

## GENDER

**Balhis Badri and Aili Marie Tripp, eds. *Women's Activism in Africa: Struggles for Rights and Representation*.** London: Zed Books, 2017. vi + 250 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$29.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-78360-908-6.

Women across the African continent have a long, documented history of mobilizing as individuals and groups to challenge and change their social, political, and economic situations. Whether trying to resist colonial actions, reform national laws, seek political office, or secure economic resources, African women have never been passive victims unwilling or unable to struggle for their imagined futures. Balhis Badri and Aili Marie Tripp's co-edited volume, *Women's Activism in Africa*, contributes to our understanding of African women's activism by detailing the history of women's mobilizations in eight countries: Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Tanzania, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Sudan. Almost all the essays were written by African scholars from the continent, many of whom have participated as leaders in the very movements they are documenting.

Tripp and Badri frame the case studies with a clear, concise introduction. They review the broad factors that have created the conditions for the recent flourishing of African women's activism since the 1990s, including "the diffusion of international norms regarding gender equality, new donor strategies, political liberalization, and the decline of conflict" (4). Their purpose, however, is not just to detail the contexts, contributions, and challenges of these histories, but to demonstrate how the stories and strategies of these women and their organizations have informed global debates and actions. African women, they argue, have asserted their political priorities (such as girls' rights) in global agendas for women's rights, improved their political representation, become leaders in finance and entrepreneurship, developed innovative tools such as gender-budgeting to lobby governments, and contributed to peacemaking and peace building. Badri's conclusion reviews these arguments and suggests some of the challenges and contributions that lie ahead for African women activists.

Although the eight case studies emphasize different perspectives, each one carefully distills, periodizes, and contextualizes the shifting dynamics of women's struggles in their country. Some contributors focus more on key institutions, like national women's groups in Sierra Leone (Nana Claris Efua Pratt) and South Africa (Sheila Meintjes) or market women's groups in Ghana (Akua Opokua Britwum and Angela Dziejdom Akorsu), while others emphasize the political and intellectual contributions of individual women (Lilia Labidi). Most authors, like Aili Marie Tripp (for Tanzania) and Regina G. Mwatha (for Kenya) interweave stories of institutions and individuals, attentive to how the legacies of colonial gender politics, frictions of class and age, the power of the state and political parties, and other factors influence women's agendas and accomplishments. Lilia Labidi's essay on Tunisia is one of the most original and compelling. She draws on

life histories with Tunisian intellectuals and activists to document how they developed and deployed literary tools, or what she calls a “literature of denunciation,” in their struggles for rights and representation. Fatima Sadiqi (for Morocco) and Samia Al Nagar and Liv Tønnessen (for Sudan) offer nuanced analyses of how secular, Islamic, and Islamist trends have shaped debates about women’s rights and the formation (and, at times, fragmentation) of the women’s movement in their respective countries. Several authors examine the sometimes vexed relationships of some African women and women’s movements with “feminism” (Sadiqi, Meintjes, Tripp, Labidi), although, as Tripp and Badri explain in their introduction, recent generations of African activists have claimed and created explicitly feminist organizations, journals, and theories based on their own experiences and struggles.

Together, the essays demonstrate the diversity of histories, agendas, achievements, and challenges confronted, created, and overcome by women activists and their organizations. Although the definition of “activist” is perhaps a bit too porous at times (are female Members of Parliament considered “activists” by themselves or others?) and the differences among “women” (especially what has often been cast as “elite” and “grassroots”) are more often obscured than emphasized, the case studies should dispel any lingering misconceptions about the supposed passivity or complacency of African women in regard to the status quo. Badri and Tripp have assembled a remarkable collection of essays by impressive, accomplished women that challenges masculinist histories of political change and challenges. The collection should be read by scholars and students in African studies and women’s and gender studies.

Dorothy L. Hodgson  
Rutgers University

New Brunswick, New Jersey  
dhodgson@rutgers.edu

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## **HEALTH AND DISEASE**

**Kristen E. Cheney. *Crying for Our Elders: African Orphanhood in the Age of HIV and AIDS*.** Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017. 239 pp. Contents. Abbreviations. Acknowledgments. Notes. References. Index. \$35.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-226-43754-5.

**Ann Swidler and Susan Cotts Watkins. *A Fraught Embrace: The Romance and Reality of AIDS Altruism in Africa*.** Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017. xvi + 280 pp. Contents. Preface. Acknowledgments. Notes. References. Index. \$35.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0-691-17392-4.

Twenty years ago, in the relatively early days of a global response to the AIDS epidemic, the UNICEF report *Children on the Brink* (1997) introduced a new definition of orphanhood—any child under the age of eighteen who