Toyin Falola and Emmanuel Mbah (eds.). 2023. *Negotiating Identities in Contemporary Africa: Gender, Religion, and Ethno-Cultural Identities*. New York: Lexington Books. 274 pp.

African identity remains a pressing question, as captured in *Negotiating Identities in Contemporary Africa*, where the editors define identity as "who we are as individuals and in groups" (p. ix). The book critically examines how colonial restructuring disrupted African ethnic and cultural identities, raising questions about what modern African identity truly means. Structured around key themes of gender and ethnic/cultural identity, it explores gender issues (Chapters 1–8), boundaries and nationalism (Chapters 9–11), and transnational African identities (Chapters 12–13). A significant number of essays in the book engage with gender topics, which is, indeed, crucial in shaping the historical and cultural understanding of African identity.

Negotiating Identities in Contemporary Africa's strength lies in how it introduces gender discussions in Africa beginning with Chapter One, Namulundah Florence's *"Sowing in the Wind."* The chapter discusses girls' education in Kenya, framing it as the genesis of gender identity struggles, highlighting the underrepresentation of girls in STEM fields and how societal values—especially "marriage and family expectations" (p. 16)—hinder female education. Similarly, *"To Have or Not to Have"* (Chapter 3) powerfully examines what Namulundah calls "motherhood labels" and the "stigma of childlessness" (p. 41), revealing how African societies perceive childless women as outcasts, even labelling them as *"witches who eat up their own children"* (p. 42). Generally, the book exposes deeply entrenched gendered beliefs, making it stand out in African gender studies. It does not merely document oppression, but forces readers to question norms, particularly how *"motherhood symbolizes femininity"* (p. 42) and dictates a woman's worth.

Furthermore, what struck this reviewer most about the book is how it explores the dual roles of women in African history—both as overlooked figures in war narratives and as active participants in terrorism. Mickie Mwanzia Koster's analysis of Mau Mau (Chapter 5) reveals how women, despite being combatants and spies, were largely silenced, enduring immense psychological and sexual trauma in what she calls the "ritual space" and/or heroism of female black bodies (p. 95). On the other hand, Femi Adegbulu's study of Boko Haram female suicide bombers (Chapter 7) presents a stark contrast, showing how women can also be collaborators in extremist violence. This contrast is powerful—it forces us to question how women navigate their roles in war, nationalism, and terrorism and how society perceives them in each context. Chapters 4, 6, and 8 expose gender inequalities in both traditional and modern African societies. Despite its depth in addressing gender issues, however, the book noticeably omits discussions on LGBTQ+ identities within African contexts. This omission limits the scope of gender discourse, as contemporary gender studies increasingly incorporate non-binary perspectives. A chapter on LGBTQ+ experiences would have enriched the book's analysis of gender inequality in Africa.

The book moves beyond gender to explore identity both within Africa and in the diaspora. In fact, the authors collectively examine how colonialism has shaped national identities, as seen in Steve Ajayi's exploration of Nigeria's fragmented nation-state (Chapter 9)) and Victor Ntui Atom's analysis of territorial-based identity conflicts at the Cameroon-Nigeria border (Chapter

10). These chapters highlight how Africans within the continent struggle with imposed national boundaries and ethnic tensions. Meanwhile, the diaspora narrative reveals a different but equally complex reality. Ajibola Abdulrahman (Chapter 12) questions Africa's inconsistent engagement with Pan-Africanism, while Pradeep Mallik (Chapter 13) provides a rare account of the Sidis in India—Africans who have integrated into South Asian culture yet retain traces of their African cultures and identities. With migration reshaping identity, the book leaves one questioning: can African identity ever be singular?

Indeed, the book is a powerful call to interrogate African identity—what it was, what it has become, and what needs to be reclaimed. While the book thoroughly examines ethnicity, gender, and national identity, its engagement with religious identity feels limited. The editors acknowledge this, with Chapter 7 providing the most extensive discussion. Given religion's deep influence on African identity—shaping politics, gender roles, and even cultural expression—it would have been enriching to see more essays analyze Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religions, and Judaism. For instance, in Nigeria, gender exclusion in politics (Chapter 2) is not just political but religiously driven, as patriarchal beliefs from dominant religions reinforce male leadership. While the book excels in highlighting the complexities of African identity, a deeper focus on religious intersections would enrich the book, aligning with its title on gender, religion, and ethnic/cultural identity.

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