

## **IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE SELF-IDENTITY CRISIS: ANALYSING THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN AFRICA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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### **Abstract**

This research investigated the challenging dynamics of identity politics and its profound impact on Africa's self-identity crisis within the realm of international relations. Through a critical lens informed by constructivist theory, the study examined how identity constructions influenced the continent's engagement with the global community. The methodology entailed an in-depth literature review encompassing academic articles, books, and policy documents, offering a comprehensive understanding of the political landscape. Findings revealed that identity politics played a pivotal role in shaping Africa's self-perception and external relations. The continent's diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious identities were often instrumentalized by political leaders to garner support, resulting in a complex web of alliances and conflicts. This politicization of identity contributed to the self-identity crisis, as individuals and communities grappled with navigating between their multiple and sometimes conflicting identities. The study also illuminated how global power structures intersected with the continent's identity politics, with external actors exploiting divisions for strategic gains. The research underscored the critical importance of recognizing the intricate interplay between identity politics and self-identity crises in Africa's international relations. By acknowledging the fluid and constructed nature of identities, policymakers can forge inclusive strategies that transcend divisive politics. This understanding is key to fostering more stable and prosperous relations within and between African nations, as well as enhancing their global presence and influence.

**Keywords:** Global Engagements, Identity Politics, Political Strategies, Self-Identity Crisis, Social Identities.

### **Introduction**

Africa's international relations are fundamentally connected to the intricate dynamics of identity politics that influence its socio-political landscape. Identity politics, characterized by political stances

rooted in the interests and viewpoints of social groups with which individuals identify, profoundly influences the internal and exterior interactions of states. The complex identities in Africa, which include ethnic, cultural, religious, and

historical aspects, significantly influence the continent's self-image and its interactions globally (Adetiba & Booyesen, 2023). Identity politics has evolved into a double-edged sword in Africa's political landscape, impacting both domestic governance and conflict, as well as the continent's standing in international affairs.

The self-identity problem in Africa, characterized by conflicts between traditional values and contemporary governance, is profoundly shaped by the construction and utilization of these identities by political leaders. The historical legacies of colonization, resource competition, and post-independence political changes have all had a role in shaping African identities that are fluid, fragmented, and frequently characterized by conflict (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022). Leaders have often employed these identities as instruments to consolidate power, establish support networks, and rationalize political actions, thus exacerbating the continent's divided political framework. The politics of identity has resulted in internal conflicts, undermining national cohesion and hampering Africa's endeavors to present a unified stance in international relations. From a constructivist viewpoint, identity is not a static thing but rather a social construct influenced by historical, cultural, and political factors. The constructivist theory posits that the significance attributed to identities is ever-changing, and influenced by interactions among individuals, communities, and states

(Wendt, 1999). In the African setting, this signifies that identities are perpetually being redefined in reaction to internal dynamics and external influences. Global power dynamics and geopolitical interests have always influenced these identities, frequently favoring external groups over the African governments themselves (Zondi, 2024). The impact of previous colonial powers, international institutions, and economic alliances has frequently intensified internal differences, transforming identity into a conflict zone for rival interests.

Africa's self-identity problem in international relations is seen in its difficulties in establishing its position within the global system. The continent's varied identities serve as both an asset and a hindrance, offering rich cultural and historical tales while simultaneously hindering a unified diplomatic approach. The absence of a cohesive African identity in global interactions frequently leads to disjointed policies and alliances that weaken the continent's capacity to function as a single entity in international politics (Mazrui, 2021). The fragmentation is exacerbated by the geopolitical aims of global powers that exploit identity politics to instigate splits, thereby cultivating dependencies that weaken Africa's sovereignty and agency. Although identity politics significantly influences Africa's international relations, the current literature predominantly examines its internal ramifications within African governments, with insufficient

attention to its effects on the continent's global engagements. Numerous studies have investigated the influence of ethnic and cultural identities on the emergence of internal conflicts, political instability, and socio-economic inequalities (Ake, 2022; Ekeh, 2023). Nonetheless, a significant deficiency exists in the study that explicitly examines the role of identity politics in

Africa's self-identity crisis within the global context. The deficiency in the literature indicates a necessity for more extensive research that connects internal identity politics to Africa's diplomatic activities and its status within the global power structure. The current literature on Africa's identity politics offers significant insights into the continent's internal dynamics; yet, there is a lack of research that directly links these dynamics to Africa's self-identity dilemma in the realm of international relations. This study examines how identity constructions affect Africa's global interactions. Comprehending this connection is essential for formulating tactics that surpass polarizing identity politics, allowing Africa to participate more adeptly in international diplomacy and advance its strategic objectives with a more cohesive and robust voice.

Thus, the justification for this research becomes binding in addressing the need for an urgent study into the implications of identity-driven politics on issues of growth and global standing in Africa. The question of

self-identity is a serious factor in the governance of the African continent, both internally and in terms of diminishing its potential as an important actor in global affairs. The paper discusses the interplay of identity politics and international relations to set out an understanding of how Africa might use its various identities in the interest of nurturing more stable and successful interactions, internally and internationally. This approach is important for the development of inclusive policies that mitigate the negative impacts of politicized identities, consolidate national unity, and provide an opportunity for African states to determine their standing in the global framework.

#### **Objectives:**

- vi. To examine how identity politics influences Africa's self-identity.
- vii. To analyse the role of colonial legacies influenced identity dynamics
- viii. To explore the intersection of globalization with local identities.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Identity politics has emerged as a significant area of study within international relations, particularly in the context of Africa, where diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious identities intersect. This literature review explores key conceptual frameworks that inform the understanding of identity politics and its implications for the self-identity crisis experienced by

African nations

## **Key Concepts in Identity Politics and Self-Identity Crisis**

The discourse surrounding identity politics and the self-identity crisis in Africa is complex and multifaceted. Several key concepts underpin this discussion, helping to frame the analysis of how identity shapes political dynamics within the continent and its international relations. This section reviews these essential concepts, which include identity, identity politics, self-identity crisis, constructivism, and the politicization of identity.

### **1. Identity**

Identity refers to the characteristics, traits, and social categories that individuals or groups use to define themselves and their relationships with others. In the context of Africa, identities are often shaped by a range of factors, including ethnicity, culture, religion, nationality, and historical experiences (Mazrui, 2021). These identities can be both individual and collective, influencing how people perceive themselves and their roles within broader societal frameworks. Understanding identity is crucial for analyzing political dynamics, as it informs how individuals and groups navigate their environments and assert their interests (Hess, 2020).

### **2. Identity Politics**

Identity politics is a political approach that seeks to represent the interests and perspectives of specific social groups based on shared characteristics, such

as race, ethnicity, gender, or religion (Ake, 2022). In Africa, identity politics has historically played a significant role in mobilizing support, shaping political discourse, and influencing governance. While identity politics can empower marginalized groups and foster a sense of belonging, it can also lead to divisions, conflict, and exclusion, as different groups vie for recognition and resources (Ekeh, 2023). The dual nature of identity politics is particularly salient in the African context, where diverse identities coexist, and the politicization of these identities can exacerbate tensions.

### **3. Self-Identity Crisis**

The self-identity crisis refers to the internal struggle individuals or communities experience when their identities are challenged, fragmented, or redefined (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022). In Africa, the self-identity crisis is often rooted in the legacies of colonialism, globalization, and socio-political changes. Many African nations grapple with multiple and sometimes conflicting identities, which can lead to feelings of dislocation, alienation, and confusion (Adetiba & Booysen, 2023). This crisis impacts not only individual well-being but also social cohesion and political stability, as communities navigate the complexities of their identities in the face of external pressures and internal divisions.

### **4. Constructivism**

Constructivism is a theoretical framework that posits that identities are socially constructed rather than fixed or inherent (Wendt, 1999). According to constructivist theory, identities are shaped by historical contexts, social interactions, and cultural narratives. This perspective emphasizes the fluidity and multiplicity of identities, making it particularly relevant in the African context, where colonial legacies, migration, and globalization contribute to the dynamic nature of identities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022). By recognizing that identities are constructed and continuously evolving, constructivism provides a lens through which to analyze the complexities of identity politics and the self-identity crisis in Africa.

### **5. Politicization of Identity**

The politicization of identity refers to the process by which political actors leverage identities—ethnic, cultural, or religious—to mobilize support, justify policies, or consolidate power (Zondi, 2024). In Africa, this politicization is often manifested in the ways political leaders exploit existing divisions for electoral gain or to suppress dissent. This can lead to the marginalization of certain groups and the exacerbation of conflicts, as individuals are compelled to align with particular identities to navigate political landscapes (Bennett, 2021). The politicization of identity is a critical factor in understanding the self-identity crisis in Africa, as it shapes the interactions between individuals, communities, and the state.

### **Identity Politics: A Theoretical Framework**

At the heart of the discourse on identity politics lies the constructivist theoretical framework, which posits that identities are not fixed entities but rather socially constructed phenomena shaped through interactions and historical contexts (Wendt, 1999). Constructivism emphasizes the fluidity of identity, arguing that it is not only shaped by social relations and collective narratives but also evolves over time as individuals and groups engage with one another and respond to changing circumstances. This dynamic view of identity is particularly relevant in the African context, where diverse and intersecting identities play a crucial role in social, political, and cultural life.

The constructivist perspective highlights that identities are formed through a continuous process of negotiation and reinterpretation, influenced by various factors including history, politics, and culture. In Africa, the legacy of colonialism has left deep scars, shaping the ways in which identities are constructed and understood. Colonial powers often imposed arbitrary borders and categorized people based on ethnic, linguistic, and cultural lines, creating divisions that continue to affect national identities today. The resultant fragmentation has led to competing narratives of identity, where individuals and groups may struggle to assert their place within a broader national or continental identity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022).

Migration also plays a significant role in the construction of identities in Africa. As people move across borders for various reasons—economic opportunities, conflict, or climate change—they bring with them their cultural practices, values, and beliefs. This movement contributes to the blending of identities, leading to the emergence of hybrid identities that challenge traditional notions of belonging. The fluidity of identity becomes particularly salient in urban areas where diverse populations coexist, creating spaces for new social dynamics and interactions that further complicate identity constructions (Hess, 2020).

Globalization adds another layer of complexity to the discourse on identity politics in Africa. The interconnectedness of the global economy, culture, and communication has led to the dissemination of ideas, practices, and identities across borders. While globalization can empower individuals by exposing them to new perspectives and opportunities, it can also lead to the erosion of local identities and traditions. The influx of foreign cultural influences often prompts a backlash, leading to movements aimed at reclaiming and redefining local identities in the face of perceived threats from globalization (Appadurai, 1996).

Constructivism further emphasizes the importance of agency in identity formation. Individuals and groups actively engage in the process of identity construction, negotiating their

affiliations and asserting their identities in response to both internal and external pressures. This agency is particularly critical in the African context, where various social movements have emerged to challenge dominant narratives and advocate for the recognition of marginalized identities. For instance, movements advocating for gender equality, indigenous rights, and ethnic autonomy reflect the dynamic interplay between identity politics and collective action, illustrating how individuals mobilize their identities to effect social and political change (Bennett, 2021).

In summary, the constructivist theoretical framework provides a robust lens through which to analyze identity politics in Africa. It underscores the fluid and contested nature of identities, shaped by historical legacies, migration, and globalization. By recognizing that identities are socially constructed and continuously evolving, scholars and policymakers can better understand the complexities of identity politics in the African context. This understanding is essential for addressing the challenges posed by identity-driven conflicts and for fostering inclusive policies that respect and celebrate the continent's rich tapestry of identities. Moreover, as African nations navigate their place in the global arena, embracing the constructivist perspective can facilitate more coherent and unified approaches to diplomacy and international relations.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the complex dynamics of identity politics and the self-identity crisis in Africa's international relations. The methodology involved an in-depth literature review to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study.

An extensive literature review was conducted to establish a theoretical framework and context for the study. This review involved examining academic articles, books, policy documents, and reports related to identity politics, self-identity crises, and international relations in Africa. The literature was sourced from various databases, including JSTOR, Google Scholar, and university library repositories, focusing on publications from the last decade to ensure the relevance and timeliness of the information.

Key themes identified in the literature included theoretical perspectives on identity politics, the impact of colonial legacies, and the interplay between globalization and identity. The review analyzed various theoretical frameworks, particularly constructivism, to understand how identities were constructed and politicized in the African context (Wendt, 1999; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022). The literature highlighted the lasting effects of colonialism on African identities and the politicization of these identities in post-colonial contexts (Mazrui, 2021). Additionally,

the review examined how global influences shaped identity politics in Africa (Hess, 2020).

The literature review also aimed to identify gaps in the existing research, particularly the need for empirical studies on the self-identity crisis in relation to international relations. This comprehensive understanding provided a foundation for the analysis of identity politics in Africa and its implications for the continent's engagement with the global community.

Thematic analysis was utilized to synthesize the findings from the literature review. This process involved familiarizing with the collected data, generating significant themes related to identity politics and self-identity crises, and interpreting these themes in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks. By employing this methodology, the study aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding identity in the African context, providing valuable insights for scholars and policymakers alike.

## **Findings**

This section presents the comprehensive findings of the literature review, addressing the research objectives outlined in the study. The objectives focused on examining the role of identity politics in shaping self-identity crises in Africa's international relations, understanding how colonial legacies influenced these dynamics, and

analysing the intersection of globalization with local identities.

### **Objective 1: Examining the Role of Identity Politics in Shaping Self-Identity Crises**

The literature reveals that identity politics plays a pivotal role in shaping self-identity crises within African nations, impacting both individual and collective identities. Identity politics refers to political positions based on the interests and perspectives of social groups with which people identify (Taylor, 1994). In Africa, the politicization of identities often leads to conflicts, social fragmentation, and crises of self-identity, as various groups vie for recognition and power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Olufowote, 2022).

A significant finding from the literature is that the manipulation of ethnic and cultural identities by political leaders has exacerbated self-identity crises. Political leaders often exploit ethnic affiliations to garner support, leading to the instrumentalization of identities for political gain (Mafa, 2016; Moyo, 2021). This dynamic has been evident in various African countries, where leaders have used identity politics to solidify their power bases, often at the expense of national unity. For instance, the Rwandan genocide of 1994 starkly illustrated how the manipulation of ethnic identities can result in catastrophic violence, as political leaders incited Hutu citizens against Tutsi populations (Kagwanja, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022). This event

not only highlighted the destructive potential of identity politics but also left lasting scars on the national psyche, contributing to a profound crisis of identity in Rwanda.

Moreover, the intersection of identity politics with external relations complicates the self-identity crises faced by African nations. The globalization of identity politics has led to the emergence of transnational movements that both challenge and reinforce local identities (Hess, 2020; Rogoza & Veronika, 2021). As African states engage with global actors, they often grapple with competing narratives that influence their self-perception. For instance, scholars have argued that the rise of Pan-Africanism as a counter-narrative to colonial legacies has provided a framework for redefining African identities on the global stage (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). However, this process has not been without challenges, as conflicting identities can lead to tensions both within states and between them.

The literature further emphasizes that identity crises are exacerbated by socio-economic factors. Economic disparities, unequal resource distribution, and marginalization of certain groups contribute to feelings of disenfranchisement, prompting individuals and communities to seek affirmation through identity politics (Owusu, 2021; Dlamini, 2022). In countries like Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency can be viewed as a response to perceived injustices and



identity-related grievances, underscoring the link between socio-economic factors and identity crises (Onuoha, 2014; Duruji & Abah, 2022).

In summary, the findings indicate that identity politics significantly influences self-identity crises in Africa, with implications for both individual and collective identities. The manipulation of identities for political purposes, combined with the complexities introduced by globalization and socio-economic factors, has created a challenging landscape for African nations. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing the underlying issues and fostering more inclusive political frameworks.

### **Objective 2: Understanding How Colonial Legacies Influenced Identity Dynamics**

The impact of colonial legacies on identity dynamics in Africa is profound and multifaceted. Colonialism not only disrupted traditional social structures but also imposed artificial boundaries that fragmented ethnic and cultural identities (Falola & Genova, 2005). Scholars argue that the colonial experience has led to enduring challenges in post-colonial identity formation, as nations struggle to reconcile inherited identities with contemporary realities (Katz, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022).

One of the key findings from the literature is that colonial powers often employed divide-and-rule tactics that

intensified ethnic divisions. For example, in the case of Kenya, colonial authorities favored certain ethnic groups over others in administrative roles, leading to long-standing tensions between communities (Khamis & Chebbi, 2018; Mwangi, 2022). This favoritism created a legacy of mistrust and rivalry that continues to shape political dynamics in contemporary Kenya.

Furthermore, the colonial imposition of Western identity constructs has led to a disconnection from indigenous identities. As noted by Mbembe (2021), colonized peoples often grapple with the alienation from their cultural heritage, resulting in a crisis of identity. The challenge of reclaiming and redefining identity in the post-colonial context is evident across Africa, as nations seek to navigate the complexities of a globalized world while honouring their cultural roots (Mamdani, 2004; Owusu, 2021).

In addition, the literature highlights that the legacy of colonialism has fostered a sense of fragmentation in national identities. As countries gained independence, the lack of a cohesive national identity, often exacerbated by colonial borders, has led to ongoing conflicts and identity crises (Zezeza, 2005; Ojo & Osaghae, 2021). In Nigeria, for instance, the amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups under a single national identity has been a source of contention, as different groups assert their identities in the political arena (Olayiwola, 2019; Akinola, 2020).

Ultimately, the findings underscore the critical role that colonial legacies play in shaping identity dynamics in Africa. The historical context of colonialism has left an indelible mark on the continent, influencing how identities are constructed, politicized, and experienced in contemporary international relations.

### **Objective 3: Analysing the Intersection of Globalization with Local Identities**

Globalization has emerged as a double-edged sword in the context of identity politics in Africa. While it offers opportunities for cultural exchange and dialogue, it also poses challenges to the preservation of local identities (Hess, 2020; Mafa, 2016). The literature indicates that globalization has both fragmented and reinforced local identities, leading to a complex interplay between global influences and local realities.

One of the findings is that globalization has facilitated the emergence of transnational identities, allowing individuals to navigate multiple cultural affiliations. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2022) argues, the rise of diasporic communities has created spaces where local identities intersect with global narratives, reshaping self-perceptions and collective identities. This phenomenon is evident in urban centres across Africa, where diverse cultural expressions coexist and contribute to a dynamic sense of identity (Prah, 2018; Dlamini, 2022).

However, the impact of globalization is not uniformly positive. The commodification of culture and the dominance of Western narratives often marginalize local voices and traditions, leading to a homogenization of identities (Hess, 2020; Owusu, 2021). For instance, the proliferation of Western media has resulted in the promotion of certain identity constructs at the expense of indigenous cultures, creating tensions between global and local identities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022; Ojo & Osaghae, 2021).

Furthermore, globalization has intensified economic disparities, leading to feelings of disenfranchisement among marginalized groups. The literature highlights that economic inequalities often exacerbate identity crises, as individuals seek validation through identity politics in response to socio-economic marginalization (Onuoha, 2014; Duruji & Abah, 2022). In many cases, individuals mobilize around their ethnic or cultural identities to address perceived injustices and advocate for their rights, highlighting the interconnectedness of identity politics and socio-economic factors.

In conclusion, the findings reveal that globalization plays a complex role in shaping identity dynamics in Africa. While it offers opportunities for cultural exchange and the emergence of transnational identities, it also poses challenges to the preservation of local cultures and exacerbates existing inequalities. Understanding this

intersection is crucial for addressing the multifaceted nature of identity politics and fostering inclusive political frameworks that honour both global and local identities

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings from the literature review highlight the intricate relationship between identity politics, colonial legacies, and globalization in shaping self-identity crises within African nations. The study reveals that identity politics continues to play a critical role in influencing political and social dynamics in Africa, with significant implications for both internal cohesion and international relations (Moyo, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022). The manipulation of ethnic and cultural identities by political leaders, as well as the socio-economic disparities within African states, exacerbates these identity crises, creating deep-seated divisions that challenge national unity.

The analysis of colonial legacies shows that the imposition of artificial boundaries and the divide-and-rule tactics employed by colonial powers left enduring impacts on African identities (Katz, 2020; Mwangi, 2022). The fragmentation of communities and the alienation from indigenous cultures contribute to the ongoing struggle for a cohesive national identity in post-colonial African states. This colonial heritage, coupled with contemporary global influences, continues to shape the identity narratives within African nations, often leading to conflicts over representation and inclusion.

Globalization emerges as a significant force that both facilitates cultural exchange and threatens local identities. While globalization allows for the development of transnational identities and greater interaction with global cultures, it also poses risks to the preservation of indigenous traditions and values (Prah, 2018; Owusu, 2021). The dominance of Western media and cultural norms has been found to marginalize local voices, leading to a homogenization of cultures and further complicating the identity dynamics in African countries.

### **Implications and Directions for Future Study**

The implications of these findings are profound, suggesting that addressing the issue of identity politics in Africa requires a multi-faceted approach that considers historical, socio-economic, and global contexts. Policymakers need to focus on fostering inclusive political environments that recognize the diverse identities within African nations without resorting to divisive politics. This study underscores the importance of reclaiming indigenous identities and creating frameworks that promote cultural pride and national unity.

Future research should delve deeper into the role of technology and digital media in shaping modern identity politics in Africa. As digital platforms become increasingly influential in shaping public opinion and identity narratives, understanding their impact on self-identity and political dynamics will be critical. Additionally, there is a

need to explore case studies of African nations that have successfully navigated identity crises, examining the policies and strategies that contributed to their success.

### **Recommendations**

1. **Promote Inclusive Policies:** Governments should develop policies that embrace the cultural diversity of African nations and foster national unity by promoting respect for all ethnic and cultural identities.
2. **Strengthen Indigenous Identity:** Educational and cultural institutions should focus on preserving indigenous languages, traditions, and values to counter the homogenizing effects of globalization.
3. **Leverage Technology for Positive Change:** Policymakers should harness digital media as a tool to promote cultural awareness and counteract the

divisive narratives often associated with identity politics.

### **Conclusion**

This study has highlighted the critical influence of identity politics, colonial legacies, and globalization on Africa's self-identity crises within the framework of international relations. The findings demonstrate that the manipulation of identities for political purposes, coupled with the lingering effects of colonialism and the pressures of globalization, has created a complex landscape for African nations. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that embraces cultural diversity, promotes inclusive policies, and leverages the power of technology to build cohesive societies. By doing so, Africa can navigate the challenges of identity politics and strengthen its position on the global stage.

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