and understandings of the meaning of documents in situations of contested identity in Africa. In these and other chapters we see the way that the provision of expert testimony serves to both interpret and create, and the role the refugee status determination process can play in the fixing of new meanings, understandings and categories. In this way, the process becomes an important site of enquiry on the production and reproduction of understandings of 'Africa'.

Second, how do we understand the 'task of the expert' and the role of experts as a new area of practice and professional responsibility for African Studies scholars? The volume highlights the productive power of the 'expert' and questions relating to the potential tensions between knowledge and the use of knowledge. McDougall's chapter, in particular, points to the 'elephant in the room' (p. 130) in discussing the ethical tensions between providing knowledge in the context of a constructed determination process and resisting the artificialities and power relations inherent in the determination process itself. This is compounded by Campbell's chapter on the UK experience and the fact that 'adjudicators have promulgated decisions that provide a semblance of legal stability when, in fact, they arrive at radically different conclusions, often erroneously, on the same issues' (p. 117). Likewise, Hepner's consideration of 'the expert as critically engaged activist' (pp. 229–33) draws the contours of the range of challenges and opportunities raised by participation in the process as an expert witness.

This remains the core challenge that remains unresolved in the volume, and needs to be the focus on discussion and debate within the field: can there be ethical guidelines to inform participation or non-participation in status determination procedures as an 'expert'? This question should be the source of informed debate within our professional associations. Ultimately, *African Asylum at a Crossroads* is important reading for those interested in the changing course of refugee protection in the global North and those interested in the representation of 'Africa' in and through bureaucratic processes – but it is especially important reading for anyone who receives an invitation to serve as an expert witness and is not sure how to reply.

JAMES MILNER
Carleton University

Education and Empowered Citizenship in Mali by JAIMIE BLECK
Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. Pp. 207. $39.95 (pbk).
doi:10.1017/S0022278X16000471

For 20 years after single-party rule ended in 1991, Mali became an apparent exemplar of democratic transition. Despite droughts, pervasive poverty and illiteracy, this landlocked Sahelian republic nonetheless managed to hold successive multi-party elections, orchestrate a peaceful handover of presidential power, and create a new system of local-level elected officials. As its economy and media were liberalised, Mali gained favour with Western governments and NGOs. Perhaps the most spectacular indication of Mali's progress during these two decades concerned primary school enrolment, which more than tripled. The near-collapse of the Malian state in early 2012, subsequent

international military intervention and the spread of terrorist violence exposed the fragility of the country's democratic gains. Yet, political scientist Jaimie Bleck suggests, expanding Malian education has fostered something essential for democracy: better-informed, more politically engaged citizens.

In her book's introductory chapter Bleck lays out three questions at the core of her investigation. How does education affect students' political engagement and civic knowledge? How does children's education affect parents' political engagement? And, in light of the variety of schools available in Mali (secular public and private schools, Islamic madrassas, and others), do all school types have similar effects? To answer these questions in 2009 she conducted an 'immersive survey' in 10 school districts across Mali and an exit poll of voters in a Bamako municipal election; the author discusses her painstaking, ethnographically informed methodology in the second chapter. Bleck goes on to analyse the local concept of electoral politics in Chapter 3, noting the considerable distrust with which ordinary Malians came to view their elected officials and the modern state amid weak, ideologically deficient political parties, corruption and a climate of impunity exempting the powerful from the rule of law. Mali's successful implementation of procedural democracy notwithstanding, ordinary citizens often felt excluded from governance and had limited capacity to hold leaders accountable between election cycles.

The good news, Bleck contends, is that education is helping to close Mali's 'democratic deficit'. Following a review of Mali's educational landscape and of the differential effects of the post-1991 schooling expansion in various segments of society (Chapter 4), the author brings her findings to bear in answering the book's three core questions. Chapter 5 shows that schooling produces politically knowledgeable subjects almost irrespective of school type. The relationship between knowledge and political participation is hardly uniform, however, and voter turnout has been lowest for Mali's least- and most-educated citizens. Chapter 6 describes a virtuous cycle between citizens gaining access to state services, such as public schooling, and taking part in the political process. Parents with children in public schools appear to benefit from this cycle more than parents with children in madrassas: the latter are 25% less likely to vote than public school parents. The inability to read or speak French, Mali's official language – long a barrier to political participation – is in no way ameliorated by schooling in Arabic or local languages, as the author notes.

Stepping back from the Mali-specific focus of its body chapters, the book ends by pondering the relationship between schooling and democracy in Africa more generally. Bleck concludes that schools' most valuable contribution to the establishment of democratic institutions lies not in their curriculum but in the skills they transmit to students: 'the process of becoming empowered starts with access to information, which increases awareness of one's own ability and of the possibilities for and constraints on one's activities', she writes (p. 121). Under the Millennium Development Goals and their successor, the Sustainable Development Goals, the push to expand schooling throughout Africa is fostering more democratic citizens.

If some of these findings seem unsurprising, others raise intriguing questions. Why, when Mali's state schooling system is in dire straits, do most public school parents surveyed rate the quality of their children's schooling quite highly?

What must be done to convert Malians' broadening pool of democratic knowledge into equally broad-based democratic participation? If credible political candidates do emerge from outside the secular-schooled Francophone elite, will they prove any more responsive to citizens' needs? The book draws attention to these and other topics for future research.

Education and Empowered Citizenship in Mali is straightforward and accessible, leavening its discussions of political science literature and quantitative data with excerpts from the author's interviews and focus group discussions. The matter-of-fact structure, previewing each major finding before discussing it in detail, then recapitulating it, makes the message clear if somewhat repetitive. It bears emphasis that, because all data analysed here were collected prior to the events of 2012, this book does not assess Malians' views of and responses to their country's present crisis (which Bleck has analysed in other recent publications). It nevertheless provides vital context for understanding how Mali's democratic deficit developed and why citizens of an ostensibly democratic country stood by or even applauded while a clique of junior military officers chased an elected head of state from power. Resilient democratic institutions depend on informed, engaged political subjects, and this book makes a strong case that broad-based schooling is one necessary condition for closing Africa's democratic deficits.

BRUCE WHITEHOUSE
Lehigh University

Bargaining for Women's Rights: Activism in an Aspiring Muslim Democracy by ALICE J. KANG
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. Pp 241. $27 (pbk).
doi:10.1017/S0022278X16000483

Many people consider women's rights and Muslim democracy as antithetical to each other. Conventional wisdom would have us believe that a Muslim majority country would be an unlikely place to see the adoption of women-friendly policies. In her terrific book, *Bargaining for Women's Rights*, Alice Kang dispels this idea through her thoughtful research and richly nuanced analysis of negotiation over women's rights reforms in Niger. She explains the variation in policy-making in Niger over time and argues that Islam *per se* is not the fundamental constraint to the adoption of women-friendly policies. Instead, mobilisation for or against policies, and the overall political environment are critical factors in determining policy outcomes.

Niger is a natural experiment because it offers the opportunity to analyse the process of adoption, or rejection, over time, of different legal instruments across different political landscapes (authoritarian, transitional, democratic). This wonderfully comprehensive analysis of women's rights and activism draws on extensive fieldwork in Niger. Kang explains the importance of bargaining and the complexity in the positions of various actors who negotiate women-friendly policies. While activists supporting CEDAW and a gender quota law were successful, counter-mobilisation of conservative religious activists (both male and female) prevented the passage of a family code and the ratification of the Maputo