

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL TOPIC “INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES AND ETHNIC COEXISTENCE IN AFRICA”

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In recent decades, discourses of citizenship, minority, and indigenous rights have ranked high on the agenda of the international development establishment (Niezen, 2003). They have also made their way into national and domestic politics in many parts of Africa. Among these, the concept of indigenous peoples has raised debates, both in political and academic circles, particularly in the African context (Kuper, 2003). At the same time, this and related notions have been adopted by many minority groups in their struggles for recognition, resources, and rights, yet with varied outcomes.

In September 2007 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Among its most significant assertions are indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination to lands, territories, and natural resources, and to free, prior, and informed consent. Activists and organizations concerned with human and minority rights saw the adoption of the declaration as an important step toward the improvement of the precarious situation of minority groups. Today, seven years later, many peoples are still involved in struggles over citizenship, belonging, and identity.

In this volume, we wish to reassess in this light the current and historic situation of selected minority groups in different parts of Africa. Among them are the prehistoric pastoralist groups in northeastern Chad (Lenssen-Erz), the Sandawe and Hadza in Tanzania (Yatsuka), the Mbororo in Cameroon, and the San in Botswana (Pelican and Maruyama). In Africa, the situation of minority groups or indigenous peoples cannot be understood without factoring in their varied and multi-faceted relationships with neighbouring ethnic groups. The contributions in this volume take into consideration that African peoples do not live in isolation, but coexist with other population groups, and that they are a part of overarching regional and national societies. In some cases, issues may arise from a problematic relationship with the state; in others, they emerge over conflicted relationships with neighbouring groups. The contributions in this volume thus focus on both the contentious and collaborative relations with neighbouring population groups as well as on processes of inclusion and exclusion against the background of national and international politics.

Furthermore, the papers critically engage with the achievements and failures of the indigenous rights movement in Africa. More specifically, they discuss the numerous ways in which discourses of citizenship and indigeneity have been translated locally—or vernacularized in Merry’s (2006) terminology—and have been put into use. As the papers suggest, different groups may pursue quite different

goals, depending on their specific needs and opportunities. These range from property rights in land and natural resources, to cultural recognition, access to development, entitlement to social security, and political self-control. Similarly, the visions of community members, NGOs, and governments concerning the groups' envisaged futures vary considerably. For example, while some international NGOs adhere to the ideal of preserving a 'traditional' lifestyle, many African governments aim at 'modernizing' their citizens (see Hodgson, 2011). Moreover, in some cases the involvement of international players and the attempted "verticalization of conflict" (Wilson, 2007: 355) do not produce the desired results, but may complicate matters even further.

Among the papers in this volume, Lenssen-Erz takes us far back in history to the beginnings of the human occupation of the Sahara. The Ennedi Highlands are famous for their impressive rock paintings and engravings whose artistic expressions demonstrate the coexistence of different pastoralist groups. Yatsuka shows that indigenous identity is closely tied to livelihood practices, and that looking back on a past as hunter-gatherers does not guarantee (self-)recognition as an indigenous people. For example, the Sandawe in Tanzania share linguistic and historical similarities as former hunter-gatherers with the Hadza, who are recognized as an indigenous people. Nonetheless, the Sandawe refrain from claiming an indigenous identity and rather consider themselves part of the 'dominant' society. Pelican and Maruyama engage with the indigenous rights movement in Africa, basing their analysis on the case studies of San hunter-gatherers in Botswana's central Kalahari and Mbororo pastoralists in northwest Cameroon. They compare the different trajectories of the indigenous rights movement in these two countries and suggest findings applicable more generally to Africa.

The papers in this volume emerged from a conference panel at the meeting of the German Africanist Association (VAD) in Cologne in June 2012 that received much positive response, and motivated us to turn it into a publication. The contributions were written by Japanese, German, and Swiss researchers who drew on the analytical and methodological tools of anthropology and archaeology. By bringing together scholars from different disciplinary and geographical backgrounds, we hope, this volume will enliven the discussion on indigeneity, citizenship, and coexistence in Africa, and will contribute new insights relevant to academic and policy circles.

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