

BOOK REVIEW

Manuel Castells and Bernard Lategan. eds. *National Identity and State Formation in Africa*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021. v + 217 pp. Notes. References. Index. \$ 25.09. Paper. ISBN: 9781509545612.

In this well-conceived and well-written volume edited by Manuel Castells and Bernard Lategan with contributions from ten other authors, the seasoned scholars argue that paradoxes resulting from the interface between globalization and identity persist as strong forces continually reshaping the world, primarily on the African continent. *National Identity and State Formation in Africa* is the product of a three-year research effort of the Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS) under the distinguished leadership of Castells and Lategan. According to the editors, as the overwhelming factors of economy, technology, and geopolitics act on “the specificity of every human community, to merge them in a global culture that ultimately rationalizes the domination of certain values, multinational economic actors, and political institutions in an interconnecting network of locals and global hierarchies” (1), the time-honored cultural identities that people depend on to make life meaningful are equally pertinent. Caught in the throes of those global dynamics and largely deprived of their abilities to exercise control, communities across the continent “retreat into their own values, asserting their identity and using whatever means available to them to claim their autonomy” (1). These reactions enable people to make their lives worthwhile within the prevailing complex global and local interconnections.

Identity as a paradigm is rife with conflicts (religious, national, territorial, racial, ethnic, age, gender, sexuality, and ideological, among others), yet according to nearly all the authors who discuss this theme, “failure to recognize the essential role of identity in restructuring social life creates a key epistemological obstacle to understanding our world” (1). In these highly intellectual discussions, national identities—the interrelated cultural attributes that provide larger groups of people whose experiences cut across time and space with meaning and self-recognition—remain quite topical in this book. The core foundations of states, with all their trappings of power, are based on pre-existing people groups. Consequently, the idea of the nation-state produces the citizenship identity, and between the nation and state

phenomenon is the intermediary construct of federalism. It is this, one of the authors argues, that the African continent needs more of, and not less, since it is “understood as a heuristic and pragmatic device for managing diversity and holding fragile states together” (6). However, given the competing and often conflicting issues involved in these concepts, readers are encouraged to engage them with their social scientist and philosopher minds.

In all these engaging deliberations, the authors focus primarily on the African continent, a complex context where the equally complex diversity and history of different forms of power and governance structures spanning pre-colonial, colonial, as well as post-colonial phases, in varying degrees have created complex outcomes in legacies and attitudes “which ... influence contemporary developments (that) require long *durée* perspective to make sense of” (5). This complexity notwithstanding, there exist common leveling forces shaping the vivacious interplay between powerful global networks and unrelenting local responses in subtler ways than can be readily envisaged.

National Identity and State Formation in Africa boasts a compelling composition; Chapter 1, which the editors co-authored, serves as an introduction, and Chapter 2, Nyamnjoh’s contribution, provides a conceptual framework for the remaining chapters, skillfully divided into two parts. The first part, including Chapters 3 through 6, written by Osaghae, Anyangwe, Zewde, and Wassara, respectively, focuses on conventional strategies as well as corresponding responses to aspirations of national identities along the lines of federalism, secession, or accommodations within a unitary state for countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. The second part, Chapters 7 through 10, authored by Zyl-Hermann, the Grundlingsh, Sithole, and de Haas, provides a refreshingly contrasting analytical perspective that focuses on emerging expressions of identities and revolutionary strategies within South Africa to provide an enhanced comparative context for the book. The concluding Chapter, 11, which Lategan solely composed, ties everything neatly together with its metaphysical and normative analysis, especially as the book suggests that the existing concepts of state and identity need critical reexamination and reformulation.

National Identity and State Formation in Africa makes an enduring contribution to the larger issue of governance, as it also expands the equally larger field of African Studies with its focus on the impact of widespread global forces as people on the continent articulate their self-perceptions in correlation to sovereignty. In light of these stimulating discussions, the book is a product of rigorous research that would serve the interests of students and scholars across numerous disciplines.

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