

Building bridges as Social Constructs in the African context

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Abstract

Societies are typical within the context of their cultural identity and settlement patterns across various landscapes of Africa. Such identities are established on the basis of distinct cultural traditions and practices that determine population distributions across territories and landscapes. In so doing, societies find themselves clustered in specific land areas deemed favourable to their ways of life. Even in cases where respective societies have isolated themselves into particular land areas, further sub-divisions still emerge in terms of clans, kingdoms, and/or administrative boundaries. In many cases within Africa and other parts of the world, separation of human settlements on the basis of ethnicity, clanism, kingdoms and/or administrative boundaries are usually based on natural features such as existence of a river, a hill, a lake, a mountain and/or a valley. Much as the separated human settlements may be in competition with each other over resources, recognition and leadership, they as well would need bridging constructs that links them for crossing over and networking both commercially and socially. Physical bridging over a water body may involve use of a boat, canoe, raft, or a ship. It may also be a log(s) set up together temporarily or permanently to link separate territories for a given purpose. Bridging may also take the form of a road connecting two separate points across the divide or swimming across for social convenience. Bridges may also be viaducts, overpasses or fly-overs enabling societies to connect with each other in various ways including trading, establishment of social-cultural relations, social cohesion alongside information transmission. This paper discusses in details the social meaning of the bridge as perceived in the African context and how it unites and/or divide communities symbolically.

Key words: Bridges, Societies, Linkages, Social