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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Pal Ahulwalia, Abebe Zegeye, eds. *African Identities: Contemporary Political and Social Challenges.* Aldershot, Hants, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002. xiv + 175 pp. $99.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7546-1947-5.

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Published on H-SAfrica (January, 2006)

The challenging aim of this edited volume is to understand "African identities" in the context of the post-1990 wave of democratization and the impossible-to-ignore impact of what is often labeled globalization. The book consists of eleven chapters, many of which were presented at the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific Conference in 2000; a few chapters were added to make the book more comprehensive. The topics include a diverse range of interests and themes drawn from many countries and regions. Consequently, the editors were confronted by the obvious challenge to develop an overall conceptual framework to which all the chapters could systematically contribute. They chose to organize the papers around five themes: boundaries of state; race, identity and representation; women and armed struggle; contemporary politics and processes of democratization; and cooperatives and labor practices.

The importance of "the idea of borders, boundaries and frontiers" is highlighted. A central object of the book is that the "border needs to take on a poignant significance as a symbol for understanding the complexities and ambivalences of contemporary African culture" (p. ix). By relying on the notion of borders and their impact on identities, the volume intends to explore and problematize borders in different settings, emphasize the fluidity of borders and identities, demonstrate how identities often challenge colonial markers, and challenge the taken-for-granted notion of borders in the evolution of African Studies as a discipline. The notion of borders, one of the unforgettable legacies of colonialism, fundamentally contributed to creating and demarcating African identities. The continent was thus permanently marked in particular and often puzzling ways. The emergence of national states in turn created the political, material and symbolic terrain upon which African citizens often derived, challenged, and contested sub-national identities. Even though the juridical meaning of borders may have less meaning for local populations, through their functioning in the political and economic battles of elites, these borders have been the basis of endless conflicts, causing untold suffering to Africa's poor

The opening chapter by Bill Ashcroft locates itself within the postcolonial paradigm. It examines the function and implications of "borders" in modernist discourses about Africa–those within the dominant European representation of Africa and counter discourses, often associated with African intellectual responses to the European perspective. Even though imposed by and on behalf of Europe's colonial interests, Ashcroft suggests that it is impossible to ignore and abandon the existence of national boundaries. This acceptance requires a necessary shift of focus, one that centers itself on how the

African masses deal with borders in everyday life. Borders, he points out, can be "inhabited" in a different, yet transformative way that responds to and appropriates and negotiates some aspects of dominant discourses yet confirms local identity. Ashcroft's "solution" to the problem of borders by way of the masses engaged in a massive movement of everyday deconstruction of modernity's borders leaves the reader both with epistemological hope and a sense of empirical dissatisfaction: hope in that it highlights the limits of dominant discourses in systematically organizing everyday practices, but also dissatisfaction at the numerous empirical life-and-death conflicts that pervade Africa's poor and marginalized where local identity issues are the cause and consequence of widespread fear and death.

The following three chapters make an explicit attempt to problematize ethnic identity. Drawing on his deeper insights into the politics of classification in nineteenth-century Java, Roger Knight compares the classification of European settlers in Java and the Cape. Knight highlights the fluid, less rigid classification of Europeans who settled in Java, where Dutch settlers often married locals and the identities of those considered "mixed" were never an issue for acceptance into the European category. This was less so the case in the Cape. Here identification as European was more rigidly defined and policed, creating the separate and discriminated group of Coloureds in the colonial classificatory system. Knight identifies the similarities and differences between his case studies but falls short of offering an explanation for the significant difference in classifications for what constitutes European identity in the colonial order.

In her chapter on a largely displaced and marginalized Khoisan community in the Northern Cape, Elizabeth Rankin focuses on the production of art by some members of this community. She analyzes these works to highlight the contradictory determinants facing this community in formulating an identity discourse that not only realizes recognition in the politics of identity in post-Apartheid society, but provides access to the material benefits that the community desperately requires. In a different chapter focusing on the role of women in the armed struggle in Zimbabwe and South Africa, Tanya Lyons and Mark Israel critically respond to the prevailing nationalist representations of women in these struggles. In contrast to the representation of women in heroic roles, they argue that women's roles were more complex and contradictory. Women were often the victims of sexual abuse and patriarchal prejudices and were involved in mainly supportive roles rather than in direct combat.

Unlike the previous chapters which admit to a more explicit attentiveness to the complexities surrounding the construction of identity and which highlight the contested nature of ethnic identity in different political and historical contexts, the next few chapters focus more on political processes associated with democratization and globalization in specific country studies. Here the complexities of identity construction are subordinated to the main theme of political conflict and/or democratization. David Dorward draws attention to the role of the illicit diamond industry, weak political leadership, and the flimsy institutional political culture to account for the general decline of orderly life in Sierra Leone. This largely descriptive account traces the political history of Sierra Leone from independence to the period of open civil war. The chapters on Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda examine the theme of multi-party democracy and elections since the decline of single-party rule. These chapters highlight the important relationship between democratic competition and ethnic politics. They draw our attention to the inability of the political system to resolve ethnic tensions within the national polity; in the cases of Kenya and Tanzania ethnic conflict increased with the advent of competitive elections.

The role of elites in democratization is taken up by S. C. Saxena. In his chapter on democratic consolidation in third wave African democracies, he argues that the "democratic elections" held in Ghana, Zambia, Gambia, Zimbabwe and Niger reveal that incumbent African elites are not committed to establishing genuine democratic societies. He appeals to international actors–Western governments and global financial institutions–to maintain pressure on African elites until democratic institutions and culture are fully established and consolidated.

The last two chapters focus on cooperatives and labor practices in Zimbabwe and South Africa respectively. Paul Nursey-Bray's chapter traces the evolution of cooperatives in Zimbabwe and offers a critical perspective towards the market-driven policies proposed by international actors, such as the World Bank and the IMF. Patrick McAllister provides an ethnological study of the relationship between beer-drinking parties and labor practices in an Eastern Cape district. McAllister suggests that beer drinking serves as an expression of communal social relations. His discussion of the rituals surrounding beer drinking suggests in an oblique manner how particular practices assist in constituting particular local identities.

This book raises many interesting themes and ques-

tions about identity politics in Africa. I have three minor criticisms. The first is that the overarching theme of the significance of borders that the editors highlight at the beginning to help understand the construction of identities in Africa, is rarely picked up in the chapters that follow. In some chapters it is implicit, but in most it is simply ignored. The second is that in some key areas the chapters contradict each other. Ethnicity is sometimes problematized as a complex unfolding of various political contestations. At other times, such as the chapters on Kenya and Sierra Leone, ethnic identity is treated as self-evident and stable. Saxena for example, adopts an uncritical stance towards global financial institutions whereas the chapters by Ahluwalia, Zegeye and Nursey-Bray assume a critical position towards globalization and oppose the key international actors supportive of unrestrained market forces on African polities. Finally, if the notion of borders does not run through the manuscript, it is difficult to find any other central idea or theme that holds all the diverse country studies and their respective thematic concerns together. However, this really points to the challenge and difficulty of making sense of a topic as complex as African identities.