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Artwell Nhemachena and Munyaradzi Mawere (editors). *Africa at the Crossroads: Theorising Fundamentalism in the 21st Century*. Publisher: Mankon: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, 2017. 330 pp. Year: 2017. ISBN: 9956764086.

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Theorising Fundamentalisms and Fetishisms in the 21st Century is a thought-provoking book that calls upon its readers not only to situate the concept of ‘fundamentalism’ within the religious context. Artwell Nhemachena and Munyaradzi Mawere, the editors of the volume, argue that fundamentalism is evident when people embrace extreme religious beliefs, scientism, and ideologies of (neo-) liberalism and pluralism without questioning such beliefs. In their analysis, the authors are convinced that in Africa “fundamentalism is a result of enslavement and (neo) colonial dogmatism, terrorism, disinheritance, insularity and authoritarianism” (p.8).

Later on in the text, Nhemachena and Mawere question humanitarianism arguing that it has turned into a ‘global civil religion’ used as an excuse for invading other countries (p. 32). To them, humanitarianism has historically been abused by the West to rationalize colonization and enslavement of Africans. The West has continued to belittle the humanity of Africans, in the postcolonial period, by “force-feeding them with toxic (neo-) colonial, cultural, social, economic and political policies such as the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes” (p. 33). The humanitarian notion that Africans are poor is an idea the authors find fault with. To uncritically evangelize the gospel of “African poverty” and ignore the history of disinheritance of Africans is offensive. It is this idea of viewing Africans as poor that has given the West the justification to “force-feed” them “with contentious genetically modified food” ultimately manifested in despotism (p. 43).

The major weakness their chapter occurs on page 31 where the quotations by Fanon (1963:101-2) and Mamdani (2010: 65) have been repeated twice. There is another quotation error on page 41. In the paragraph that follows after the statement, “Liberty Voice states thus:” it is not clear if this is intended to be a direct quotation. This would have been avoided with deeper editing. Further, the random photos selected from the internet that have no relevance to the authors point make both the photos and text less convincing.

Continuing on, Nokuthula Hlabangane addresses in Chapter Three HIV/AIDS in the African context as a new platform of Othering, raising reservation of the European’s humanity. Thus, the interest shown by the West to study HIV/AIDS in Africa should be understood within the framework of the “ongoing colonial relationship in which one is the master and the other the slave; one the subject and the other, the object” (p. 76). This form of relationship is repeated at “the level of research where” Africa is considered as “the field” while the West, “the fieldworker,” collecting data “for processing into knowledge using Eurocentric frameworks” (p. 71, 76). The author views holding to the “scientific method” without asking critical questions about its genesis a “fundamentalism,” an idea developed further in the chapter. “Poverty and Fundamentalism in Africa” is a theme explored by Oliver Mtapuri in Chapter Four, arguing that

the deliberate continuation of poverty is a form of fundamentalism. Mtapuri posits that poverty fundamentalism is the attitude held by the West to perpetuate poverty in Africa. To reverse this trend, Africans should embrace “radical Africanism” since it is committed to their total liberation. According to Mtapuri, radical Africanism will emancipate Africa because it is devoted to “decolonisation, depoveritisation, refusal to pay foreign debt, de-appropriation of spaces, resources, knowledge, the attainment of total economic freedom, African sovereignty and self-determination” (p. 115). This idea and recommendation is certainly interesting, however, the chapter ends abruptly without a conclusion to synthesize this complex topic.

Moving to religion, Munetsi Ruzivo addresses the conflict of civil and spiritual religion in African states. He states, “although civil religion tends to thrive in secular state and may appear to be not exclusive and intolerant to other varieties or forms of religions in Zimbabwe it may be as intolerant and fundamentalist as evangelical groupings”, (pp. 132-133). The practice of reciting the Pledge in schools, which the Evangelical Church has likened to idol worship, and the gesture of saluting has turned into some sort of state rituals of civil religion intended at instilling national patriotism. Despite disapproval by evangelicals who desire the establishment of a Christian state, the government has been adamant with its project of popularizing civil religion in the country. In my view, this chapter is written with a journalistic tone when an academic style of writing would have been more appropriate. Additionally, the argument is repetitive and contains errors in spelling.

The next topic addressed in this book volume is the conventional approach to civility by civil society organizations in Africa. Informed by Western epistemologies, the standard approach to civility demonstrates a form of fundamentalism that portrays Africans as barbaric, uncivilized and demonic without noticing the incivility of Western plunder and looting. It is a form of fundamentalism that overlooks the West as the one who creates problems in Africa, instead depicting the West as the savior of the continent. Without credible evidence, the chapter by Artwell Nhemachena and Bankie F. Bankie alleges that “a lot of noise has been made about African families and marriages in order to frighten Africans from their families and marriages and into the imperial nets of pornography, bestiality, prostitution, homosexuality, sodomy,” which are presented as evils of the West (p. 165). Since the West presents itself as antithetical to any form of fundamentalisms, it should also accept criticism, a claim the authors did not adequately explore. Tobias Dindi Ong’aria’s chapter, other than it showing an appreciation of Feyerabend’s epistemological anarchism, African science, and how Africa’s intellectual settings could be redeemed to give a contribution to the world, it does not demonstrate the fundamentalism in Western science as suggested in the title.

A new type of fundamentalism is described in this book by Tafirenyika Madziyauswa regarding the fetishization of knowledge in form of the Third Chimurenga. It is argued that the state of Zimbabwe has solicited the services of certain outstanding scholars to formulate a new historiography that evangelizes particular ideas that considers “anything contrary as subversive and antiestablishment (p. 200). Madziyauswa discusses the land reform, patriotic history and Third Chimurenga in order to show how these issues could be interpreted as forms of fundamentalisms and fetishization of knowledge in the country. For clear political mileage, the political leadership in Zimbabwe has used the liberation war as fetish to be worshipped since it is the ideal for measuring both the present and future political leaders in the country. The trend is regarded as “dogmatism of fundamentalisms” that is “insensitive and intolerant” to positions that are “diametrically opposed to dominant viewpoints” (p. 207).

On the theme of development, it is argued that any form of “development that is devoid of inclusivity is nothing but a problem resulting from individuality and academic inequity” (p. 245). The author calls for the rejection of neo-liberalism in defining, redefining and dictating development, and instead advises Africans to seek incorporating their philosophy of Ubuntu. Warnings against development that is monopolized by one section of human society, to define, dictate and impose upon others are presented. To avoid problematic development, deconstruction and redefinition is required in order to meaningfully accommodate the needs of others.

A section of this book authored by Fidelis P.T. Duri examines the political opportunism of many traditional leaders for purposes of self-aggrandizement from the pre-colonial time through the colonial era to the post-colonial period. Since the pre-colonial era, there has always been a clear interaction between political elevation and monopolistic tendencies like free access to material resources and accumulation of wealth by the upper class. Similarly, during the colonial period a significant number of local chiefs cooperated with colonial government to earn comparatively higher salaries. These conditions created tension among local subjects. In the post-independence stage beginning in the year 2000, many traditional chiefs supported the ruling party (ZANUPF because the government’s efforts of according them substantial benefits.

The final chapter in this book focuses on Zimbabwe claiming that the country has not yet reached a condition where a citizen-driven constitution can be crafted due to varying political interests. This claim is based on a critical analysis of the way the COPAC-led constitutional process was conducted. The key political competitors always wanted to dominate and manipulate the process at every stage for political convenience, leading to a “constitution without constitutionalism” (p. 287). As a result, the views common among the people at the constitutional conferences were not considered equally important to those of the dominant political parties.

Overall, the book is an important contribution to African Studies. Even with some gaps, this text would benefit those interested in problematizing the concept of fundamentalism.

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