

M.H.A. Bolaji
Book Review
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The Role of Religion in African Civil Wars

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(Reviewed by Dr. M H A Bolaji, SPIRE, Keele University, mhabolaji@hotmail.com)

The wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, etc. have portrayed Africa as a continent that harbours states some of which appear to be fitting examples of the concept of 'failed state'. With this image, Africa is seen as a continent whose states need external intervention if they must be counted among the comity of nations. The fact that the implication of religion in African states' problems continues to be emphasised in the discourses about the consolidation of African states makes this collection a worthy addition to the literature.

The book begins with a thorough scene-setting introduction in which the editor painstakingly takes the reader through a trajectory of interpretations of civil wars and rebellions in the literature. The editor locates the central theme of the book in exploring the connections between the following: religion, rationality and war; war, meaning and religious change; religion and legitimization of war; religion, war and reconstruction; and religion and civil war in time perspectives. The introductory chapter is scholarly and impressive in that it forays into relevant works outside the collection in order to demonstrate how the current collection fits into, and departs from, the conventional knowledge on the subject. While this approach has its own merits, it requires readers to pay special attention to footnotes in order to distinguish between what ideas belong to the present contributions and what ideas are from earlier studies of the contributor(s) and/or other commentators. For instance, the editor states 'Longman's contribution to this book demonstrates' (p. 16) and delves into earlier works on 'Hamitic hypothesis' (p. 16) by other authors without notifying the reader.

Although the editor devotes some space to explain the Nigerian civil war in the introductory chapter, a chapter on the Nigerian civil war would have been more helpful. This is because the Nigerian civil war, which the editor sees as a possible 'historical paradigm' (p. 3) of the papers in this collection, was not only a major test for the first-crop African statesmen under the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) but also because the religious dimension of the war was blown out of proportion to overshadow other markers of Nigerian diversity such as ethnicity, culture, language, region, religion, etc. The religionisation of the war polarised the OAU and the international community and complicated the moves towards its resolution (see Yancho, 2005). However, besides benefiting from a variety of methodological approaches that range from intellectualist understanding, spiritual and personal aspects, institutional and organisational viewpoints, to historical dimensions of the theme, the collection sought contributions from an interdisciplinary team of scholars of anthropology, religion, political science and history.

Hutchison's exposition on the interconnections between religion, war and regionalism in launching and perpetuating the war efforts in southern Sudan is excellent. She demonstrates how the

southern Sudanese warlords, under the auspices of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army and its splinter militia groups, found it expedient to distort the traditional religious beliefs on the sanctity of life in order to trivialise homicide. Her analysis strengthens the reader's understanding of how internal power struggles wrecked a regional liberation movement, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and allowed the infiltration of their once avowed enemy, the national Islamic state in Khartoum.

Wheeler's paper provides insights into how, in the post-colonial context, the Christian faith experienced growth by benefiting from the misfortune of the campaign for the 'Arabization and Islamization' (p.55) of Sudan. This paper has a number of principal appeals. Firstly, it demonstrates how the onslaught from the north, a region that had earned considerable aversion among southern Sudanese people in the colonial past, created an 'emerging southern identity' (p. 55) among peoples that were ethnically and culturally divided. Secondly, it explains how the Churches and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) whose objectives, orientations and agenda showed 'profound dissonance' (p. 58) could unite in the fight against a mutual enemy. Thirdly, it depicts the skilfulness of some clergy in grasping the opportunities presented by mass sufferings and displacements to put up biblical reconstructions of live events that gave meaning to their congregations. Also, at the cultural level, the paper shows how the Churches – in their proselytisation – differ in their accommodation of, and interaction with, African traditional religion, culture and artefacts.

Devisch's account creates a robust understanding of the connection between the debacle of modernity, political ideology of the return to authenticity with its associated Zairianisation, and state decline on one side, and the mass disillusionment, riots and violence on the other. However, it is erroneous to suggest that the 'rural subsistence economy' (p. 109) and 'street economy' (p. 109) are on the same footing in terms of 'predatory behaviour' (p. 109). Studies have shown that the two domains in Africa are poles apart in moralistic terms (see Ekeh, 1975). Even in the paper, as Devisch progresses with his analysis, the contradiction soon becomes clear. When the 'street economy' and all its paraphernalia ran into total collapse, the people had to depend on the communitarian values of rural lifestyle for rescue. These values, which Devisch calls 'villagisation', largely emphasise addressing the alienation caused by 'post-colonial modernity' (p. 112), creating 'a cultural or moral framework of empathy' (p. 113), regeneration and belongingness, and inspiring grassroots initiatives.

Timothy Longman's paper helps the reader to identify the intractable interaction between politics and religion in Rwanda and Burundi. Nonetheless, we are not informed whether the idea of Christian missionaries seeking political power and influence by 'appeasing political authorities' (p. 86) emanated from Christian theology or whether it developed out of the search for the most appropriate strategy for proselytisation. While the paper shows a high level of sophistication in explaining the various social engagements of the Church such as 'allies of the state' (p. 83), 'kingmakers' (p. 86), 'social engineers' (p. 87), 'havens for the oppressed' (p. 90), 'civil society' (p. 92) and 'political arbiters' (p. 95), more exploration that connects these social engagements to the Biblical injunction of 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's' (Mathew 22: 17-22) would have enriched the paper. Such an attempt would have benefited the reader by shedding lights on the traditional roles of the Church and thereby delineating their excesses. The allusion to a 'prophetic role' (p. 95) and 'principles undergirding their social engagement' (p. 96) without elaboration, whet an appetite that remained unsatisfied to the end of the paper.

Richards brilliantly explored the internal cohesion and dynamism of the Revolutionary United Front's (RUF) camp culture – a culture that significantly deviates from that of the larger society.

The exposition on why the deviation accounted for the RUF's initial success is excellent. However, in the paper the connection between the RUF project and religion is tenuous. Firstly, phrases such as 'Green Book values and beliefs' (p.123), 'Green Book veterans' (p.126) as part of the RUF's intellectual core, 'Libyan populism' (p. 127), and 'Benghazi-trained ideologues' (p. 126) seem to be inadequate in connecting the RUF project with the Green Book and its Islamically informed doctrines. Secondly, the camp routines may be ritualised to produce certain effects on the inmates. But saying the 'Lord's prayer' and 'Alfatiyah' (p. 134) as part of the morning routine of camp life is not enough to conclude that the RUF's insurrection against the state and incursions on civilian populations had any peculiar religious significance. It is essential to understand what religion means to an African. Africans are said to be "notoriously religious" such that '[r]eligion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.' (Mbiti, 1969, p. 1). It is for this reason that some scholars have warned that an attempt to apply a Western-imposed dichotomy on social life in Africa can lead to erroneous conclusions (see Ellis and Haar, 1998).

The greatest contribution of Højbjerg's analysis is that it unravels the complexity involved in assigning religious codes to the outer manifestations of the conflict between the Loma and Madingo peoples. His analysis warns the reader of how over-generalisation of certain patterns of the traditional religious practices can distort the true connection between religious expression, ethnic identity and violence. In addition, his paper also demonstrates how the traditional religious practices of the Loma dominate their public life and infringe upon the fundamental rights of both ethnic and non-ethnic members alike.

Maxwell's narrative on Zimbabwe's post-war religion and politics is scholarly sophisticated. His analysis elaborates how the traditional religion and Christianity seemed to have swapped positions in terms of political significance during the liberation war and post-independence politics. The paper shows how the traditional religious beliefs significantly influenced guerrilla politics and how the traditional beliefs surrounding the menacing activities of *ngozi* (avenging spirit) in post-war social relations provided a fertile ground for Christian evangelisation and Pentecostal healing services. His paper reveals how Christianity has met the tensions that arose from state collapse and social relations that are structured along divisions of gender, ethnicity, generation and status.

The book is a valuable contribution to the literature. It contains well-researched papers from seasoned academics. Collectively, the authors can be credited for bringing important lessons to the attention of their intended readership. Firstly, the analyses have shown that Africa remains a battleground for ideological struggles between the two major religions and the African religions. Despite the claim of globalising influences, there are important variations in thoughts. While Africa has imbibed certain aspects of modernity, Africa is still largely grasping superstitions and mysticism, unlike in most Western states where modernity emerged out of particular experience with the Renaissance. With this experience, the West grew out of superstitions and accepted scientific knowledge as synonymous with modernity. Secondly, the papers in this collection have shown that the failure of the modernisation project and the accompanied quagmire of state-building in many African states have strengthened cultural traditions, religious affiliations and primordial ties which have, in most cases, worked against the civic nationalism that came with modernity. Thirdly, the political instability that results from the attachment to cultural and religious ties has made elite manipulation inevitable in building constituencies and in sourcing political legitimacy. The intractable task of meeting sectarian aspirations and demands by the political elites has made the observance of the separation principle a particularly problematic exercise.

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