

FINEX NDHLOVU (2009). THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE AND NATION BUILDING IN ZIMBABWE, BERN: PETER LANG, AFRICA IN DEVELOPMENT VOL. 2, pp 227. ISBN 978-3-03911-942-4

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There is a growing body of literature on the politics of nation-building in Zimbabwe which include titles like, *Do Zimbabweans Exist? Nation Building, Identity and Violence* (Ndlovu-Gatshehi, 2009); *From Buoyancy to Crisis, 1980-1997* (Muzondidya, 2009); *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008* (Raftopoulos and Mlambo, 2009) among others. Central to the arguments in these volumes is the main challenge of constructing a unified Zimbabwean national identity in a society which is intensely divided along racial, ethnic, gender, geographical and linguistic lines which is confronting the post-independence leadership of Zimbabwe. Finex Ndhlovu's book, *The Politics of Language and Nation Building in Zimbabwe* introduces a new dimension to this debate as he focuses on the language politics and nation building in Zimbabwe, a perspective which has been given little attention by the Zimbabwean academics in the disciplines of languages and politics.

In this book, the impetus of Finex Ndhlovu's argument is on linguistic imperialism, a famous truism popularised by Phillipson (1992), which has always been professed to be a situation where the indigenous languages are dominated by the ex-colonial/foreign language which is English in the Zimbabwean case. He argues that linguistic imperialism has very little to do with whether the dominating language is foreign or indigenous. He does not subscribe to the view that English is the 'killer'/hegemonic language in Zimbabwe. Alternatively, he argues that Shona and Ndebele languages are the hegemonic languages which have resulted in the exclusion and marginalisation of minority languages from the mainstream domains of social life which include administration, law, media, business and education. To augment his argument, Finex Ndhlovu identifies four factors which contribute to the exclusion of other languages in Zimbabwe other than the dominant Shona and Ndebele with the symbolic status of national languages. These are nationalist postcolonial discourse; exclusive nation building; subtle cultural oppression and the push for linguistic uniformity. The author fearlessly delves into a subject matter which hitherto, has been omitted in Zimbabwean scholarship, because of the volatility and polarity of the ethnic relations in the country.

The Politics of Language and Nation Building in Zimbabwe is not product of imaginary arguments; rather it is a product of rigorous research based on fieldwork, Finex Ndhlovu carried out with a considerable breath covering views from the minority language speakers, language policy makers, media practitioners, writers, cultural activists, book publishers, media and society studies lecturers from the local universities and language experts. Though, this is a reflection of the breadth which was covered by the researcher, this limited the depth of his research. However, oral interviews were conducted on this target population providing useful information on language use, identity and nation building in Zimbabwe. To authenticate the point that this book is a product of research, the book is marked by well substantiated

arguments as shown by direct verbatim from the interview answers which came from the fieldwork as well as clearly tabulated data.

This book incites varied offshoots for further research considering the questions which can be raised on its coverage and the subsumed argument. The book is wholesale on the Zimbabwean public domains where the minority languages are excluded and are dominated by Shona and Ndebele. For that reason, Spartan information is given on the Zimbabwean politics, media, publishing, education, and business. For instance, further research can be done on language policy, identity formation and the media sector in Zimbabwe from its inception in the colonial period, the post-independent Zimbabwe, and the post-2000 period, a period with watershed media reforms such as the Broadcasting Services Act, 2001, and the subsequent Amendment Act of 2007 with the contentious issues which include local content conditions; the desire to reflect the multilingual nature of Zimbabwe, and the bid to create a national identity and culture through broadcasting. Alas, Finex Ndhlovu does not make reference to these issues. More so, his exoneration of the English language in identity politics of Zimbabwe is also open to discussion.

On the whole, this book presents a fearless and reasonable argument on the language politics and identity formation in Zimbabwe using a novel approach, which focuses on the contestations of indigenous languages for space in the public domains as opposed to the indigenous-foreign language dichotomy. This book is fundamental to those with interest in studies on languages in competition, language policy and planning and identity politics in Africa who include academics and students in the local universities. For those who may need to investigate the exclusion of minority languages in post-colonial Africa, this book is worth reading.

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