

things', she develops the concept of a 'cultural script' in which actors and objects alike are embedded. The result is multiplicities of meaning, a constant and ongoing reworking of (materialized) traditions driven by changing contexts, a theme that Kasfir explores with regard to the changing meaning of objects and the body in the ritual performance of warriorhood. The fourth part, entitled 'commodities', looks at the incorporation of Samburu and Idoma material culture into the artistic and touristic regimes of the West. Again, the trajectories differ. While in the Idoma case the museal tribe and style paradigm allowed for the production of Idoma 'masks', in the Samburu case what mattered was the romantic image/idea of the 'noble savage'. The body substituted the missing mask. As well as becoming part of the regime of collecting, Samburu became part of the regime of looking, with Samburu warriors now appearing both on the celluloid screen and on the sandy beaches of Kenyan tourist resorts as embodied representations of Western desires.

As noted above, the story of the book is twofold. The comparison between Idoma and Samburu also echoes a personal narrative. Both are driven by the quest to come to terms with cultural difference and changing traditions of meaning. The result is a rich and truly mature work, full of insights into artistic production, the idea of newness, and the meaning of the label 'African art'. It breathes the experience of a life devoted to reconciling theoretical sophistication with deep and minute fieldwork; anthropology with art history; a subject-oriented with an object-based perspective. Following such an agenda requires a considerable degree of resistance to the lures of clear positions and easy gains in the 'warrior theater' of academia. Is there a personal echo here? Anthropology has long reflected upon the question of a possible correlation between the site of fieldwork and the writings of a fieldworker. In the case of Sidney Kasfir, one of the freshest minds of African art history, one is inclined to think that such a correlation exists.

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## THE CONTRIBUTION OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES TO DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

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*Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*. Edited by TERENCE O. RANGER.  
New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. xxx + 267. £14.99/\$29.95,  
paperback (ISBN 978-0-19-530802-0).

KEY WORDS: Christianity, democracy, politics/political.

This book is one of a series of four volumes on 'Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in the Global South'. In the words of Timothy Samuel Shah, the series editor, the project rested on the idea that 'democracy in Asia, Africa, and Latin America needed all the help it could get' and its main objective was therefore to try 'to know how much help, if any, evangelicals were giving' (p. ix). Three regional volumes (Asia, Latin America, and Africa) have already come out, while a fourth one covering global issues is expected in 2011. The book is constructed around six case studies on Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and South Africa. Written by a team of African scholars mostly based at African universities – a fact rare enough to be worth noting – the six main chapters produce a wealth of new material on evangelical Christianity and its changing roles in the public sphere (even though most of the research for the book was conducted between 1999 and 2002). Terence Ranger, who coordinated the group, discusses

the main issues at stake in his introduction and updates some of the data in an afterword, while Paul Gifford suggests a few very interesting avenues for further research in a short but incisive response.

'Evangelical' is understood here in a very broad sense, based on Bebbington's four main characteristics – conversion, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism. The advantage is that classical divides between 'historical' and evangelical churches, as well as between African Initiated or Zionist churches and the protestant 'family' are bridged, thereby allowing for an analysis of churches as social movements beyond denominational barriers. The book thus clearly shows that the conventional distinction between politically minded 'historical' churches and 'politically blind' evangelical churches is far too simplistic. As Cyril Imo argues about northern Nigeria, very few evangelicals nowadays 'believe that engaging in politics is satanic' (p. 60), and the chapters about Zimbabwe and Mozambique in particular show how AICs and Zionist churches 'understand their role in society as the "salt of the earth" and therefore necessarily political', as Isabel Mukonyora suggests (p. 135). If this is certainly one of the strong points of the book, the problem with such a broad definition is that it becomes difficult to know what would *not* fall into that category – apart, maybe, from the Roman Catholic Church – and therefore what it is exactly that makes evangelical churches different from others with regards to their political role.

Democracy is also defined in rather broad terms and, as Ranger puts it, in a 'situational' rather than 'standard' manner (p. 7). Setting the central issue of the book against the backdrop of what he calls the 'third democratic revolution' (struggle against presidential 'third-termism', against corruption, and in favour of an actual democratic culture), Ranger argues that the contribution of evangelical churches to democracy must be sought in the way in which they can make 'possible the *operation* of democracy' (p. 17). There also, this broad perspective is what enables the authors to avoid a 'classical' approach that would 'measure' the participation of evangelicals in electoral and party politics in favour of a sociological one that looks at the way in which evangelical values and ethics can influence politics at both the grassroots and the national level. Gender thus appears rather unsurprisingly as a cross-cutting issue, and the chapters on Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe in particular provide very interesting insights on the role of women in evangelical churches with regard to democratization.

All in all, the six case studies show remarkably well how complex, non-linear, and ambiguous is the (potential) contribution of evangelical churches to democracy. Unfortunately, however, by focusing on that purported contribution rather than on, say, statehood or power relationships in general, the book sometimes misses the point. What exactly is 'democratic' about the political processes analysed here remains unclear, and the contours of the proclaimed 'third democratic revolution' are extremely fuzzy, to say the least. Besides, as Paul Gifford notes in his concluding chapter, crucial issues such as the role of neo-patrimonialism in the history of the state in Africa and, more importantly, the way in which evangelical churches relate to the politics of clientelism receive very little attention, if any. The political economy of evangelical churches is also completely ignored, and a chapter on Prosperity Gospel churches or on the Brazilian evangelical multinational Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, for instance, would have therefore been a very welcome addition.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, the book is a highly welcome and important contribution to the study of evangelical churches in African politics.

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