

Reviews

Powerful Prayer and the Political Praxis of Spiritual Warfare Devices by

ABIMBOLA A. ADELAKUN

London: Rutgers University Press, 2023. Pp. 194. \$125 (hbk) \$34.95 (pbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X23000083

Adelakun's *Powerful Prayer and the Political Praxis of Spiritual Warfare Devices* is an interdisciplinary musing on phenomenality and performativity of spiritual warfare acts. Three different impulses motivated the engagement with and documentation of the rich data and findings of the book. First, the transnational formation of the US evangelical Christians and Nigerian Pentecostal Christians as manifest in the praxis of spiritual warfare for spiritual activism in the realm of local and international politics. Second, the author's fascination with Mountain of Fire and Miracle's (MFM) prayer books. Third, the author's interest in the literature of prayer and how it might be connected to the combative convictions of the spiritual warriors.

The book is divided into four chapters. Adelakun, in the first chapter, focuses on the conceptualisation of prayers as apocalyptic devices deployed to terminate and abort Satanic 'pregnancies' aimed at derailing human destiny and stunting social prosperities. MFM, according to Adelakun, is best known for discerning the operations of malignant supernatural forces and spectacularly praying for their violent annihilation in the name of Jesus (35). The dominant theology of spiritual warfare and prayer rituals is occasioned by some specific life instances of the founder, Dr D.K. Olukoya, a scientist turned demonologist, which were interpreted as 'personal testimonies of overcoming through launching apocalyptic devices against satanic gestations' (31–35). The Church's spiritual warfare rituals are taught and disseminated through publications of literature on prayers and the church's distinct policy of individually training people for spiritual warfare (39).

In the second chapter the author argues that prayers as apocalyptic devices are not independent of the spiritual warriors who deploy them to disestablish the operations of militating forces, but they are ingrained closely into their psyche and being. In this context, spiritual warfare prayers may be conceptualised as ritualistic processes through which spiritual warriors are transformed into God's human warriors commissioned and deployed to execute phenomenal mass destruction at battleground sites (52). Spiritual warriors are therefore God's human weapons 'that have engrafted into themselves, such that their social conduct is justifiably expressible as the true essence of His divine character and a consequence of their being God's human weapons' (55). The author posits that the continual rehearsing and performative acts of spiritual warfare are well-entrenched in the ideology and kerygmatic mission of the MFM.

The third chapter explores how the context and condition of the Covid-19 pandemic spurred the impulses of disestablishing spiritual warriors cutting national divides. Adelakun beams the scholarly searchlight on the ministry of Dr Stella

Immanuel of Firepower Ministries International in Texas. As a physician, Dr Stella Immanuel combined spiritual warfare with conspiracy theories against scientists and science-based organisations. Dr Immanuel disarmed the mortal threat of Covid-19 and claimed a cure for the virus. Her assertion encouraged Nigerian Pentecostal Pastors especially Bishop David Oyedepo who dismissed the pandemic as ‘a noisome pestilence’ (81). Through the case of Dr Immanuel, the author explores ‘conspirituality’, the idea that there is a point of meeting between conspiracy theories, spirituality and disestablishing power.

In the last chapter, Adelakun explores the Christian reaction to the effect of Covid-19 in terms of virtual worship and emphasises prayers as an essential service during the pandemic. Using illustrations from Nigeria and the USA, she examines how discourses of spiritual warfare and rational-cum-moral authority mapped onto nativist and nationalist sentiment during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Powerful Prayer and the Political Praxis of Spiritual Warfare Devices is a fascinating and intriguing text. It engages the conservatism and parochial views of Charismatic-Pentecostal Churches on issues of prayer and political structure from a democratic point of view. I commend this publication to all and sundry as it is a brilliant scholarly work that conceptualises and analyses how the phenomenality of spiritual warfare is deployed as an ‘exoteric’ militarised device to exorcise a public space that is presumably saturated with activities of demons and opposing spirits.

BABATUNDE A. ADEDIBU
Redeemer's University, Ede

Searching for a New Kenya: Politics and Social Media on the Streets of Mombasa by

STEPHANIE DIEPEVEEN

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. 240. \$110 (hbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X23000095

Searching for a New Kenya is a highly penetrating and thoughtful account of public discussion and its role in bringing about social change. By tracing people's participation in public debate in both physical and digital spaces, the book is not only a timely contribution to our understanding of ‘publics’ in an increasingly digitised world but also showcases the potential and constraints of digital communication channels in influencing socio-political movements.

Publics generate shared understanding and political debate through people's attempt to articulate and persuade others of their views and contest and challenge other people's opinions (20). Discussions can take place in varied spaces, including physical (streets and parks) and digital spaces (social media networks). Drawing on data collected from a post-colonial setting (Kenya), the book asks very important questions about why and how public discussion can provide for changes in shared imaginaries in the country (29). This is crucial for a number of reasons. Publics in Kenya continue to be divided along ethnic, religious and regional lines, despite the diversity of discussions and spaces in public debate emerging. Thus, Diepeveen's book asks why, if public debate is active, varied and open, do there not appear to be obvious changes in the terms of debate? (11). Secondly, the ideas around publics in Africa can generally be attributed to two distinct