

Amidst excitement over media-savvy Evangelical performances, Marja Hinfelaar reminds us that traditional or mission churches have not gone away in Zambia. Christianity's historical importance is also highlighted as Nicholas Kamau-Goro describes Ngugi wa Thiongo'o's formative Christian experiences. Barbara Cooper, Ruth Prince and Damaris Parsitau dig down into the riveting evolution of reproductive politics in Niger, Luo widow inheritance in Kenya and, in the same country, the very public scene of domineering female pastors. Birgit Meyer steps back to consider some lessons learned from her work in Ghana, and areas that require further research. Harri Englund then contributes from his own work in Malawi on Evangelical media and Islam. Michael Okyerefo argues the case for Evangelical churches as positive resources for socio-economic development in Ghana. Thus, the sheer ubiquity of religion in Africa is highlighted and addressed, in terms of the everyday importance of particular public contestations of Christianity. This helps to avoid portrayals of exotic exceptionalism.

We are thus provided with fascinating descriptions of communities that continue to be characterised by frictions, negotiations and fluidities as they evolve internally and in response to external conditions. James Pritchett argues this well in his compelling opening chapter, describing early mission stations that 'could easily have been the most complex social aggregates on the African landscape'. Having said this though, individuals are not only located inside looking out. The practicality of religion in Africa means that individuals dip in and out, move around, and negotiate. The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) in Durban as described by Ilana van Wyk, for example, strikes me as a 'drive through' church, utilised by some people, some of the time, for particular purposes. Attendees may well find sites of 'community' elsewhere, just not at the UCKG. Therefore, portrayal of African publics in this volume slightly restricts consideration to intra-group actions, when inter-group motion is so important for characterising Christianity in Africa. This point aside, the book is a timely and engaging contribution to an important and growing debate on religion's role in public life, offering a range of fascinating perspectives.

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Season of Rains: Africa in the world by S. ELLIS

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Scholarly attention to African statehood has changed radically over the past two decades. From the institutional determinism of state-building has emerged a literature immersed in historically specific practices of managing power relationships and manipulating political space. Reflecting on this shift, Stephen Ellis cogently takes stock of the present juncture facing both the continent and the academy. *Season of Rains* situates 'Africa in the world' and maps a shrewd course for Western engagement with its challenges.

Writing for an audience at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ellis's immediate concern is to link current development practice to the colonial project that bore it. He argues that the West continues to view Africans as

lingering outside time, unable to find a place in the modern world. Drawn into his critique are shortcomings in the prevailing sovereignty regime, the follies of Afro-optimism and -pessimism, and the persistent Victorian conceptualisation of history as social progress. Thoroughly refuting such hypotheses, Ellis moves on to challenging widely held assumptions that pollute Western conceptions of African agency. Remarking on the continent's putative irrelevance, Ellis emphasises changing forms of insertion in the global political economy, and notes Africa's growing importance in matters of religion, resource scarcity and global criminality. Against the 'tribal animosity' tropes still lingering in Western media accounts, Ellis argues that urbanisation and the constant reinterpretation of ethnicity portend deep shifts in the political demography of coming years. Where it is assumed that Africans are universally poor, he contends that they are finding opportunities in the financial crisis to push back on global patron–client relationships, citing growing markets for securities and an ascendant middle class. The sum effect is a provocative re-evaluation of Africa's past and present trajectory.

Among the study's few faults is the unfortunate tendency to revisit thematic or historical arguments in numerous passages, sometimes at varying lengths and with only tangential relevance to the topic at hand. While such repetition is unavoidable for a wide-ranging analysis, *Season of Rains* would have benefited from adherence to a clearer structure. Moreover, Ellis's profusion of case studies falls short of cumulatively demonstrating his theses. Two paragraphs on Kenya's transition at independence to a one-party state are insufficient to establish the manufacture of political identities (p. 100), while passing remarks on Zimbabwean and Congolese leaders' condemnation of veiled threats to African independence do not fully illustrate evolving notions of sovereignty (pp. 142–4). Additionally, underneath this wealth of vignettes remain substantial geographic blind spots: Tanzania and Botswana garner few mentions, island-states fare no better, and much of West Africa simply goes unnoticed. This oversight undermines the study's generalised conclusions. Ellis might have narrowed his broad observations and opted for fewer, more effective, case studies to support them.

Notwithstanding such quibbles, this work is powerful, nuanced and engaging. Its judicious treatment of state formation consolidates recent scholarly advances, and provides a blueprint for future study of modernity and development in Africa. A terse drawing-together of on-going social, economic and political change, *Season of Rains* is an exhortation for fresh thinking from which all readers will benefit.

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Rescuing a Fragile State: Sierra Leone 2002–2008 edited by L. GBERIE

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Lansana Gberie's edited collection undertakes the ambitious task of reviewing post-conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone. While often cited as a success story,