Faith-based Segregation of Interments in Joal-Fadiouth

Report of a Dissemination Seminar

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On 13 October 2016, CODESRIA organized a dissemination seminar in Joal-Fadiouth, Senegal to share preliminary results of the research project on 'Faith-based Segregation of Interments' with the community. The project is an individual grant under the Nagel Institute Programme on Religious Innovation and Competition: Their Impacts in Contemporary Africa. The project on the faith-based segregation of interments seeks, at its core, to understand why Muslims and Christians are buried in separate cemeteries in Joal while neighboring Fadiouth has one cemetery where people of all faiths are interred. In exploring this puzzle the study seeks to shed light on questions concerning inter-communal relations and approaches to differences based on religion and origins that are relevant to diverse societies across the African continent and beyond.

The dissemination seminar had the goal of sharing results of ongoing research with the community and putting the work undertaken under the grant at the heart of policy discussions on the management of inter-communal relations in the Commune of Joal-Fadiouth. This is in response to the request of many people in the Commune to access the results of what they considered to be an interesting and relevant study. The mayor of the Commune, Mr. Boucar Diouf, had indicated in the first meeting with the principal investigator that the study would help in informing responses to the fact that all the cemeteries in the commune are almost full.

The dissemination seminar centred on the discussion of a policy brief published by CODESRIA that draws on a 600-person survey, semi-structured interviews, archival study and site visits that had already been undertaken for the study. Titled 'Improving Intercommunal Relations in Joal-Fadiouth: Insights from a Study on the Resting Places of the Dead,' the policy brief was published in both English and French and was supplied to panelists at the event one week before the meeting. It was also distributed to all participants at the meeting and copies were given to others in the community as well.

The meeting was organized as a half-day event with an opening and closing ceremony sandwiching two substantive panels. The first of these panels constituted a short presentation of the study and policy brief, which was followed by commentaries on the document by influential members in the community and an open discussion. It was chaired by Prof. Rosalie Diop, the mentor for the project. The second panel asked a set of community leaders to reflect on the policy steps that the community should take to engage with the policy brief and its recommendations and was chaired by the mayor of the Commune.

The meeting was attended by many high level leaders in Joal-Fadiouth reflecting the seriousness with which the study and document are viewed and the interest of the commune to engage with the brief. Present also were the mentor for the project, Prof. Rosalie Diop and the Executive Secretary of CODESRIA, Dr Ebrima Sall. The interest of the Commune was also seen in the offer of the main meeting room of the Commune for the seminar. The Mayor presided over the opening and closing sessions as well as the panel that discussed policy steps to take in reaction to the policy brief. The Chief Imam of Joal and an imam from Fadiouth, a Catholic sister and leading members of the Catholic lay community, neighborhood delegates, municipal councilors and many citizens of the Commune participated in the meeting. Leaders of youth associations, an association that cares for the cemetery in Fadiouth and many community groups were also present.

The discussion of the document was very lively. There was somepraise for the choice of Joal-Fadiouth as the site of the study, the relevance of the study and the quality of the policy brief. Some commentators also pointed to ways in which the policy brief could be improved. More important was the clash over the portrayal of intercommunal tensions in the document. Some denied that the tensions mentioned in the policy brief

existed in the community and even condemned the study forfabricating tensions where none existed. Others riposted that many of the tensions highlighted were common knowledge discussed in public squares and that the community could not solve its problems by denying them. One participant noted 'We can't say we are of this place and not do what it takes to keep the peace here. We need to have these conversations even if they are sensitive. We should not fear to address these issues.' Some of the issues that formed the subject of heated debate concerned the issue of mixed marriages involving people of different faiths, religious conversions and relations between 'strangers' and 'autochthones.'

The panel that deliberated on policy measures to take in response to the study and the policy brief highlighted the following steps:

- Organizing seminarsto train the youth on tolerance and respect for differences
- Instituting a scholarship so people of the commune can study issues related to intercommunal relations
- Creating a high level committee to discuss the recommendations and steps to take in relation to them
- Organizing public meetings in the community to engender more widespread debate of the recommendations
- Organizing further meetings of community leaders and involving established communal structures to further discuss and deal with recommendations
- Investing in resuscitatingtraditional practices that reinforced social ties like maternal lineages and age-groups
- SupportingM'binBaktou in its work on the cemetery in Fadiouth as recommended by the policy brief

Leaders in the community expressed a wish for CODESRIA, through the project on the faith-based segregation of interments and other programmes, to continue to work with and support the community in moving forward in dealing with the recommendations

The dissemination seminar achieved its main goals and was beneficial on many levels. For the community, the seminar represented a rare opportunity for community leaders across political divides as well as religious leader to sit and discuss important questions concerning intercommunal relations. Many expressed gratitude to CODESRIA for providing the opportunity. For the research project, the discussions at the seminar represented additional data that will influence the works that will be produced. The seminar represented a successful opportunity for CODESRIA and the Nagel Institute to directly connect research to policy and impact policy conversations and deci-sions.

Mayor Boucar Diouf pointed to findings in the policy brief as reinforcing their decision to create two separate cemeteries for Muslims and Christians in Joal. He also noted that in response to the findings in the document, they will cease a search for a new site for a cemetery for Fadiouth and instead support the community in prolonging the life of its cemetery.

The seminar created significant visibility for CODESRIA and the Nagel Institute in the community and beyond with their logos on seminar documents (banner and programme). The Nagel Institute was also prominently mentioned in the policy brief that was published by CODESRIA. The fact that there was press coverage by the local community radio and by national outlets brought the study and its backers to a wider audience beyond Joal-Fadiouth. Communication specialists working with the Commune have indicated an interest in sharing the policy brief with an online audience interested in the Commune in a move that will create even more visibility.

To further concretize the impact of the study on policy, CODESRIA could explore ways of supporting further community steps to deal with the recommendations of the study. This support could be in the form of technical advice on organizing, planning for and moderating forums and financial help (within the budget for the organization of the seminar) with provision oflunch and refreshment for such meetings organized by the community.