
Local Politics and Local-Centre Linkages in Ghana

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Within the last ten years there have been numerous studies of grassroots politics in Africa. The major justification for these studies has been that they would generate new insights concerning local-centre relations in the African states, and that they would counterbalance the prevalent views of state penetration and national integration which had been developed on the basis of centre-focused studies (Barker 1970; Zolberg 1966: 153; Bienen 1967: 136). There has however been a relatively low yield of such conceptual insights; the blame has been put on the analytic sloppiness of local studies, the non-comparative chronological and anthropological frameworks employed, and the inherent difficulty in moving from the specificities of the individual case-study to meaningful middle-level generalizations. (Crook 1977: ch 1; Kitching 1972).

A reading of the literature on local politics and local-centre linkages in Ghana seems initially to confirm this impression. Each study has used a different conceptual framework and has been conducted largely without reference to other studies. Behind the differences in approach and treatment however, one gets the impression that there are important similarities in the way that village and small town politics in, for example, Ahafo, Swedru, Yendi or Offinso have been influenced by national government and politics.¹ Moreover, it seems likely that the various conceptual frameworks employed are not so incompatible as is usually claimed.

My own perceptions of local-centre linkages in Ghana are based on a study of local politics in Kpandu (Volta Region) which was completed in thesis form in 1977. The main purpose here is to state briefly some findings of that study in a way which highlights what are seen to be dominant themes in local-centre linkages in Ghana, and which stresses the comparability of the various local studies. The discussion will be in two sections; first, an outline of the main historical

phases in Kpandu's relations with the centre; and second, a discussion of the conceptualisations which emerged from the Kpandu study and of their relationship to concepts employed in the other studies.

Phases in local-centre linkages

For the period from the mid 1920s to the 1970s, it is possible to see four distinct phases in Kpandu's relations with the centre. The isolation of these four phases may provide a useful framework for looking at local-centre relations elsewhere in Ghana. Clearly, not all the localities studied have experienced the same four phases to the same extent and in the same periods as has Kpandu. Nevertheless, the four-phase framework seems to be sufficiently applicable to other localities to provide a basis for comparison. Although no such comparison is attempted here, I hope to proceed to such a study in the near future.

Prior to the mid-1920s, local politics in Kpandu remained largely unaffected by Kpandu's incorporation into the Gold Coast Colony.² From that time onwards the major influences on local politics became first, the emergence of new socio-economic groups associated with the spread of cocoa and of education; and secondly, the development of new Native Authority institutions by the colonial administration. These changes produced a specific pattern of limited overlap between the arenas of local and of national politics. The incumbent local elites who dominated the Native Authorities were challenged by emergent socio-economic groups which sought to gain advantage in local disputes both by mobilising local factional alliances and also by manipulating the institutions and values associated with the colonial administration and the Native Authorities. The result was the escalation of bi-factional local disputes, focused upon the issue of the authority of chiefs, and pursued primarily through the colonial administrative procedures. In Kpandu factions developed during a series of disputes around two competing core groups: a group of educated youngmen and a group of wealthy uneducated elders. By the late 1940s these factions were attempting to ent stool

¹ The main studies of rural and small town politics in Ghana are Dunn and Robertson, 1973; Kelly, 1974; Owusu, 1970; Brown, 1977; Groom, 1977; Staniland, 1975; Stone, 1974; Salim, 1976; Kwaku, 1976; Callaway, 1970; Anafu, 1973. The recent studies of politics in the larger urban centres, i.e. Accra, Kumasi and Cape Coast, are not discussed here.

² Kpandu was in that part of German Togo which came under British control in 1914 and was subsequently administered as part of the Gold Coast under League of Nations Mandate and later United Nations Trusteeship.

two rival chieftaincy candidates: Gershon Howusu, a young teacher, and Dionisius Nyavor, a senior elder and a wealthy cocoa farmer. In the face of an indecisive colonial administration, both factions gained strength as they manipulated the various appeal procedures associated with the Native Authority system (Brown 1977: section 2. For comparable situations in other localities see Stone 1974; Salim 1976: ch 8; Staniland 1975: ch 6; Dunn and Robertson 1973: 89-93; Owusu 1970: 129-40; Anafu 1973: 31-3; Kwaku 1976: 76-9; Kelly 1974: 15-9, 35-8, 130-3, 226-9; Crook 1973).

Centre penetration, primarily in the form of the Native Authority system, thus had sufficient influence on local politics to exacerbate bifactional disputes, but the extent of the resultant overlap between local politics and centre politics was limited. The Native Authority system proved ineffective both as a manipulatable resource for local politics, and as an avenue for central control of local politics. As a result, the values, institutions and elite composition of local politics were not fundamentally restructured by centre penetration. There were two main reasons for this 'limited overlap'. Firstly, village level politics remained largely beyond the reach of the state institutions which functioned mainly at the District/Native Authority level. Secondly, the colonial administration's concern to appear non-interventionist inhibited its ability to recognise and resolve the basic tensions underlying local factional disputes. The result was that the Native Authorities were controlled by neither set of participants and the two activities, of localist manipulation and of centre control, tended to cancel each other out.

The second phase of local-centre linkage was that of 'high integration'. This developed during the early and mid-1950s when competing local factions sought additional external resources through which to pursue their disputes by allying with one or other of the competing nationalist parties, which, for their part sought to manipulate local factionalism so as to gain mass support in electoral politics. The situation in Kpandu was relatively straightforward. The Nyavor faction allied with the Togoland Congress party, while the Howusu faction allied with the CPP. This particular pattern of alliances developed in part out of the coinciding economic interests of party activists and local faction core groups; the defence of cocoa interests in the case of the Nyavor-Togoland Congress alliance, the concern of educated state functionaries to maintain administrative links with the Gold Coast in the

case of the Howusu-CPP alliance (Brown, 1977: cc. 10-12. Also Crook 1977: cc. 4-6; Dunn and Robertson 1973: 324-34; Owusu 1970: 30-1, 195-213; Staniland 1975: 134-44;; Kelly 1974: section 2).

The arenas of local politics and of national politics overlapped to such an extent that clear distinctions between them disappeared. This integration had two major characteristics. Firstly, effective mutual manipulation occurred; both local factions gained clear benefits in the form of material aid and political support from the parties, and both parties gained significant electoral support. Secondly, integration occurred in the sense of a change in political consciousness, in that participants in local politics came to see the issues of local and national politics as being closely interconnected and in some respects indistinguishable. Involvement in local factional politics became, *pari passu*, involvement in national party politics, and it was the realisation that national political issues were of direct local relevance which lent intensity to party politics at the local level.

In the case of Kpandu the 'high integration' phase of local-centre linkage gave way to a 'crisis' phase in the period between 1956 and 1962. This was the period in which the flow of economic benefits from the centre effectively dried up. Moreover, the CPP's use of state power to defeat the opposition party-faction (the Nyavor faction/Togoland Congress party) involved direct and overt centre interventions in local community politics. Local political and governmental institutions largely ceased to function and local politics was characterised by violence and instability. Centre dominance involved the removal of the incumbent political elite group, i.e. the activists of the Nyavor-Togoland Congress party-faction, and their replacement by the Howusu-CPP activists. The authority of the new local political elite was, however, seriously undermined by the disruption associated with their accession to power, and by their overt reliance on the centre, so that they were seen locally more as agents of disruptive centre control than as representatives of local interests (Brown, 1977: 308-22. Also Kwaku, 1976: 79-86; Crook 1977: ch 7; Dunn and Robertson 1973: 334-45; Owusu 1970: 270-81; Staniland 1975: 162-6).³

From 1962 onwards, Kpandu's relations with the centre were moving into a second 'limited overlap' phase which has lasted into the 1970s. The

³ This crisis phase did not occur to the same extent in the North of Ghana, where the degree of centre penetration was less.

basic characteristics of this phase are first, the growth of disillusionment with involvement in centre politics, based on a perception that the benefits of such involvement have been outweighed by the costs in terms of disruption, taxation, and 'interference' in local politics; second, the reduction by the centre of opportunities for participation in national government and politics; third, a shift away from bi-factional local politics towards a focus on communal unity (both local and ethnic-regional) as a defence against the centre (Brown 1977: ch 13; Brown 1978; Kwaku 1976: 84-5).⁴

Relations between Kpandu and the centre have thus not been characterised by any straightforward linear movement towards national integration or centre domination, nor has there just been continuous adaption within an established dependency situation. Rather there have been several distinct phases in local-centre linkages which are explicable in terms of the changing relationship between three variables: the attempts by the centre to penetrate and control local politics, the attempts by local political activists to manipulate centre resources for localist ends, and the concern of the local community to defend its status, unity, and autonomy against the centre. Changes in the balance between these three factors have produced the four phases in local-centre linkages indicated above.

The conceptualisation of local-centre linkages

The various studies of local politics in Ghana have employed different conceptual frameworks to deal with patterns of local politics and local-centre linkages which are in many cases similar. Although this makes comparison between the localities difficult, it does make it possible to see more clearly how the various concepts used are related to each other. Four major points seem to emerge from comparing the concepts used in the Kpandu study to those employed elsewhere.

1. 'Class' and 'faction' have frequently been used to designate distinct and alternative conceptual models. 'Faction' has been seen as referring to political alliances which cut across socio-economic cleavage lines, while 'class' focuses attention on socio-economic groupings as themselves the prime political units. Local chief-

taincy disputes have tended to be analysed either as factional disputes explicable in purely local terms, or as local manifestations of a wider, national, process of class formation and confrontation (Crook 1977: ch 1 and p. 90; Sandbrook 1972; Tangri 1976).

In the Kpandu case, and apparently elsewhere also, it seems useful to see the formation of local factions as a stage in, and a facet of, class formation (Boissevain 1974: ch 8; Kitching 1972: 285-6). The bi-factional dispute in Kpandu developed out of confrontations between two core groups: wealthy cocoa farmers and traders who had been born at the turn of the century, who either had no education or had received some German education, and who formed the governing elite in Kpandu, versus younger clerks and teachers, who were educated in the 1920s or 1930s and who felt themselves to be excluded from control of Kpandu's affairs. Each of these two relatively distinct socio-economic groups recruited support for its factions by manipulating a wide variety of local rivalries so that there was no clear difference in the socio-economic composition of the resultant factions. Nevertheless, the two factions were clearly perceived by their core groups as vehicles for the group interests of the latter. Within the local arena then, class confrontation took factional form.

The second stage in class formation occurred with the coming together of several local factions, with core groups of similar socio-economic composition, as they each sought to manipulate the same 'external' resource, e.g. the Native Authority institutions, or a political party. The development of classes at the national level thus becomes a function of the process of overlap between the two arenas, and the class composition of e.g. the political parties, is blurred by the association of 'class' core groups with their local faction allies.

2. In centre-focused studies, national integration has frequently been identified with the ability of the centre to penetrate and dominate local politics. The study of local politics in Kpandu implied however that these processes need not be identical and may, in analytic terms, be clearly distinguished. Centre domination meant that the centre was able, when necessary, to determine the elite composition and the institutional framework for politics at the Local Authority, Native Authority, or District level. However, centre domination and national integration remained distinct in two ways. Firstly,

⁴ It is difficult to evaluate the extent of these phenomena in the rest of Ghana because few of the local studies deal with the post-1966 period, apart from the 1969 election. The election studies do indicate a decline in the intensity of grassroots involvement since the 1950s and, except in the North, a shift from the politicisation of factionalism toward the politicisation of local and ethnic communalism (Austin and Luckham 1975).

much of the vitality of the local government institutions arose from their involvement in localist manipulation of, and defence against, the centre, rather than from their role as agencies of centre domination. Secondly, in some cases centre domination of the state institutions led to a reaction against this at the grassroots village level where the state agencies did not reach. Some of the local elite might well become 'integrated' within the state agencies but, as with Kpandu from the early 1960s onwards, such men might thereby forfeit their position as local influentials as they are seen to act increasingly as agents of the centre. In this case local politics becomes increasingly distinct from, and out of reach of, centre penetration.

The 'view from below' is thus that 'national integration' involves the interweaving of local and national politics such that mutual manipulation occurs. When the centre proves not to be manipulatable to localist advantage, then centre domination might well lead to a growth of concern to defend local autonomy which emerges either as an apathetic response to participation in centre politics, as the virtual boycotting of local state agencies (e.g. the retreat from involvement in local councils) or as the politicisation of communalism.

3. C. S. Whitaker has argued that politically centralised and autocratic communities tend to have a distinct manipulative response to centre penetration which serves to minimise the disruptive impact of such penetration (Whitaker 1967: 216-7). The studies of local politics in Ghana would seem to suggest that communities of widely different political structures are able to respond in a manipulative way, e.g. through the development of factions, the shift of local influence between competing elites, or the pragmatic use of alternative linkage structures. Moreover, in Kpandu and apparently elsewhere also, the manipulatory response to centre penetration can be seen to have been conducive to disruption of local politics in particular ways, even though it might have inhibited effective centre penetration on the lines intended by the centre. In the case of Kpandu, this disruptive aspect of the manipulative response was seen in terms of the escalation of bi-factional rivalries to the point where they threatened communal unity. In the case of Yendi, Staniland analysed similar phenomena in terms of the "confusion, ambiguities and inconsistencies" generated in the intermixing of traditional and modern values (Staniland 1975: 132). In the case of Ahafo, Dunn and Robertson

focused on the problems of changing communal identities which arose during localist manipulative activities (Dunn and Robertson 1973: 223). In each case 'disruption' and manipulation are seen as being inherently related, and not as alternative outcomes of centre penetration.

This point is closely related to the problem of how to characterise local level factionalism: as evidence or cause of instability, or as a stabilising and integrative factor in local politics. The two viewpoints are not in fact incompatible (Barrows 1974: 294-5). While bi-factional cleavages have provided the major basis for historical continuity in the local politics of, for example, Kpandu, Yendi, or Ahafo, the factions have at the same time acted as filters through which the issues and values of centre politics have been re-interpreted in terms compatible with localist values. They have thus provided a basis for that pragmatic local manipulation of centre politics which ensures that local-centre linkages remain, from the viewpoint of the centre, unpredictable and unstable.

4. Finally, it seems possible, in the case of Kpandu, to analyse changes in local-centre linkages in terms of the changing role of those who acted as intermediaries between Kpandu and the centre. Broadly, those with local political influence were recruited by the centre to man the local-level state institutions. These men then attempted to combine their role as local influentials and representatives of local interests with the role of agents of centre penetration implied in their involvement in the state institutions. Only in specific circumstances (notably those of 'high integration' and mutual manipulation) were the two roles in fact compatible. In the other phases of local-centre linkage the intermediaries tended either to emerge as local agents of centre control, identifying more with the centre than with the locality and thus facing increasing challenges to their local political influence; or to work outside the institutions of state penetration, retaining local political influence by using their individual wealth and contacts to pursue local community interests. Such a 'role-conflict' approach does not, therefore, necessarily imply any acceptance of the 'tradition-modernity' duality model (Cliffe *et al* 1977: 321-4). The distinction between the two roles is important because it throws doubt on the utility of terms like 'elite' and 'broker' which assert the compatibility of the roles, and thus deflect attention from important tensions in local-centre linkages. Moreover, a focus on the

interaction between the roles of 'local representative' and 'centre agent' provides a basis for relating the functioning of state institutions to the behaviour of local political activists and thus clarifies the relationship between those who use the 'broker model' and those who stress the institutional linkages between centre and locality (Staniland 1975: 171-2; Crook 1977: ch 1).

The problem for students of local politics is that the complexities and peculiarities of politics in different local communities serve to hide many of the rules which structure local-centre linkages, and yet it is only through such local studies that these rules may be isolated. The temptation is either to take refuge in describing the picturesque complexities of a 'unique' locality, or to assert boldly the typicality of one locality for the nation as a whole. In the end however, it is necessary, perhaps in a piecemeal way, to try to extrapolate the local-centre linkages from the minutiae of local politics by relating various local studies to each other. This brief paper represents a basis for moving in this direction.

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