

Reviews

Women and Power in Postconflict Africa by AILI MARI TRIPP

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. 292. \$29.99 (pbk).

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Here is a book full of hope about gender transformation in the political arena of African countries emerging from conflict. It is sobered by the realities of limited civil and political rights in undemocratic countries and buoyed by what women's movements have accomplished. Sixteen post-conflict countries have higher rates of female representation in politics and more women's rights reforms in their constitution and legislation than non-post-conflict countries in Africa (not a reason to celebrate conflict).

Tripp accounts for these changes by noting disruption in gender relations unique to countries experiencing conflict, a rise in women's mobilisation, and changes in gender norms promoted by the international community. The evidence for these claims comes from three case studies – Uganda, Liberia and Angola – and comparative reviews of peace agreements, post-conflict constitutions, legislative reforms and women's emergent leadership. In chapters devoted to each of the three countries, Tripp shows how the presence of three factors – women's changed roles, women's organising and new international gender norms – explain the emergence of women's political leadership in Uganda and Liberia, and how the absence of these factors in Angola made that country less likely to adopt policies advantageous to women.

In terms of explaining the failure of liberation wars to liberate women to those of us disappointed by the aftermath, the case study of Angola is the most interesting. Tripp describes the lack of an independent women's movement in Angola and the lapse in donor funding of civil society after the conflict as well as other contributing factors: the want of democratisation and a peace process to end the war. Peace negotiations, Tripp writes, offer an opportunity for women to introduce gendered constitutional and legislative reforms, but Angola's war ended in 2002 without an agreement. And, whereas both Uganda and Liberia experienced a transformation in elite configurations as new political institutions dislodged older elites and coalitions, the same political elites remained in power during and after the war in Angola, as did the ruling party.

Tripp's book is a valuable contribution to the post-conflict literature on gender. As a political economist I wanted to know more about the impact of national wealth and resources on outcomes for women. Both Uganda and Liberia lack significant resources of importance to the global economy, but are strategic allies of the governments of Britain and the United States, respectively. Angola is blessed (or cursed) with plenty of oil and a considerable trove of diamonds, of vital interest to transnational petroleum corporations (2002 was

the height of peak oil debates) and the diamond industry (in the midst of negotiating the Kimberly Process, concluded in 2003).

Tripp compares Angola to Chad and Eritrea, two other countries that did not see appreciable gender gains, but both lack the substantial natural resources that attract international investment (or interference). Oil wealth provided Angola with alternative sources of funding and, according to Tripp, provided donors with justification for their financial withdrawal. While Tripp credits the international community with pressing for gender reforms, still open is the question of how the end of these conflicts played out in the global economy and with what consequences for women. What advantages do international entities – inter governmental, non-governmental and private sector – gain from supporting or suppressing women's rights in post-conflict countries?

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The Financialisation of Power: How Financiers Rule Africa by SARAH BRACKING
London: Routledge, 2016. Pp. 193. £95 (hbk).

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Sarah Bracking has compiled a concise and well-integrated book with many strands of argument drawn together at quite varied levels. Her compact analysis makes connections in unexpected and constructive ways. The relationship between finance and capitalism has long been problematic. In liberalism and Marxism the question of 'circulation' has taken up a lot of ink. In the guise of financialisation it could be said to be both popular and vague. What is the role of money in the real economy? The classical liberals considered this role to be entirely secondary and the Marxists have traditionally been ambivalent about it. In recent years the rise of money has been correlated with the weakening of political economy as an approach. Bracking adopts an eclectic, she would say empiricist or critical-realist, approach combining questions of some detail with very large-scale inquiries ranging from fiddling manipulation through mundane African corruption to the future of capitalism. At one extreme, money takes on a power of its own, at another it offers a simulacrum of the real economy, whatever that may be taken to be.

Financial manipulation has obviously taken off in recent decades; and the range of issues on offer here is sometimes bewilderingly complex; it is hard to see how narrow questions of traditional political economy in Africa can somehow throw light on the end of neoliberalism. Quite arcane concerns with the theory of circulation range from the manipulation of local funding and services to global daily turnover of foreign exchange (\$5.3 trillion). The main empirical focus is on Southern Africa and Bracking's many collaborators here are drawn from that region. This lends a parochial touch to what is in effect a global analysis.

Given the explicit concern with classic Marxist traditions, it would be reasonable to locate financialisation within a broader Marxist history. Marx and Engels argued for a revolutionary outcome to Victorian capitalism of which the three components of surplus value were profit, interest and rent, with profit subordinating the others to its logic. This established a rather static analytical framework