

Barbara Meier and Arne S. Steinforth, eds. *Spirits in Politics: Uncertainties of Power and Healing in African Societies*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2013, 265 pp.

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This book deals with the intersection in African societies of socio-political processes, including state politics, and beliefs in spiritual or otherwise “supernormal” phenomena (Malinowski)—hereafter “religion.” The volume largely originated in an international workshop “Spirits in Politics: Violence and Social Healing in African Societies,” held in 2010 at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster in Germany.

Of the book’s four parts, the three chapters in Part I are introductory and theoretical, and Part II examines how people address concrete, personally adverse situations through means or interpretations defined in religious terms. Part III deals with the roles played by religious beliefs in socio-political transformations, and Part IV explores the place of spirit beliefs in societies that have suffered serious internal conflicts.

Meier, Igreja, and Steinforth point out how African colonial and postcolonial regimes have tried to eradicate any connection between religion and “secularized” or “modern” state politics. This has failed, and they present the book as a contribution to research into ongoing relationships between religion and politics in African “configurations of modernity.” Ellis and ter Haar remind readers of earlier, specifically European connotations of the concept “religion” and propose a definition that stresses the invisibility of religious entities people believe in, even while they may have connections with the visible world. Bernault describes the garbled interpretations French colonial administrators placed on “fetishism” and introduces the term “infra-politics” to denote an analytical approach that presupposes a separation between politics and religion.

Larsen examines how people in Zanzibar try to understand or remedy adverse, visible personal situations with invisible means. Kirsch, dealing with spirit possession in Zambia, introduces the terminology of a spirit’s *locus* (the person[s] through whom a spirit manifests itself) and *focus* (the social environment for which such manifestations are relevant). Niehaus looks at the ambiguous conceptualization of witchcraft in post-apartheid South Africa and its consequences for legal pluralism.

Steinforth analyzes the concept of “big man” from a Malawian perspective. He shows that, in addition to the material, re-distributional basis of such leadership as famously modeled by Sahlins for Melanesia in a 1963 *CSSH* article, in Malawi (and Melanesia) there are also religious aspects to the positions of actual and aspiring political leaders. Harnischfeger presents a case study of how a Christian movement in Nigeria has violently acted against the worship of a local deity, against the background of the state’s failure to bring development.

Igreja and Racin discuss how beliefs in spirits enable victims of Mozambique's first civil war (1976–1992) to deal with past traumatic events and negotiate solutions for contemporary problems. They offer the case of a “traditional” leader accused of failing to bring rain and general bad governance, and state actors denying flexibility to local political practices that could have addressed local grievances in comprehensive ways. Combey highlights the relevance of the socio-religious institution of *Poro* in Sierra Leone. Here, colonialism altered but did not obliterate the system of political checks and balances associated with *Poro*. Meier examines the spiritual background of the conflict in Northern Uganda involving the Lord's Resistance Army.

I think some of the book's approaches to cases where religious beliefs appear detrimental to certain people are debatable. The classical distinction between “emic” and “etic” that is evoked here seems less than useful. As Kirsch indicates, those accused of witchcraft are not necessarily prepared to “consider religion in a subject's own terms,” and religion is often contested within societies. The case of Europe, discussed by Harnischfeger, where witchcraft beliefs seem uncommon, may not be as exceptional as it appears on the surface. For example, Lucia de B. in the Netherlands spent years in prison convicted of murders that were never committed, and on a grander scale, World War II showed the ultimate consequences of suspicion against particular categories of people. Although the cognitive vehicles for suspicion in these cases differed from witchcraft beliefs in Africa and elsewhere, suspicion did involve assumptions about real evil operating through invisible means.

That said, overall this is an illuminating book with an admirable conceptual coherence and broad visions of the relationship between religion and politics. It deserves to be widely read and discussed by Africanists, cross-cultural psychologists, students of conflict resolution, and political scientists and anthropologists. The authors provide thought-provoking alternatives to analyses of postcolonial African politics that, often contradictorily, stress “politics of the belly” or “occultism.”

———André Van Dokkum, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam

Robert J. Donia. *Radovan Karadžić: Architect of the Bosnian Genocide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, ISBN 978-1-107-42308-4, 339 pp.

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The name of Radovan Karadžić has become familiar worldwide. As one of the two leaders of the Bosnian Serbs in the early 1990s (together with General Mladić), Karadžić is known as one of the main organizers of the ugly ethnic cleansing campaigns in Bosnia. Apprehended by the Serbian authorities in 2008, Karadžić is standing trial on charges of genocide, crimes against