I have no doubt that Williamson Sinalo is a well-intentioned and capable researcher who sought to respect the archival testimonies that form the corpus of her data. Still, her book stands as a caution for others, as any interdisciplinary study requires historical analysis that draws on historical sources, to understand and explain individual responses to mass atrocity in context, not just through the lens of a single event, in this case the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In failing to do so, Williamson Sinalo has written a book that complements the view of the country's current ruling elite. This is unfortunate as archival testimony is best utilised when it is grounded in the social world and historical context in which is created.

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Quranic Schools in Northern Nigeria: everyday experiences of youth, faith and poverty by HANNAH HOECHNER
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Classical Islamic schooling has come under sweeping suspicion, particularly given many policymakers' and journalists' facile equation of Pakistani and Afghan madrasas with the rise of the Taliban and, indirectly, the 9/11 attacks. Critics of madrasas, Qur'an schools and other classical institutions of Islamic learning are often ill-informed. Yet that has not stopped them from arguing that the learning that occurs in such institutions is purely rote, and that this rote learning leads to fanaticism. With the rise of Boko Haram in West Africa, assumptions initially applied to South Asia have been exported, context-free, to Nigeria and beyond. There, such assumptions have intersected with forces dating back to British colonial rule, when authorities – often unsuccessfully – tried to domesticate the *makarantar allo* or Qur'an school. The ambitions for control that British administrators voiced in the 1900s have reappeared, *mutatis mutandis*, in the 'countering violent extremism' discourses of USAID, as well as in the policy blueprints of Nigerian technocrats. I have frequently been struck, in my interactions with Washington policymakers and think tankers, that if they know one word of Hausa it is inevitably *almajirai* (singular *almajiri*), meaning Qur'an school students.

Hannah Hoechner has written a rich, challenging and ethnographically grounded account of the lives of *almajirai* in northern Nigeria, based on her fieldwork in both urban and rural areas in Kano State; the book is paired with a documentary film, *Duniya Juyi Juyi*, that Hoechner made in collaboration with several *almajirai*. Emphasising *almajirai*'s lived experiences of schooling and poverty, Hoechner argues for placing these experiences into 'the wider social and economic contexts in which educational decisions are taken, including religiously motivated ones' (7). This is not just contextualisation for the sake of academic rigour, but rather contextualisation that challenges stereotypes of Qur'an schools as fundamentally backward institutions, out of step with market economies. Rather, Hoechner suggests, 'Qur'anic education becomes a way forward for poor boys and young men in the context of a declining rural economy, a public education system in disarray, and frequent family breakups' (7).

This is an important reversal of the conventional wisdom that suggests that tradition – or even Islam itself – is what holds Muslim societies back and, allegedly,

generates masses of young men ripe for radicalisation. Hoechner's second chapter, 'Fair Game for Unfair Accusations?' addresses this issue directly. She writes, 'The shortcomings of the almajiri system are clearly an unsatisfying explanation for a phenomenon as complicated as Boko Haram' (58). More broadly, she concludes, 'Low-status groups may serve the more powerful in society as scapegoats' (67). Blaming the almajirai serves the well-off not just in the context of Boko Haram but also in the context of attributing responsibility for poverty to the poor themselves.

Hoechner's other chapters investigate various aspects of students' lives, from their roles as domestic servants (Chapter 5) to their entrance into a highly competitive 'prayer economy' (Chapter 8). The value of Hoechner's contextualised approach is evident throughout these chapters. In Chapter 8, she shows how the *almajirai* work to navigate a religious landscape fragmented into Sufis, Salafis and other tendencies, as well as an educational landscape where rival Islamic educational models offer forms of knowledge that Qur'an schools do not. By continually highlighting Qur'an school students' agency, Hoechner provides a crucial, bottom-up complement to the many top-down studies of Islam in West Africa (including my own) that concentrate on religious scholars and elites.

If the book has a weakness, it is that Hoechner does not cover the internal life of Qur'an schools in as much detail as one might expect; aside from a few passages about rhythms and interactions within schools (e.g. 31–32, 118), she emphasises what happens outside the schools. This approach shows how poverty, hunger, and hardship affect students, but it allows for less treatment of the issue of physical abuse by teachers and older students – a charge frequently levelled by critics of West African Qur'an schools. Rudolph Ware's important but uneven book *The Walking Qur'an*, which examines Qur'an schools in Senegal, has attempted to rebut this allegation by reframing corporal punishment as something the participants in Qur'an schools consider intrinsic to proper moral formation; Hoechner might have gone further in addressing this topic in the context of her own ethnographic data.

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To Swim with Crocodiles: land, violence, and belonging in South Africa, 1800–1996
by JILL E. KELLY
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To Swim with Crocodiles narrates the history of the Table Mountain region of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa and makes a valuable empirical and theoretical contribution to scholarship on political authority and political violence in southern Africa. This 'macrohistory of a microregion' convincingly challenges claims that colonial and post-colonial interventions have rendered traditional authorities entirely illegitimate and unaccountable (xvlii). Documenting the complex interplay among traditional leaders, followers and government officials, Jill E. Kelly shows how Table Mountain people have used long-established practices to 'produce the polity of the chief' through their decisions about whom to follow in difficult circumstances (10). Political violence killed thousands of South Africans and displaced