

BOOK REVIEW

AFOLAYAN, Adeshina, Olajumoke, YACOB-HALISO and Toyin FALOLA (eds). *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa: African Histories and Modernities*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 452pp. Pbk. ISBN 9783319749112. €83.

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This remarkable collection of nineteen essays aims at widening perspectives on the socio-political profiles of the Pentecostal movement in sub-Saharan Africa. It therefore circumvents a critical theme that slowly is gaining greater attention in recent years. The volume addresses pertinent Pentecostal features of the complex relationship between politics and Pentecostalism in Africa by presenting a kaleidoscope of case-studies across the continent. Although the volume has a visible Nigerian anchorage, readers will be acquainted with contexts of Pentecostal socio-political agency, for example in Zambia, Botswana, South Africa, Ghana and Kenya. The spectrum of authors, among them a notable number of female scholars, is similarly international and representing multidisciplinary approaches. Such impressive range of portrayals of Pentecostal trajectories within different political economies reverberates the plural composition of the African Pentecostal movement. Methodologically, it supports the editors' claim that the "political essence of Pentecostalism is context-bound" (p. 4). The reader is left with an impression of situatedness and specificity but also with only marginal arrangement of comparative analyses. Featuring for instance a broader spectrum of Nigerian Pentecostal churches, the collection of essays underscores well its heavy weight within not just African but global Pentecostalism, on the one hand. On the other hand, given such a predominant national context one might have expected a stronger impulse on comparative analyses of case-studies presented. The common characteristic of African Pentecostal intersections with politics is seen in the specific postcolonial texture, marking "a unique practice" of Pentecostal political theologizing. What it exactly means is yet left to "further interrogation" into "areas of symmetry and asymmetry, confluences and divergences" (p. 4).

The editors refrain from narrowly defining what they term the "political essence" and the "unique practice" of African Pentecostalism under postcolonial conditions. Rather, the volume uses a tentative framing of politics and the political, as it were, concepts applied interchangeably. This opens broad, if not fragmented horizons of socio-political Pentecostal performance. Some themes addressed in the introduction come by surprise, circumnavigating the correlation of religion and politics in the history of human evolution, or comparing

the Greek notion of *politeia* and the structure of the Ethiopian *agora*. More imposing to the theme of this volume seems to be the careful editorial exemplification of Christianity and politics in Africa, decoding colonial handicaps for introducing Pentecostalism and the postcolonial in Africa. But the “protean character of Pentecostalism in Africa” (p. 9) is genuinely characterized by “a message of modernity and existential meaning” (p. 8) that responds to precarious social cleavages and political instability of post-independent systems of governance. Implicitly the volume corresponds with Ruth Marshall’s interpretation of Pentecostal “Political Spiritualities”, grounded in the insecurity of postcolonial African arenas. “[T]he peculiar evolution of the nation-state within the African postcolonial context makes for a distinctive reinterpretation of Pentecostal creeds in different parts of Africa” (p. 8).

This editorial interrogation of the term “politics” that unfolds a postcolonial paradigm of Pentecostal political agency is not taken up consistently throughout the collection of essays. On the contrary, contributing authors treat the political significance of African Pentecostalism as self-evident. Chapter 2 in the introductory section surveys the growth and diversity of African Pentecostalism in quite classical fashion. The political question raised for the volume, however, remains vaguely addressed. One finds classifications and typologies of classic and neo-Pentecostals; the centrality of politics, let alone of postcoloniality finds no specific elaboration. By referring to Ogbu Kalu’s localization in an African universe, analysis points primarily to the cultural and religious indigeneity of African Pentecostalism. The emphasis on Africanness overstates aspects, for instance of demonology or Biblicism identified as peculiar for African Pentecostalism. Yet, interspersed with the introductory focus on growth patterns are some hints at a political reading of Pentecostal history. The persecutions of church leaders in colonial times touch an imaginative string as it might possibly relate to the post-colonial production of distinguishing collective memories built on categories of martyrdom and other expressions of political identity in selected churches.

There follows a section of nine essays locating the Pentecostal relevance in the wider social and political spheres. Although most of the essays are charting post-independent developments, they also examine historical trajectories on contemporary issues that help to explain the growing prominence of African Pentecostalism. Some of these thematic clusters are familiar to many readers as the almost classic debate on Pentecostalism and its relation to African Independent Churches. The Pentecostal negotiation of so-called “traditional” religious practices may be considered a common theme as well; however, it is analysed in an intriguing presentation of immense power struggles of world-views in Nigerian movies. This section furthermore consists of case studies on often neglected themes in the research on African Pentecostalism. They also throw light on the limitations of Pentecostal agency. Some chapters trace a dualistic or more precisely antagonistic structure of Pentecostal identity formation that informs actual politics. We learn about inter-religious scenarios of competition between a range of anti-pluralist Pentecostal churches and fundamentalist Islam. Another scope is set on ecumenical conflicts and their destabilizing impact on society. Several chapters put greater attention on prosperity theology

and connect it to social transformation. Although its origins are retraced within American milieus, prosperity theology has gained status as a characteristic of African Pentecostalism. Various authors convincingly connect its attracting imaginary to high levels of poverty caused by neoliberal African political economies. Two carefully presented chapters (on the Women Aglow Fellowship, International (Botswana) and the Kenyan Faith Evangelistic Ministries) shed light on the role of women in Pentecostal landscapes predominantly marked by male leadership. They narrate the difficult inroad of female power into public life, but also identify impressive contributions on social justice and empowerment in patriarchal settings.

The next section of articles charts the potential and actual entanglement of Pentecostalism in African politics. Compared to the first section that identified a rather random range of themes of Pentecostal praxis in the public sphere, this section is more compact. It attempts a more theoretical and theological interpretation of the overall theme. This second sample of seven essays relates directly to the editors' design of postcolonial shifts of African Pentecostalism toward political engagement. Discussion of postcolonial theory is seconded by Pentecostal theological visions of better life in this world. Pentecostal cohesion as national and international institutions are connected to nation-building. The empirical surveys address a basic ambiguity of Pentecostal entanglements with politics. The Pentecostal movement appears as part and parcel of state policies of co-optation and clientelist cooperation. But it also tries to keep a heterotopian vision of social order that contradicts the ongoing crises, state repression and even civil wars in many African societies. On the one side, Pentecostal socio-political agency is paralleled with the formation of civic society organizations. On the other side, special mention is made of the change from a priestly to prime-ministerial leadership model, experienced in the rise of mega-churches. Analyses of mega-church involvement in politics is given some priority due to the high membership numbers of such churches in addition to their enormous media presence. Again, the noticeable organization of national and regional church associations help to position them as potential key stakeholders in elections as well as in framing national discourses. Preliminary review suggests, however, a still experiential state in the political output of Pentecostal agency.

In conclusion, the volume offers some remarkable contributions to the discourse on the African Pentecostal impact on public spheres. Amplified by the editors' decision not to define terms in a strict sense, the authors make use of variable concepts of politics, and display diverse methods and themes both in historical and contemporary perspectives. The editors have put together a strong palimpsest of case-studies on Pentecostal notions and practices of politics placing the theme centre-stage in further Pentecostal studies and making it a useful reference source.