

masters. Nonetheless, the book's Western Indian Ocean scope and accessible writing style make it an important text for World and African History courses.

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Rwanda After Genocide: gender, identity and post-traumatic growth by

CAROLINE WILLIAMSON SINALO

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How can we evaluate scholarship that relies on the distortions and political uses of history? How can an author analyse archival testimonies without situating them in broader historical context? These questions came up as I read through Williamson Sinalo's book, *Rwanda After Genocide: gender, identity and post-traumatic growth*. She uses the concept of 'post-traumatic growth' to evaluate the ways in which 42 survivors of Rwanda's 1994 genocide are able to flourish despite their traumatic experiences of violence. The analysis is clearly intended to honour survivors, yet the argument flounders in treacherous waters. Williamson Sinalo fails to engage with the nuances of Rwandan history. In particular, she overlooks the contested nature of much of Rwandan history, presenting a shallow interpretation of the role of ethnicity in shaping the violence of the genocide and the civil war that preceded it. More critically, she fails to understand how elite Hutu or elite Tutsi both deploy ethnic tropes to maintain power and mobilise their co-ethnics, a topic of intense debate in African Studies. The result is a book of theoretical interest, as Williamson Sinalo argues for a post-colonial understanding of individual trauma; but ultimately one that fails to convince the reader, as individual traumas cannot be separated from national ones.

Williamson Sinalo's analysis relies on an interpretation of history that scholars have long argued against, that is, viewing Rwandan history solely through the lens of the 1994 genocide (see, for example, D. Newbury and C. Newbury in the *American Historical Review*, 2000). Instead of taking a longer view of political history, to analyse themes of state-building, kinship networks and rural life, Williamson Sinalo tells a simple and empirically incorrect historical tale of how the 1994 genocide was a product of colonial rule and ethnic divisions introduced by the Belgians. Not only does this version of history graft neatly onto the official history of the current government, it also denies the agency of Rwandans, both today and in the past. Denying individual agency is against the core tenet of Williamson Sinalo's argument – that Rwandans who survived the genocide have grown in culturally relevant and positive ways.

In eschewing assessment of her interpretation of history, Williamson Sinalo's book relies on a romanticised past in which Rwandans lived peacefully before the arrival of colonial rule (xiii–xvi). This lack of empirical analysis is disappointing as there is so much published on Rwanda's pre-colonial history, in both French and English (for example the collected works of Jan Vansina). Williamson Sinalo's choice is curious, particularly as the available scholarship addresses the motivations to kill (for example the books of Lee Ann Fujii (*Killing Neighbors*, Cornell University Press, 2009) and Scott Straus (*The Order of Genocide*, Cornell University Press, 2006), among many others).

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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Qur'anic 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,