to achieve the electoral stage of a peace process after effective mobilisation and disarmament of contenders, the political performance of local actors, as well as the quality performance of the international community and its organisations, is much more important than the sheer size and duration of the international interventions" (López-Pintor, 1997: 60).

In the end it is the success of the process of democratisation which counts, not the amount of money which can be generated by the international community.

Gemma Vriens: Conflicts; the path to an African future?

Gemma Vriens is studying Rural Development Studies at the Wageningen Agricultural University and is one of the co-ordinators of OtherWise-interdisciplinary research and education on sustainable development-. This paper is not only questioning the value of imposed democracies in Africa, it also asks whether we should accept conflicts as a part of the solution of its present day problems.

Before the big democratisation wave on the continent in 1989/1990, only four African countries had established multi-party democracies: Senegal, the Gambia, Botswana and Mauritius. In the beginning of the 1990's, the combined pressure on one-party states from domestic constituencies and from aid donors became irresistible. Virtually all states adopted new multi-party constitutions. (Ellis, 1995).

Achille M'Bembe in his speech is not only questioning, but also strongly criticising these imposed democracies, which are very often no more than a structure with no content. In contrast with Raúl Rosende and Kingsley de Silva, who are satisfied with the imported Western liberal democratic model, M'Bembe suggests to start from scratch, and to formulate a new framework or paradigm to rebuild an African system of governance. This should include an African system of conflict resolution.

Several authors are concerned with the question of a possible African style of governance. Patrick Chaball (1998) maintains, for example, that parliamentary democracy is suitable for the African situation. He takes a quite moderate viewpoint, by describing three proofs for political liberalisation. He sees the end of the one-party- political system, the emerging political competition and the first free and multiparty elections as a positive trend towards a good system of governance in Africa. According to him, democracy should be about parliamentary elections, which are, however, in themselves no guarantees of a well-grounded system of political accountability.

Stephen Ellis (1996), on the other hand, rejects the "IMF and World Bank recipe of free markets and liberal politics". According to Ellis, this recipe is bringing neither prosperity nor peace to Africa. This is not because Africans do not want good governance, but it reflects the fact that a system of governance is not achieved by exhortation. Ottaway (1997) also rejects the view that democratic transformation can take place only through what she calls "The Leninist option"; namely "the manipulation of the political process, and more fundamentally of the entire society". Imposition of democracy is a *contradictio in terminis*; it automatically leads to an authoritarian regime, in this case an authoritarian regime of the IMF, World Bank and donor countries.

Most authors do write critically about governance in Africa. They nevertheless use a Western paradigm to study the practice of African politics. They criticise external imposition, but they do not really present alternatives, neither do they learn from African initiatives that have already taken place. Maybe Ake (1998) comes a bit closer by breaking with liberal democracy.

> "Liberal democracy, which pretends to be universal, actually is history-
> specific. It is a child of industrial civilisation, a product of a socially
> atomised society where production and exchange are already

> commodified, a society that is essentially a market. It is this product of a society in which interests are so particularised that the very notion of common interests becomes problematic. Hence the imperative of democracy".

Western European history is not African history. Both Ake and M'Bembe call for an African framework to study African Affairs.

Ake makes a first small move towards this paradigm. Governance in Africa, according to him, should de-emphasise abstract political rights and stress concrete economic rights. The demand for democracy in Africa draws much of its impetus from the prevailing economic conditions within. The rejection of Western atomised society comes in line with the emphasis on the important link between the individual and the community that is prevalent in African society. M'Bembe is referring to a reactivation of older social practices (for example rotating credit systems) building on a social memory that has always been there, but has been suppressed by the colonial and post-colonial state.

During colonial and post-colonial times, African societies were basically ruled on external initiatives. Africa needs time to internalise parts of these external systems, adapt them to an own African way of governance, including local authority structures like the chieftaincies in, for example, Zambia. According to Ellis (1996):

> "Of paramount importance in Africa is the way in which foreign and local pressures and interests combine in the formation of institutions, including the new political institutions of democracy".

It is like making cocktails: put in all different kind of elements from inside and outside, shake it heavily and than come up with something that is typically African: an own system of governance. This, however, does not happen smoothly. With the shaking of the cocktail, conflicts do occur. The widespread evidence that Africans are dissatisfied with the current situation, and that they want change does not imply that conditions per se are favourable for a new system of governance. On the contrary, conflicts are likely to arise. Not only the number of countries with multi-party elections has risen; the number of intra-state conflicts has drastically increased as well. In countries like Liberia, Somalia and Sierra Leone one can hardly speak of a present state authority, let alone a democratically chosen government.

But than again, as was questioned during the seminar, is conflict always a bad thing? Should we always try to prevent, mitigate and solve conflicts? Conflicts might be a bitter but effective tool to change the *status quo* in a certain country. Conflicts express the tensions. Established institutions loose their legitimacy and are forced to adapt to their changing environment.

The political reality of most African countries today does indeed suggest that democratisation can only be the result of conflict (…). "Democratisation could only emerge from the kind of disruptive struggle for which little, if any, external assistance is likely to be forthcoming" (Ottoway, 1997). Ottaway is referring to Dahrendorff (1967) who stated that: "Democracy is government by conflict". It recognises the inevitability of conflicting interests and establishes procedures and mechanisms for their regulation. Kingsley de Silva in his speech also states that one cannot assume that democracy could be run without conflicts.

Should we then accept conflicts, however violent they can be? Should the international community sit down and watch what happens in Sierra Leone, Angola, Somalia, Eritrea, Algeria, Sudan, Liberia, not wanting to interfere in internal affairs? The first question to be answered is: Who is benefiting from violent conflicts on the continent? Local grassroots organisations striving for improvement of socio-economic conditions and human rights, child soldiers, farmers and the local shopkeeper are certainly not amongst the beneficiaries. If conflicts reflect tensions within a certain country, are those tensions not primarily local elites' conflicting interests who may support warlords or suppressive regimes? And: should we accept the facilitation of war by weapon-exporting countries who reap most of the profits?

I would like to conclude by saying that imposing peace, like imposing democracy, is a farce. Authoritarian regimes use repression to create the illusion of consensus. An abundance of external pressures to mitigate and solve conflicts in Africa can become the same "illusion of consensus". Conflict resolution, however, might be a breaking point. Negotiations should take place at local level where conflicting parties and other stakeholders face each other. The role for international peacemaking-and keeping forces and solidarity- and peace movements need to be reformulated. Pacification can be a point on which people will search for an alternative to the present situation, an explicit vision of what a good African society should be. To use M'Bembe's words: "Who they are, where they come from, and where they want to go". It could be a starting point for a new African paradigm.

For more information about the seminar you can contact Wageningen Disaster Studies or one of the editors. The reader from the seminar, with articles about governance in conflict areas is still available (costs ƒ 20,=) at OtherWise.

References

Ake, C. (1998) 'Unique democracy; The unique case of African democracy', *Africa World Review*, November 1997-March 1998: 42-45.

Chabal, P. (1998) 'A few considerations on democracy in Africa', *International Affairs*, 74 (2): 289-303.

Ellis, S. (1995) *Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa; Where did it come from?; Can it be supported?; Paper presented at the study day by the Foundation for a new South Africa.* The Hague.

López-Pintor, R., (1997) 'Reconciliation elections; A post-Cold War experience', in K. Kumar. (ed.) *Rebuilding societies after civil war.Critical roles for international assistance*, 43-61. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers; Boulder.

OtherWise & Disaster Studies (1998) *Reader Democracy Under Fire. Governance and Intra-state Conflict* . Wageningen.

Ottoway, M. (1997) 'African democratisation and the Leninist option', *The Journal of Modern Studies*, 35 (1): 1-15.

Pearce, J. (1998) 'From civil war to civil society; Has the end of the Cold War brought peace to Central America?', *International Affairs*, 74 (3): 587-615.

Rosende, R. (1998) *Foreign assistance in the peace process in Central America; Paper to be presented at the seminar "Democracy Under Fire".* Wageningen.

Disaster Sites

1. Georg Frerks
    Omgaan met rampen; Inaugurele rede

2. Dorothea Hilhorst and Mathijs van Leeuwen
    Imidugudu, Villagisation in Rwanda; A case of emergency development?

3. Gemma Vriens and Jeroen de Zeeuw
    Democracy under fire; Seminar proceedings, November 1998

4. Ferdinand de Jong
    Revelation and secrecy; Cultural models of performance in the
    Casamance revolt, Senegal