

## REVIEWS

### CONTRADICTIONS OF RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE

doi:10.1017/S0021853712000497

*Christianity and Public Culture in Africa*. Edited by HARRI ENGLUND. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, Cambridge Centre of African Studies Series, 2011. Pp. ix + 238. \$49.95, hardback (ISBN 978-0-8214-1945-8); \$28.95, paperback (ISBN 978-0-8214-2022-5).

KEY WORDS: African modernities, Christianity, media, political culture.

Adopting a postsecularist approach, the contributors of this volume engage in ethnographic and historical investigations to demonstrate how ‘African Christians have *constituted*, and not merely addressed, domains and categories for moral and political practice and reflection’ (p. 3, emphasis added). Using the notion of public culture, the aim is to open the study of religion in Africa to wider fields than formal politics and popular culture alone. The chapters consider questions about how Christian ideas, practices, and styles assume public significance and thereby cross a variety of boundaries between private and public dominions, rural and urban areas, colonial and postcolonial situations, and mainline Catholic Protestant, and Pentecostal churches. At the same time they generate conflicts with other citizens, viewpoints, and practices. In their rich empirical work on the multiple ways in which Christians make religion public, the authors particularly highlight the mediating practices of religions, such as the use of books and radio, and agricultural and reproductive techniques.

Part I, ‘Missionary and Nationalist Encounters’, starts with vivid descriptions by James Pritchett about the role of Protestant and Catholic missions in enriching the visual, material, and behavioural components of the Lunda’s life in Zambia’s Mwinilunga District in the twentieth century. Pritchett presents rural Africa as a site of innovation and experimentation. For example, American and European second-hand clothing was appropriated and reworked by Lunda youth who thereby commented on global fashion trends. Marja Hinfelaar contests the Pentecostalist interpretation of Zambia’s history as an evolution from a secular, satanic past to a Christian present and future, showing the public role of other churches, in particular the Catholic Church’s input into the scientific socialism debate after independence that helped to shape different Christian and secular imaginations of the nation. Nicholas Kamau-Goro focuses on how Christianity influenced public culture in colonial and postcolonial Kenya through the creative writings of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, who uses Christian allegories in his appropriation and rejection of Christianity as a force of salvation from (post)colonial oppression.

Part II, ‘Patriarchy and Public Culture’ analyses the forms in which very intimate domains become public by looking at Christianity and gender relations, sexuality and reproduction. Barbara Cooper perceptively grasps how family life, ritual performances, and the use of media are all interconnected in the demographic competition of the minority community of evangelical Christians in Muslim-majority Niger. By Christianising the ‘Muslim’ rite of naming a newborn child, children are claimed for and controlled by the Christian community to increase the number of followers. Moreover, the public performance of the naming ceremony becomes the most important way for Christians to reach Muslims, communicating their presence through sound – music, sermons and radio announcements – which

is a technique of staking a claim to the public sphere. Ruth Prince sketches the heated and complex field of public debates among traditionalists, Christians, and human rights activists regarding Luo culture in western Kenya. She examines how the discourses about widow inheritance, which has become a growing concern in relation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, expressed in radio programmes and booklets, have historical precedents in mission Christianity. The diverse Christian idioms are often more compelling to women than human rights discourses. With a rare focus on Pentecostal female leaders, Damaris Parsitau considers how women's participation in Kenya's public culture is a complex mix of empowering and intolerant attitudes and outcomes.

I find Part III, 'A Plurality of Pentecostal Publics', where a variety of contradictory realities and views of the Pentecostal impact on public life in Africa are presented, to be the most intriguing and positively puzzling part of the book. Birgit Meyer's theoretical reflection of ethnographic and historical work on Ghana emphasizes how the very act of going public by Pentecostals is not neutral, as it is embedded in a historical legacy of a distinction between Christianity and traditional religion. Compared to other religious groups, Pentecostals have been able to gain a strong public position by embracing consumer items and mass media, thereby transforming the public sphere. While Meyer underscores the resulting tensions in the public sphere, Harri Englund stresses that Pentecostal mediation of spiritual warfare in Malawi shapes a form of spiritual kinship that advances peaceful public life and encourages democratic civility. The testimonies, Transworld Radio broadcasts, and the shared everyday lives of believers and non-believers in the townships demonstrate the importance of human relationships in proselytising. Yet, with the case of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Durban, South Africa, Ilana van Wyk reveals how intimate relationships are discouraged and Pentecostals are encouraged to engage in one-off contracts with God through large monetary sacrifices that increase distrust in the church and pastors, and amongst church and family members. Next, Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo argues that Pentecostalism contributes to socioeconomic and spiritual development in Ghana by launching social services – orphanages, schools, and medical clinics – resembling the pioneering missionary organisations and ensuring the Pentecostal presence in the communities. The challenge these divergent and inspiring chapters offer for the future study of Pentecostalism and Christianity at large is to further develop a sophisticated and alternative analytical framework to not only capture the public appeal of religion but also its limits, taking into account the indivisibility of the material and spiritual.

*Tilburg University, The Netherlands*

LINDA VAN DE KAMP

## SCHOLARSHIP ON AFRICA IN A TROUBLED COMPARATIVE FRAME

doi:10.1017/S0021853712000503

*Wissenschaft und Dekolonisation: Paradigmenwechsel und institutioneller Wandel in der akademischen Beschäftigung mit Afrika in Deutschland und Frankreich, 1930–1970.* By FELIX BRAHM. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010. Pp. 337. €49, hardback (ISBN 978-351-509-734-5).

KEY WORDS: Colonialism, decolonization, Western images of Africa.

As indicated in his title, Felix Brahm seeks to make a comparative study of scholarship on Africa in Germany and France from the inter-war era through the