Book Reviews

Smith, James Howard/Hackett, Rosalind I J (Eds), *Displacing the State: Religion and Conflict in Neoliberal Africa*. **Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 2012, xi+299pp.**

This volume complements broader discussions on the dynamics of conflict and religious transformation in African states. Its various contributors provide in-depth analysis, based on empirical research on religious process, to enrich and challenge our understanding of the process of conflict resolution.

The first of three sections, "Historical Sources of Religious Conflict and Peace" examines how aspects of African history have laid the foundation for very divergent models of peace: one stressing reconciliation and cooperation between former adversaries, and another assuming the perpetuation of conflict and the persistent demonisation of others, especially the poor or marginalised. In "Forgiveness with Consequences: Scriptures, Qene, and Traditions of Restorative Justice in Nineteenth-Century Ethiopia", Charles Schaefer argues that Ethiopian restorative justice has allowed for the former type of justice. Schaefer dwells at length on the peaceful potential of religion and religious discourse and argues that these aspects should be developed so that religion can contribute effectively to peacebuilding. On the other hand, in his chapter "Making Peace with the Devil: The Political life of Devil Worship Rumors in Kenya", James Howard Smith recounts how specific, culturally nuanced ideas about the devil and devil worshippers have been central to governance in Kenya ever since the colonial era. He explains that diverse Kenyan groups have tried to use these concepts to 'make peace' by destroying that which threatens their vision of social order. Smith traces how, over time, this discourse about devil worship was deployed by different groups in Kenyan society that sought to shore up moral and political boundaries which are perceived to be threatened, and to forge viable national communities predicated on shared moral values. Contemporary conflicts are thus understood and acted upon through the prism of traumatic historical memories and historically entrenched structural conflicts.

The second section, "New Religious Movements, Enduring Social

Tensions", emphasises how contested historical memories shape the way Africans experience and respond to the structural transformations associated with neoliberalism. Grace Wamue-Ngare, in "Mungiki Movement: A Source of Religion-Political Conflict in Kenya", examines a Gikuyu neo-traditionalist religious and political movement whose members and leadership have struggled to retain their original utopian religious foundations while, at the same time, the organisation morphed into a powerful shadow state and mafia. Mungiki's followership consists mainly of poor young men who have, in the past, sought to impose a strict gendered and generational orthodoxy upon the Kikuyu public, blaming the spread of HIV/AIDs on the waning of cliterodectomy, and even going so far as to attack 'indecently' dressed women on Nairobi's streets. In doing so, Mungiki embody and act on their belief that Kenyan society and the state have lost their grounding in (what are presented as) traditional African values. While many Kenyans criticise Mungiki for being anachronistically obsessed with the past, Mungiki leaders have spoken publicly on issues of current national concern, including the need for land tenure reform and the destructive consequences of IMF-mandated SAPs. Because of their public, exaggerated projection of a violent and repressed history, the group struck a profound chord in Kenyan society, provoking a great deal of discussion and, ultimately, violent repression from the Moi and Kibaki regimes. Wamue emphasises the religious dimensions of Mungiki in reaction to those who have portrayed the movement as a mafia organisation with no redeeming moral virtues. In contrast, Koen Vlassenroot, in his work on Mai Mai militias in the eastern Congo ("Magic as Identity Maker: Conflict and Militia Formation in Eastern Congo"), minimises the occult dimensions of a similar, equally heterogeneous, youth-based movement in the eastern Congo in an effort to draw out their often unrecognised political and sociological motivations and historical underpinnings. International media portrayal of Mai Mai militias has made them infamous for their transgressive deployment of traditional religious ritual and their occasional acts of cannibalism. But Vlassenroot convincingly argues that Mai Mai militias have struggled violently to overhaul local life from the bottom up, and that this total transformation of society has been oriented toward the remaking of historically entrenched local authority structures. This is in contrast to analyses of Mai Mai that have depicted the movement as solely an autochthonous reaction to foreign, Rwandan occupation. Wamue and Vlassenroot call attention to an

even more fundamental issue, namely that the new religious movements at work in Africa challenge entrenched Western understandings of religion as belief in a transcendental truth above and beyond political realities. Rather, these religious/political movements are firmly grounded in real-world struggles and transformations, and are the principal mechanism through which people try to bend overarching structures to their wills. Isabel Mukonyora confronts this issue directly in her chapter "Religious, Politics, and Gender in Zimbabwe: The Masowe Apostles and Chimurenga Religion". Mukonyora examines a religious movement that has taken on many social functions including those formerly reserved for states, while in some ways echoing Zimbabwean state ideology about the sacral power of stolen lands. Mukonyora's analysis reveals the profound ambivalence about tradition among Masowe Apostles.

The third section of the volume, "New Religious Public Spheres and the Crisis Regulation", explores the new forms of social and political identification engendered by religion in the wake of state transformation. The chapters in this section enumerate the conflict between state structures and the new ideologies and institutions associated with neo-liberal globalisation, new forms of media, and discourses of human rights. In this vein, Rosalind Hackett, in "Devil Bustin' Satellites: How Media Liberation in Africa Generates Intolerance and Conflict" argues that media are integral, even essential, to the production of the new religiously inspired political communities that are emerging throughout the continent. In his essay, "Mediating Armageddon: Popular Christian Video Films as a Source of Conflict in Nigeria", Asonzeh F-K Ukah examines the popular and legal controversy surrounding the release of the Nigerian Pentecostal film "Rapture". Ukah's essay reveals an attitude toward the state that is as widespread among African citizens as it is among Westerners, namely the belief that, regardless of what the representatives of any specific state actually do, the ideal-typical state is supposed to function according to impartial and universalising legal codes that are removed from private interests and personal emotions. But Abasi Kiyimba's essay on the fraught history of the Ugandan Democratic Relations Bill, "The Domestic Relations Bill and Inter-Religious Conflict in Uganda: A Muslim Reading of Personal Law and Religious Pluralism in a Postcolonial Society" suggests a more complex relationship between the state and religion in contemporary Africa. Kiyimba shows how a proposed bill designed to legislate domestic arrangements — most controversially, by criminalising polygamy — has been

promulgated by Ugandan legislators and other educated elite. These self-professed modernists, supported by a wide cross-section of the non-Muslim population, view polygamy as backward and perceive its current protection under the law as a byproduct of the limiting, divisive colonial policy of indirect rule by which so-called 'natives' were governed by traditional authorities and customary law.

If there ever was a book written about Africa that offers prospects for hope on such a grim subject, then it is this one. The book resulted from the work of numerous authors who have ably assisted the editors, and whose expert views on the conflict in Africa are fresh, provide food for thought, and urge Africa to awake from slumber and seize her moment.

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Praeg, Leonhard/Magadla, Siphokazi (eds), *Ubuntu: Curating the Archive.* **Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2014, 231 pp.**

Strictly speaking, it is not *necessary* for a state to have a foundational ideology; government can exist and function well enough without one. Still, a national ideology has certain advantages. It has the potential to join together the citizenry and create a sense of purpose and belonging; of a shared community that is more than just an arbitrary collection of people living within a set of lines on a map. It can also serve to restrict — in a beneficial way — the range of political choices available, delegitimising extremists and non-democrats and strengthening the moderate centre.

Thus the old USSR had Marxism-Leninism, the United States of America has Lockean liberalism, and even *apartheid* South Africa — bitterly divided and existing, for much of its history, in a state of low-grade civil war — had Afrikaner nationalism as the semi-official ideology of the elite. But what of the new South Africa? Perhaps the best candidate for an essentially "South African" ideology is *Ubuntu*: the idea that the welfare of individual human beings is inextricably bound to the welfare of the community. There have been times, especially during the