

definition of ‘primary sources’ discounts the kind of fieldwork done by authors such as Matfess and MacEachern; surely interviews with people who have belonged to or interacted with Boko Haram are primary sources too.

Problematically, Kassim’s approach aligns with a wider kind of ‘jihadology’ popular in the US, Europe, Israel, Russia and elsewhere, where analysts proffer uncritical readings of jihadist sources as the key to understanding and defeating jihadism. Jihadology is an approach that emphasizes ‘doctrine, tactics, propaganda and members’ over efforts to place jihadist movements into their political and social contexts. As Darryl Li has written in his ‘A jihadism anti-primer’, it becomes ‘a secularized form of demonology [that stems] from a place of horror that shuts down serious thinking about politics’. Jihadology relies heavily on jihadists’ self-presentation and is implicitly hostile to attempts at critical source analysis, particularly if those techniques undermine the image of jihadists as masters of conspiracy and conquest.

The *Reader*, then, is on one level an effort to compile texts and let the reader judge their implications for herself or himself, and it will hopefully be used this way. Yet, on another level, it is a step towards portraying Boko Haram as a one-dimensional manifestation of global jihadism and an incipient threat to the US. David Cook, from an early point in Boko Haram’s evolution, explicitly made this argument, writing in his 2011 paper ‘Boko Haram: a prognosis’ that ‘the pattern of Boko Haram’s attacks, and threats of attacks, focuses more and more on interests that touch US economic concerns in the region [i.e. sub-Saharan Africa]; the group has not avoided both contact with globalists (in Somalia, presumably) and citing the United States specifically as an eventual target’ (p. 3).¹ The politics behind the *Reader*, then, are hard to ignore.

The study of Boko Haram is advancing, and yet there remains something elusive about the movement itself. Perhaps it is the difficulty involved in hearing directly from the group’s fighters – their perspectives come to us only indirectly, either through propaganda, as with the *Reader*; or through the voices of defectors, as with Matfess or with the quantitative studies by Mercy Corps, the United Nations Development Programme and others; or through the experiences of the societies around them, as MacEachern relates. Even as studies of Boko Haram become more sophisticated, the propensity to mistake the part for the whole sometimes means that the movement itself retreats out of sight, and the study of Boko Haram merely orbits the group rather than comprehends it.

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Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: the history of an African jihadist movement*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press (hb US\$29.95 – 978 0 691 17224 8). 2017, 352 pp.

Attention paid to Boko Haram, the terrorist insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people and the displacement of millions more, often overreaches, veering into the sensationalist or speculative. Particularly since the organization pledged *bayat* (allegiance) to the Islamic

¹See <<https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/boko-haram-a-prognosis/>>.

State in 2015, certain circles in the media, policy bureaucracies and the academy have been quick to attribute shifts in the organization's tactics and developments in the region more generally to the 'internationalization' of the conflict. Alexander Thurston's *Boko Haram: the history of an African jihadist movement* is a delightfully grounded account of the group's rise that emphasizes the local dynamics that gave rise to the group and that continue to shape its activities.

The book helpfully divides Boko Haram's history into five phases: a phase of 'open preaching' between 2001 and 2009, a 'decisive turn to violence' in 2009, the group's turn to terrorist tactics between 2010 and 2013, its territorialization in 2013–15, and the internationalization and internal fragmentation that has characterized the organization from 2015 to the present (p. 2). In each chapter of the book, Thurston provides a meticulous account of the religious and political debates, as well as the intra-elite dynamics, that characterized the period, and describes the conditions that lead to the shift to the next phase.

Throughout the book, Thurston deftly integrates primary material from the group (including recorded sermons, written theological interpretations, correspondence between Boko Haram and other jihadist groups and within the group, and propaganda videos) with journalistic accounts, social scientific writing on the group and local history. He powerfully argues that Boko Haram has both theological and insurgent predecessors in the region, while paying due attention to the group's theological and tactical innovations. He asserts that 'Yusuf invoked a set of interrelated doctrines as the religious basis for his political stances' and describes how *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* (described as 'exclusive loyalty ... to those they consider true Muslims, and complete disavowal ... of all others), *al-hukm bi-ma anzala Allah* (or a belief that 'the true Muslim had to choose between God's laws and those of man') and *izhar al-din* (operationalized to mean that 'personal piety alone was insufficient: Muslims needed to confront the fallen society surrounding them') shaped the organization's tactics and development (pp. 109–10). Thurston provides a description of the sect that unpacks what it means to be a Salafi organization, what it means to advocate for jihad, the space between the two distinct concepts, and the significance of Boko Haram's merging of them.

Thurston's description of the theological debates of the time is nuanced without being unapproachable and is entirely engrossing. The description of Yusuf's radicalization, a process described by Thurston as being facilitated by a combination of 'hardliners' within his own organization, frustration with the local political order and increasingly acrimonious confrontations with mainstream Salafis, is the most holistic treatment I have seen to date. The book takes religion seriously without engaging in sensationalist accounts, 'othering' adherents or securitizing Islam; it is a model of how to engage with ideologies and religion in conflict-affected settings to be emulated in a variety of fields. The intensity and characteristics of aspects of Boko Haram's violence have prompted some to describe the group as nihilistic; Thurston, however, engages with and contextualizes the theological positions of Boko Haram's leaderships that underpin the adoption of some of these tactics.

Boko Haram must also be commended for the unprecedented level of detail paid to local politics. Thurston details how seemingly unrelated and underexplored facets of the Nigerian political sphere affected the group's development. For instance, Thurston describes how urban sprawl in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, where Boko Haram's founder, Mohammed Yusuf, first established his own mosque and religious community in the 1970s, resulted in 'a host of associated health and development programs, but also a breakdown in hereditary religious authorities' mechanisms of surveillance and control', further catalysing

competitions over influence and legitimacy (p. 46). These details and discussions give the book heft and texture without making it clunky.

One of the few criticisms that can be levelled against Thurston's book is its focus on intra-elite dynamics. While there may be nuanced theological debates at the elite level, raids on Boko Haram camps frequently describe finding charms and amulets among the belongings of the foot soldiers that would be considered un-Islamic *bid'aa* (innovation) and condemned. The gap between the organization's theological policies and day-to-day practices is not addressed in the text. Having acknowledged this shortcoming, it is undeniable that *Boko Haram* is one of the best existing accounts of the rise and characteristics of the movement. Thurston's nuanced study of the local political dynamics that accompanied the founding and evolution of Boko Haram is simply unparalleled.

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Jason Bruner, *Living Salvation in the East African Revival in Uganda*. Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press (hb US\$99 – 978 1 58046 584 7). 2017, 191 pp.

Bruner offers a thoughtful account of the experiences of a group of Christians in Uganda who claimed the identity of *balokole*. This group emerged in the 1920s within the Anglican Church in Uganda and the Great Lakes region and saw themselves as different, shaped by experiences of public confession and inner conversion. The name *balokole* refers to their choice 'to walk in the light' as a community.

In the introduction, Bruner sets out his approach and sources, explaining his decision to focus on a sometimes elusive subject in colonial Africa – the lived experiences of 'ordinary' Christians. Many existing sources favour elites, and the literature on religious revivalism and the Anglican Church of Uganda is often a story of missionaries, priests and leaders, a story of ethnic and national politics and state formation. Through oral history, Bruner also wants to explore the development of a distinct identity within a mainline church. Bruner suggests that we have too easily elided notions of agency with dissent, and too often overlooked the work that goes into pursuing a distinct identity within a mainline church. He aims to show the creative ways in which Christians pursued their faith within what often looked like a fairly uninspired historical mission church.

Chapter 1 documents the history of the *balokole*. There is an argument concerning the retreat of the missionary Anglican Church into a largely bureaucratic world – 'lives regulated by timetables and programmes' – opening up space for those concerned with a more spiritual Christianity. In an echo of recent work on contemporary 'born again' movements, 'witchcraft' was often held up as a force holding people back and an attachment that needed to be broken (a theme developed further in Chapter 2). But there was also a political edge. Although Bruner wants to emphasize the ways in which *balokole* reconciled their distinct identity with their membership of the Church of Uganda, he cannot entirely escape the way the movement challenged political institutions and authorities.

Chapter 3 looks at the way 'living in the light' meant taking up new bodily experiences, including the often physical experience of conversion as well as the codes of dress, diet and personal conduct that defined the *balokole* lifestyle. Here, he is able to make an interesting set of arguments about gender. Many