Book Review

From human security perspectives, religion is viewed as both an agent of violence and peace. In some instances, groups have been mobilized to fight against marginalization, or simply to realize their selfish interests; often resulting into violence with the effect of deaths and destruction of property. Violence organized around religion is always very dangerous since rationality and reasoning are side-skipped when advancing its cause. On the other hand, through its teachings, religion has been able to pose sanctions on followers to realize peaceful endeavors. In politics, the use of religion by elites to mobilize support either for peace or violence is not uncommon. Indeed, religion is the most powerful social cleavage for mobilization since it is based on idealism and belief systems. More often than not such beliefs are not questionable, and whoever questions them is usually regarded by society as an outcast. Hence, religion informs actions emotionally. Normally, the political class in power uses religion to foster peace and legitimacy of their regimes. In the middle ages, for example, it was considered that authority comes from God; and hence no one could question it. In modern times, still religion has been used to legitimize authorities, particularly in African contexts. There are some cases where opposing groups struggling for power or resources use religious beliefs to mobilize and justify their existence, demands and actions. Africans being so religious, the magnitude religion has on human security is deep and omnipresent.

In their edited volume *Religion and Human Security in Africa*, Ezra Chitando and Joram Tarusarira observe that across diverse countries and contexts in Africa, religion has direct implications for human security. They maintain that while some individuals and groups seek to manipulate and control through the deployment of religion, religious belief is also a common facet of those working towards peace and reconciliation. In a comparative perspective, the volume examines the impact of religion on human security across Africa.

The book contains fifteen chapters, including the introduction written by a team of contributors from different countries, thereby reflecting diverse African contexts. Acknowledging that religion can be used to incite violence as well as encourage peace, the chapters employ an interdisciplinary exploration of the ethics, sociology, and politics around these issues. The volume is well written and articulated. Moreover, having all the authors from Africa, means that the volume reflects lived-experiences and evidence of religion and human security from the African perspective.

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A review of this volume depicts a number of gaps. To start with, the volume acknowledges that religion can play a role of instigating violence or forging for peace. While this is a known fact in the literature, the dominant view across all chapters is simply that religion is used to cause violence. There is no specific chapter dedicated on religion and peace. This approach limits our understanding of the subject matter of religion and human security in a wholistic perspective. Moreover, almost all chapters focus on two dominant religious groups: Christianity and Islam. Other religious groups, particularly the traditionalists, are simply mentioned by passing. One would want to know which religious groups have a large number of followers, or how religion and state co-exist; and whether religion is inherently peacefully or violent. These critical issues that are central to the subject matter of human security are not covered.

Again, the entire volume lacks a thorough, systematic and robust literature review on the correlation between religion and human security. By ignoring this, it is difficult to appreciate the state of the art in terms of what is already known, and hence the concrete contribution of this volume to knowledge. In the introduction, the editors simply claim that the literature on religion and human security is a nascent academic project, and that scholars have not yet developed interests around the topic. This claim is not justified since the volume lacks a robust literature review: it is an established fact that the subject matter of religion and politics is as old as political philosophy. Related to that, the volume lacks a general framework that could guide the discussion and scope of all chapters. One gets the impression that each chapter is a standalone contribution that is not related another. As a result, the editors fail to come up with a chapter on conclusion. This makes it difficult for readers to easily grasp the final position of the book, and its contribution on the subject matter.

Yet, on another case, it appears that the editors were in a hurry to publish this volume since there are obvious omissions in terms of organization and editing. To be sure, for example, Chapters Four and Five lack sub-titles "Introduction" as opposed to other chapters. Likewise, the book does not have one system of referencing – while in some chapters full names of authors are provided, in others they contain surname and initials of first names. Finally, throughout this volume, several concepts have been used as given—e.g., human security, democracy, state, peace and insecurity—to mention a few. In academics, concepts are not fixed, and therefore carry with them diverse meanings. To bring readers to equal terms of understanding, such concepts need to be defined and limited to a particular academic genre.

Despite the aforementioned shortcomings, this is a much-needed volume on religion and human security in Africa. This is because religion is an agent of peace or violence. Moreover, most Africans are religious and could be involved in peace or violence through mobilization by elites. Individual authors in the volume have been able to bring forth some realities of religion and peace in Africa. Therefore, the volume will be of significant interest to any scholar of religious studies, African studies, political science, sociology of religion and anthropology, as well as peace, conflict, and reconciliation studies.