



BOOK NOTE REVIEW

Maxwell, David. *Religious Entanglements: Central African Pentecostalism, the Creation of Cultural Knowledge, and the Making of the Luba Katanga.* Africa and the Diaspora: History, Politics, Culture. Madison, Wisconsin, USA: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022. Pp. xx + 352. US\$80 (hardback); US\$33 (paperback).

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David Maxwell's *Religious Entanglements: Central African Pentecostalism, the Creation of Cultural Knowledge, and the Making of the Luba Katanga* presents a nuanced exploration of the intricate interactions between Pentecostal missionaries and the Luba-speaking peoples in southeastern Katanga² during the colonial period. Published in 2022, this work examines the multifaceted relationships that shaped cultural knowledge and identity formation in the region. Maxwell's study focuses on the Congo Evangelistic Mission (CEM), established in 1915 by William Burton. Through eight chapters, the book explores how the CEM's Pentecostal framework influenced its engagement with Luba society, resulting in significant cultural exchanges. The narrative commences with an examination of Burton's role and the CEM's ecclesiology, underscoring their rejection of worldly status and emphasis on strong community interactions. The following chapters outline the historical transformations of the Luba people, the dynamics of their encounters with missionaries, and the collaborative production of knowledge that arose from these interactions. Maxwell highlights the reciprocal nature of this relationship, demonstrating how both missionaries and indigenous peoples contributed to the creation of cultural knowledge and the formation of Luba identity.

One of the book's significant strengths is its challenge to conventional

¹ Dr Ngoy is from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

² Editors' note: Katanga was a historical region in what is now southeastern DRC. For a time in the 1890s, it maintained independence between the colonies of Belgian Congo and Northern Rhodesia, before being incorporated into the Belgian Congo. Today the region is primarily divided between four constitutional provinces of DR Congo: Tanganyika, Haut-Lomami, Lualaba, and Haut-Katanga.

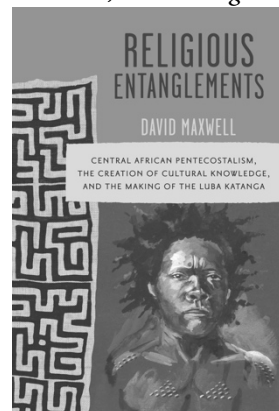
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narratives which often depict Western missionaries as unilateral agents of change. Maxwell presents a more balanced perspective, showcasing the collaborative nature of knowledge production between missionaries and the Luba people. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the entangled relationships that influenced cultural and religious transformations in the region. The book's structure, with each chapter building upon the previous one, offers a comprehensive and coherent analysis of the subject matter. Maxwell's meticulous research is evident in his use of diverse sources, including missionary records, colonial documents, and indigenous accounts, which enrich the narrative and provide multiple perspectives. Furthermore, the book's focus on the role of indigenous agents in the missionary enterprise highlights the agency of African actors in shaping their own religious and cultural landscapes.

Although Maxwell's work is thorough and insightful, some readers may find the dense academic prose challenging. The detailed analysis, while comprehensive, can feel overwhelming for those who are not well-versed in the subject matter. Furthermore, the book's focus on CEM and the Luba people, while providing an in-depth case study, may limit its applicability to broader discussions of missionary activities in other regions of Africa. Some readers might also wish for more exploration of the perspectives of ordinary Luba individuals, as the narrative predominantly centres on prominent figures and overarching structures.

It was a privilege to review this book. As a native of Luba Katanga, I find it inspiring and motivating to see how my people contributed alongside the missionaries in creating knowledge about African Christianity. As a reviewer from the Luba Katanga tribe, I believe this book is not only intended for the Luba of Katanga; it highlights the global implications of Maxwell's work. This book adds to broader discussions about missionary encounters, cultural exchange, and the co-creation of religious worlds. However, while *Religious Entanglements* provides a compelling and nuanced analysis of the interactions between Pentecostal missionaries and the Luba people, the book's cover raises concerns regarding representation. The imagery used fails to accurately reflect the Luba people's historical engagement with literacy, knowledge production, and cultural agency, which Maxwell articulates so effectively in the text. Instead, the cover appears to depict the Luba as passive, primitive (a term often employed by the author to refer to the native Luba of Katanga) or illiterate, a portrayal that contradicts the book's emphasis on Indigenous agency in shaping religious



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and cultural knowledge. Given that Maxwell's research highlights the dynamic intellectual exchanges between the CEM missionaries and the Luba, the cover fails to communicate this complexity visually. This disconnect between content and design is problematic, as it risks reinforcing outdated stereotypes rather than challenging them. A more representative visual choice—perhaps incorporating historical artefacts, texts, or depictions of Luba intellectual traditions—would better complement the book's rich analysis. This misalignment underscores the importance of involving local voices in decisions about representation, ensuring that visual narratives do not undermine the scholarly arguments within.

Religious Entanglements is a seminal contribution to the historiography of missions in Africa. Maxwell's nuanced analysis offers a fresh perspective on the collaborative nature of cultural and religious exchanges between missionaries and indigenous peoples. Despite its dense prose, the book provides valuable insights for scholars interested in the complexities of missionary activities, knowledge production, and identity formation in colonial Africa. It stands as a testament to the intricate web of relationships that have shaped the continent's cultural and religious landscapes.