

Book Review

From Divided Pasts to Cohesive Futures: Reflections on Africa

Hiroyuki Hino, Arnim Langer, John Lonsdale, and Frances Stewart (Eds.).

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From Divided Pasts to Cohesive Futures: Reflections on Africa is an edited book that advances the argument that our today's world is unable to maintain the cohesion of its multi-ethnic societies due to the historical inequalities and social divisions. Anchoring on the relationships among the three main elements (identity, equity, and trust, p. 3) that make up a social triangle framework, the book optimistically promotes the position that the world can move forward to a cohesive society where diversity is a source of social enrichment and growth rather than a cause for internal divisions, conflicts, and instabilities. Based on the research findings from some Sub-Saharan African countries, the book has shown where Africa was, where it stands now, and how it can move forward, just to help us learn from the successes and failures of Africa in building a cohesive society. To this end, the book examines the root causes of Sub-Africa's internal divisions and outlines future prospects and indispensable elements that are important for building better social cohesion (p. 1).

The book is divided into three major parts: *Social Cohesion in Africa: Case Studies of Past and Present, Policies and Institutions for Social Cohesion, and Conclusions and Policy Recommendations*. There are chapters under each part. The first part comprises five chapters which can theoretically be categorized under

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the broader theme of ethnicity and social cohesion in Africa while the second part deals with the importance of building institutions and policies that help to build cohesive African societies. The last part consists of useful ingredients that are useful to foster cohesive African societies.

Based on the theoretical foundation that ethnicity is a universal identifying human characteristic, Chapter one takes Kenya as a case to show how ethnicity shapes the competition for equalities in regional development. The chapter outlines the four ages of ethnicity-the age of moral economy, the age of colonial conquest, the age of ethnic competition, and the current age of full access to state power (p. 21-22). While the first age is labeled as ecological ethnicity which was egalitarian in nature, the second was the period in which colonial rule fostered ethnic competition and inequalities between ethnic regions under the privileged white settlers (p. 21) who enhanced ethnic self-awareness and helped some ethnic groups to have a stronger and intimidating power over others. The third age was the Mau Mau age in which ethnic combativeness was marked with significant ethnic and regional inequalities among the Kikuyu, Luo, and Luhya, to mention a few. Kenya's fourth age of ethnicity is what the authors call 'Political Tribalism', in which Kenyans were divided between ethnic-based political parties to demand access to state power (p. 45).

Chapter two, *Better Elections-More Deaths: Nigeria*, deals with the deadly violence during the 2011 elections in Nigeria. The author reflects on how Nigerian politicians' self-centered ambition and the far-reaching inequalities emanated from societal division could cause the death of several hundred citizens during that relatively commended election for its fairness. As discussed in the chapter, Nigerian politicians instrumentalised ethnic divisions particularly between the North and the South to mobilise support during the election. Although Jonathan Goodluck's project of abandoning zoning politics was used as an institutional mechanism for political power sharing to address inequality questions, the decision further fueled the violence. The chapter concludes that, during elections, authorities should take maximum care not to be a source of human fatalities while abandoning the existing ethnic-based rules.

In contrast to the underlying arguments in the first two chapters, chapter three presents an account of Tanzania's success story regarding its practice to build a cohesive society through a historical transformation of the localised and ethnic-based mechanisms to trust based networks to develop a national framework that could help to resolve conflicts at all levels. Here, the book contends that enhancement of the local level social norms and trust to the making of national frameworks helped Tanzania to transform from its divided past to a cohesive future

thereby building shared national identity. The chapter argues this historical transformation in the country's nation building process put Tanzania an exception to the patterns of violence and conflicts in many Sub-Saharan African countries. Thus, from the case in Tanzania, we can see that genuine political engagement and policies that aim at effectively addressing inequality in all spheres can address identity questions particularly that of ethnicity and thereby minimise conflicts to protect the nation from divisions.

Chapter four presents the whole picture of the past, present, and the future of the post-apartheid South African society. The chapter argues that the ethnic and race-based inequalities deep-rooted in history, social structure, and geography of the country became less visible during the early years of post-apartheid period though it was reversed as a result of the ascendancy of inequalities between and within ethnic and racial groups in the same period. This was evidenced by the empirical data generated based on income inequalities and individual life-satisfaction benchmarks which were used to identify social groups' "inequality hot spots" (p. 155) in South Africa. Finally, alternatives such as poverty reduction, promoting a common citizenry, and building a national identity were put forward to cultivate a more cohesive society in South Africa.

The last chapter in the first part of the book historicises the relationship between ethnicity, development, and social cohesion in modern African history and in the contemporary global contexts. Here, ethnicity is perceived as a historically constructed identity which is changeable in relation to the political economy of modern states where both the economy and politics are affected by ethnicity. Ethnicity and ethnic relations are characterised by cleavages which are causes for intra-and inter-ethnic competitions over resources which in turn create unceasing exclusionary ethnic cohesion and political violence in Africa. Therefore, the relationship among ethnicity, development, and social cohesion in Africa should be examined within the contemporary global context which is characterised by migration, corruption, and diminishing public trust in the states' capacity to deliver to the expectations of African societies.

Chapter six, under the second part-*Policies and Institutions for Social Cohesion*-of the book, explores policy options for ensuring growth and equity in order to redress the existing vertical (among individuals) and horizontal (among groups) inequalities in African societies. The chapter argues that vertical inequality limits human resources while horizontal inequality may lead to violent conflict which finally barricades development which is often explained in terms of better social services, income redistribution through employment, and public expenditure. To this end, experiences are drawn from Ghana, Peru, Malaysia, and

Northern Ireland to show how politically supported policies and institutions are successful (p. 216) to attain both vertical and horizontal equality which is a foundation for fostering social cohesion.

Chapter seven examines the importance of vertical and horizontal decentralisation, for equity and stability in multi-ethnic states such as Kenya. Here, vertical decentralisation, is perceived as a process where power is handed down from the central government to local authorities while, in horizontal decentralisation, central decision-making powers are divided among different ministries and different wings of government (p. 223). The cases of Kenya, Uganda and Indonesia are good examples to show how both forms of decentralisation, have worked well to create cohesive societies. However, the success of one form of decentralisation, depends on the success of the other form to urge decision makers to deliver their services with accountability.

Chapter eight presents how land reforms in Africa were associated with ethnicity and ethnic mobilisation (p. 247). The chapter questions whether the reforms have addressed the challenges in inclusive development and whether they helped to resolve or exacerbate ethnic conflicts. Thus, some structural relations that may produce ethnic conflicts over land were examined with a historical lens to show how history impacts the contemporary land reforms. Then, the chapter reviewed dangers that may emerge as a result of land reforms such as ethnic political mobilisation and capital accumulation (p. 269) which can be potential source of conflict. Yet, as competition over political power revolves around ethnic mobilisation, it is likely that ethnicity influences land allocation and resource accumulation to the extent of facilitating land reallocation to the members of the winning ethnic group in political competitions. In this connection, the case in Kenya shows how state administration of land has facilitated private accumulation of land. Finally, it is argued that Africa's land reform question involves some structural polarisations that have a bearing on land related ethnic conflicts. These polarisations include the dichotomy between the customary and statutory tenure since the colonial period, the tension between migrants from land-hunger to land-rich areas which could result in displacement and land commodification, and the social differentiation that may arise from the contradictions between the customary tenure system and the new land commodification approaches.

Chapter nine presents the impact of ethnic divisions on the educational attainment of Kenya where officials, during their terms of office, have worked in favour of their co-ethnics in the allocation of resources for education. The chapter exposes the presence of favouritism in government decisions and how this fuels anger among ethnic groups during national elections. Here, a comprehensive

solution was recommended to take away education from ethnic politics. This can be done by devolution to limit executive power over the distribution of resources for public schools and/or by enhancing the engagement of the private sector in education. Along the line in Chapter nine, Chapter ten presents how improving the education system fosters social cohesion in multi-ethnic countries. This chapter argues that an education system that enables citizens to learn from different groups through equal access to education strengthens social cohesion, and can change the “rules of the game” in the democratisation processes. The chapter recommends the value of exercising multiculturalism, citizenry, and peace education as the three important elements of education that contribute for social cohesion. The value of these elements was analysed by taking the case of post-conflict Côte d’Ivoire and that of the ethnically divided society of Kenya. The authors argue that, if not carefully addressed, the impact of ethnic favouritism might go beyond the education sector to reinforce the already boiling horizontal inequalities. Understanding these challenges would help Africa to build a cohesive society because it can abate biases that are observed starting from the design of education policies and resource allocation to the inter-ethnic hatred and negative attitudes among policy implementers, school teachers (p. 336) and students.

Chapter eleven, somewhat different from the preceding chapters, dwells on urban space and the related contestations. It explores how people’s connectedness to Cape Town was explained in terms of the city’s land restitution and memory of its historic values in the due process of the implementation of urban development projects. Some of the projects include the development of real estates and urban renewal in a part of the city called District Six which has been considered as a cultural centre but affected by the development initiatives. Yet, the development initiatives were contested by historic memories which were connected with the post-apartheid period. Thus, it is suggested that urban reconstruction must be based on citizens’ memory of their past social experiences (p. 348) if we want to create a cohesive society. Based on the experiences from multiethnic countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, and South Africa, chapter twelve deals with ethnicity and the politics of African states. The impact of ethnicity on politics was presented by examining the nature of ethnic structure, inequalities between ethnic groups, historical patterns of power institutionalisation, and the culture of politics in those multi-ethnic countries (p. 379). So, the chapter suggests the importance of undertaking institutional reform, if we wish to realise political inclusiveness in multiethnic states. Finally the chapter argues that, whether formal or informal, the goal of redesigning institutional rules should be to achieve institutional and

political ends; that is, realising inclusive politics and harmonious inter-ethnic relations so as to create cohesive African societies in the future.

Chapter thirteen and Chapter fourteen contain much of the editors' ambition in building cohesive African societies because they believed that the social, political, institutional and demographic potentials in the continent would suppress the negative energy of past and present ethnic allegiances. Although it is the center of all the discussions in this book, I cannot claim that ethnicity is perceived as a main cause for African societies' divisions. If that intention is there at all in the book, I think that should be re-examined by both African and non-African scholars because, as Robert Bates (2000, p. 134) puts, 'ethnicity may not provide a sufficient condition for political violence though there are conditions under which it can be dangerous'. Of course, the editors seem well aware that there is no best way to harness ethnicity in every aspect of African development as there are many alternatives by which African societies should identify their own potentials to redesign their institutions and policies for their own development initiatives.

The book presents well thought arguments based on historical records and empirical data generated from some Sub-Saharan African countries. It is true that ethnic division is not unique to Africa but the problem is that the way others create the image of Africa, and the way we ourselves contribute to this distorted image of the continent may prolong the time it takes to reach at the level where we can see cohesive African societies. The stereotype about African past and present that was inscribed by non-African scholars should be deconstructed to build a cohesive African society. From Africans' stand, we should challenge the existing mixture of essentialism and instrumentality of ethnicity that may cause vertical and horizontal inequalities. To attain what is envisaged in this book, therefore, there are some major theoretical departures we should consider. First, we have to identify African potentials to build institutions that can foster democracy from below. Second, it is equally important for African scholars to take the responsibility to persuade scholars and the media from the West to accept that Africa has the capacity to identify its potentials to deconstruct the African pasts while constructing new approaches to build a cohesive future society.

As a final remark, I should share Francis Deng (1997) opinion that today's Africa still stands between the struggle for reconstructing its indigenous values and pursuing the logic of universalizing modernity through European education. But, despite all what has been said in this book, we should be cautious that labeling ethnicity as a threat to the cohesion of African societies may be a self-defeating move.

References

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