



Harvey Glickman, ed. *Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa*. Atlanta, Ga.: African Studies Association Press, 1995. iii + 484 pp. \$29.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-918456-74-8.

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Democracy and Ethnicity

In the last five years a tidal wave of democratization has swept over Africa (and other parts of the world), in what some would call Africa's second great struggle for independence, a contest to be free of years of authoritarian rule at the hands of presidents-for-life, military dictatorships or so-called democratic one-party states. The end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the rise of democratic states in Eastern Europe set the scene for this wave, but an undercurrent of discontent within Africa, propelled by a generation of drought, famine, civil war, and economic stagnation, added momentum. Once again, "the winds of change" are blowing across the continent.

In the context of these changes, Harvey Glickman and the contributors to this volume seek to analyze why democracy failed to take hold in the past, and what new approaches, restructuring, and fine-tuning might be needed this time to insure its success. Underlying these issues is a concern about ethnic conflict. As societies liberalize, as freedoms of association and speech are once again permitted, the prospect of ethnic tension seems likely to be unleashed. What then is the prospect for democracy's success in light of this unleashing?

In most minds this concern is made real by recent images from Liberia, Rwanda, and Somalia, situations simplistically characterized in the Western press as barbarous ethnic wars or primordial tribal conflict. Many come away numbed by the extent of the violence, left deeply pessimistic about Africa's future, possessed of some sense, although not totally convinced, that a return to the authoritarian past where ethnic competition was

"suppressed" might be best for all concerned. Yet Glickman and his contributors do not share in this pessimism.

Democracy certainly has a long way to go before it becomes firmly rooted in African soil, and there are absolutely no guarantees, but these authors are cautiously hopeful, and bring a refreshing, hard-nosed, and realistic approach to analyzing the situation. In their minds ethnicity is neither primordial in its existence (thus locked unchangingly in time and space) nor inevitable in its demise (as Marxists would predict). Instead, ethnicity is an existing and future reality and as such must be dealt with politically. Politics is about having a voice in the decision-making which determines in part how resources in a society are to be distributed. Ethnic units are interest groups and thus in terms of political organization and mobilization, it makes as much sense to appeal to people on the basis of their ethnicity as on the basis of class, ideology, age, or anything else.

The appeal to ethnicity can of course be abused, and has been, by political leaders, but such appeal is natural and not necessarily negative. Evidence is that, even in campaigns where ethnic mobilization is not a hot issue, local electorates tend to vote for "one of their own" (someone from their own ethnic group or locality) anyway. If ethnicity thus is a "given" in the political arena, and is potentially explosive, then the approach should be to "manage" it, rather than seeking to deny or eliminate it. Africa's past authoritarian regimes mastered this technique as a tool of repression. The objective then is to determine how ethnicity as a political factor can be managed, but within democratic constraints.

Glickman's contributors present an interesting array of case studies: South Africa (T.V. Maphai), Zimbabwe (M. Sithole), Kenya (G. Muigai), Somalia (H.M. Hussein), Cameroon and Gabon (M. Azvedo), Tanzania (H. Glickman), Nigeria (V. Nmoma), and Zaire (J.F. Clark). Glickman does not fully explain why the case studies included in his work were chosen. But they are broadly representative and certainly promote the book's stated purpose, although there are no case studies from Muslim North Africa.

In addition, W.S. Clarke contributes a piece on the national conference phenomenon and its relation to managing ethnic conflict, focusing on Benin, Niger, Congo-Brazzaville, and Gabon. Shaheen Mozaffar writes a chapter on the institutional logic of ethnic politics, while Glickman himself is responsible for both the introductory and concluding chapters. Glickman and Mozaffar have provided intelligent think-pieces which admirably lay out the issues, review the relevant literature, and then set the agenda for the work as a whole.

What emerges from the case studies is an impressive demonstration of Africa's energetic and often courageous struggle to adopt and adapt Western-style democracy to its own unique political environment. The laboratory that is Africa today reveals a wide variety of ongoing experiments, not all of which will succeed. Yet we in the West should not lose sight of the fact that democratization is an evolutionary process (as evidenced in U.S. history, and currently in Asia), and solutions to the problems may not be immediately apparent. The contributors' underlying optimism stems from the democratic commitment that clearly exists and from the persistence of the effort to find the right mix of institutions and mechanisms (old or new) to engender democracy's success. The authors hint that in rare instances no workable solution may be found within Africa's currently existing nation-states, and that in time dissolution or territorial reconfiguring of some states may need to take place.

Glickman and his contributors suggest several possible ways to manage ethnic conflict and to achieve democracy: co-vice presidents to prevent major ethnic groups from being locked out of government; term limits with effective enforcement mechanisms to discourage life-time

presidencies; zoning and rotation of offices among members of different ethnic groups; an expanded privatization of parastatals so as to diminish government control over the economy and to provide more opportunity for success and influence outside government; proportional representation; consociationism. All have their merits, but are not applicable to every situation. For any of these to be implemented, major changes in a nation's constitution, institutions, and electoral processes likely would be necessary. Again, there is no guarantee that this could be successfully achieved.

Glickman certainly understands that obstacles other than ethnicity stand in the way of democratization in Africa: weak and underdeveloped economies, traditions of military interventionism, cheap and easy access to small arms in the post-Cold War era, widespread and growing acceptance of graft and other forms of corruption, the potential for class conflict. Add to this list the egos and thirst for power of individual politicians. These issues are not discussed in any concerted fashion in the various case studies, yet this is not a real fault, since Glickman sets a well-delineated and precise agenda for his contributors to work within. To broaden the work's focus would only lengthen the discourse and obscure its particular purpose.

For one willing to "wade" through four hundred pages of the discussion, the time is well spent. There is much for the academic to mull over here. The issues are important ones for those of us who try to explain and/or translate Africa to an American audience. African generalists and the public at large will gain greater insight into the "problems" of ethnicity and democratization in Africa even if they peruse only a few chapters selectively. Beyond the important theoretical issues, this work delivers a sense of solid struggle and of cautious optimism; its efforts to overcome traditional Western biases about Africa in its discussion of both ethnicity and democratization make this a work that will have wide accessibility and readership.

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