Session 1: Ethnicity, Governance, and Stability in East Africa

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Impact through Insight

Outline of Presentation

- Introductory Themes: Three Pillars of Ethnicity

- Governance as Ethnic and Diversity Management

- Patterns of Ethnic Management

- Lessons from the past and present

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Introductory Themes: Three Pillars of Ethnicity

- **Identity:** Ethnicity is simply an identity that most Africans carry as an inevitable outcome of parentage, region, and place of origin; ethnicity represents shared languages, cultural practices, kinship ties, and common ancestry: Kikuyu in Kenya and the Baganda of Uganda are members of a cultural and linguistic; they also, have for the most part, a geographical identity (central Kenya and Central Uganda);scholars studying ethnicity call this aspect PRIMORDIALISM; primary identities that often cannot change;

- **Geography:** Ethnicity is important in Africa because modern territorial states comprise multiple cultural groups who have to live together; geography is an opportunity (the size argument), allowing large spaces for problem-solving; geography is also a constraint, if there are no institutions to manage these large spaces, conflicts inevitably occur;

Three Pillars of Ethnicity

- **Politics:** Ethnicity is clearly linked to politics in Africa, where identities are multiple, permanent, and fairly rigid; also, politics everywhere is about organizing and mobilizing interests; in Africa, politics becomes ethnic politics because ethnic groups are the primary means of identification; where there are ethnically rigid structures, the first line of mobilization become ethnic; thus political participation takes on ethnic lines, representation becomes ethnic; some scholars refer to this component of ethnicity as INSTRUMENTALIZATION, the use of identities as tools for gaining or retaining power;

- **Governance:** The links between identity, territory, and politics give us the notion of governance, i.e., the rules, mechanisms, and institutions that mediate among the three components; these are institutions that reconcile the tensions that arise as multiple communities living within the same territorial space attempt to manage their differences and diversities;

Governance as Conflict and Diversity Management

Is Ethnicity a Problem? Some scholars have contested this notion, arguing that ethnicity per se cannot generate conflict; people do not wake up every morning wearing their ethnic identities, ready to battle those who are different from them; instead, ethnic conflicts reflect the failures/deficits in governance, in rules that should mediate and manage these identities;

Leadership Failures: Governance failures are also leadership failures because in ethnically-divided societies, ethnic entrepreneurs often emerge to instrumentalize differences; by this argument, ordinary people have no grievances against each other until elites mobilize them, frequently for idiosyncratic interests; studies of ethnicity in the region placed a lot of emphasis on the role of elites in fueling ethnic conflicts; the picture has not changed that much;

Patterns of Ethnic Management

- **The idea and practice of nation-building:** Post-independence leaderships prioritized the notion of nation-building to denote: formation of new identities that would conform with the new states; forging new forms of citizenships to prevent the destabilization of alternative identities; and strengthening national loyalties for national development;

- **Popularity of Single-Parties:** The institutional vehicles for nation-building were one-party states because of the conviction that political competition would scramble alliances based on the primordial identities and thus hinder national integration; later in the 1970s, military regimes throughout the region emerged as nation-builders, particular with the demise of weak civilian governments; militarism, however, compounded nation-building processes, igniting the civil wars of the 1990s;

Patterns of Ethnic Management

- **Governance in Large States:** Ethiopia and Sudan emerged as large territorial spaces, the legacy of colonial and imperial expansion; as a result, they faced significant nation-building problems because of the prevalence of large ethnic groups (Hamitic/cushitic, Bantu, Somali, pastoralists etc) in their territories; the imperial and colonial legacies bequeathed highly centralized states which were perceived as too distant and draconian; secessionist pressures in Eritrea and South Sudan also guaranteed that these states would face years of civil wars;

- **The Fallacy of Homogeneity:** In the 1960s, every country in the region envied the homogeneity of Somalia (same language, same culture, same religion); this sameness also wrought Somali irredentism (the integration of Djibouti, Northern Kenya and Ogaden into a Pan-Somali state;

Patterns of Ethnic Management

Irredentism and territorial Disputes: Major wars in the 1960s and 1970s (Shifta war in Northern Kenya and the Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia) were logical outcomes of irredentism; irredentism remains one of the organizing principles of radical groups in Somalia and may re-emerge in the future depending on the trajectories of state reconstruction in Somalia/Somaliland/Puntland etc;

Clans and Conflicts: With the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, clans emerged as the key political identities and cleavages (the Issaks, the Hawiye, the Darood; the Merjeteens etc) but clans are not homogeneous either; studies of the collapse of the state put most of the blame on the centralizing tendencies under Siad Barre that destabilized the coherence of clans as conflict mediators; the region is still paying heavily for the more than 26 years of a stateless Somalia;

Patterns of Ethnic Management

Kenya: The Kikuyu-Luo political divide has festered throughout the post-colonial era, fueled by Luo perceptions that the Kikuyu dominate economic power through political power; the many other equally large ethnic groups do not have sufficient power to constitute a bulwark against the two, so they bandwagon on either side; the results are ethnic tensions that prevent the building of genuine national institutions (including transparent electoral systems); a decentralized constitution is promising to dampen these conflicts by redirecting competition to local levels, but mutual mistrust, the specter of electoral violence, and poverty and marginalization continue to prevent a "political settlement" between the two leading groups; Kenya has a fairly large middle class in the region, but during elections, they don't vote on issues, but on ethnic lines;

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Patterns of Ethnic Management

 Uganda: Ethnic cleavages and conflicts have revolved around efforts by ethnic groups to prevent the perpetuation of Buganda hegemony (the British used the Buganda Kingdom, a centralized and functional state to govern the rest of the country); the perception of Baganda marginalization has dissipated over the years, as the new fault lines have emerged between the Banyakole (Museveni's ethnic group) and the rest of Uganda; ethnic marginalization of Northern groups such as the Acholi and Langi drove the insurgencies of the 1980s (particularly the Lord's Resistance Army, LRA); some westerners on the Uganda-DRC border have also violently contested their membership in the Ugandan state;

Patterns of Ethnic Management

Tanzania's Exceptionalism? National integration proceeded relatively easily in Tanzania because of the absence of a dominant ethnic group or the contestation among leading groups; where there is no dominant group, stability is maintained by the balance of power between small but numerous groups; Tanzania also succeeded in preventing ethnic conflicts because of the strong leadership of the founding leader, Nyerere, who imposed Swahili as the national language and experimented with socialism;

Burundi-Rwanda: Hutu (the majority) and Tutsi (minority) conflicts are legion in East Africa; in recent years, they have produced genocides, mass human rights violations, and regional instability; there is ring of Somalia to these conflicts: same language, same culture, but the history of domination an oppression of the majority sparked post-colonial violence; these countries are not in the woods yet;

Developmental Dictatorships

Elections in developmental Dictatorships: These regimes do not countenance political competition even though they occasionally permit opposition parties to win some seats in parliaments; in Rwanda, major opposition leaders are in jail; in Uganda, opposition parties can hardly organize; in Ethiopia, as Meles told an American envoy, "the opposition can vegetate in jail;" in Eritrea, there is no opposition;

Permanent Conditions? Will developmental dictatorships persist in perpetuity or will they transition to electoral democracies? Where measurable levels of development have occurred, these leaders have bought sufficient legitimacy that has inured them from divisive mass pressures; in Rwanda, Kagame's developmental record has been touted as a key achievement, in addition to ending genocide in 1994;

QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS?

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