

Romero's final statement, 'Traditions and customs do not give way easily' (p. 316) reiterates the theme running throughout the book, that generations of African women have been scarred by the regressive tendencies of their predecessors. This line of reasoning obscures the shifting ideas, strategies, and adaptations African men and women have made to improve women's livelihoods over time. Contemporary college students reading this text will need to challenge Romero's underlying assumptions about the stagnancy of gender in Africa.

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## SAFE AND SECURE

*Africanizing Democracies 1980–Present.*

By Alicia C. Decker and Andrea L. Arrington.

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**Key Words:** Democracy, governance, social movements.

Alicia C. Decker and Andrea L. Arrington's *Africanizing Democracies: 1980–Present* opens with a discussion of Sudanese businessman Mo Ibrahim's 2007 creation of the Mo Ibrahim Prize, a significant prize awarded to democratically elected African heads of states who have recently and willingly left office. For Decker and Arrington, the need for such an award hints at one of the central questions underpinning the past thirty to forty years of African political history. 'Why', they ask, 'must there be a prize for African leaders who fulfill what *should be* the mandate of every leader in every state of the world?' (p. viii) As Decker and Arrington vividly illustrate in their book, the answers to such a question are not easily forthcoming. Rather, they require an analysis of intersecting political, social, and economic interests, values, actors and expectations. These include institutions and authorities ranging from local and national political parties and interest groups; to the continent's various governmental infrastructures; to the World Bank, IMF, and United Nations. As a result, through chapters on politics, economics, health and healing, women, gender, and sexuality, and security, *Africanizing Democracies* offers a short and engaging survey of the promise and tensions of the thirty-plus-year push for a particular form of African democracy.

In structuring their book, Decker and Arrington by and large organize their chapters around a number of prominent case studies designed to highlight the push and pull effects of the continent's various democratization efforts. In their opening chapter, for instance, Decker and Arrington frame their discussions of African politics around more narrow analyses of Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement in Kenya; the end of South African Apartheid; Ellen Sirleaf Johnson's 2005 election to the Liberian presidency and, more broadly, high-ranking women in African leadership positions; and the Arab Spring. Similarly, their chapter on women, gender, and sexuality explores topics including the African Charter on Women's Rights, academic feminism, female circumcision, and

LGBTQ rights. The aim of these case studies is to provide the book's intended undergraduate audience with specific, digestible, and engaging episodes and issues in Africa's recent past through which to approach the political, social, and economic complexities of African democracy. In most cases, the examples the authors highlight have the potential to open up such debate, particularly in terms of what turned out to be their most innovative chapter – the final one on security. Eschewing the expected emphasis on terrorism, the authors approach the question of security through a focus on access to food, gender-based violence, corruption, and peacekeeping. In doing so, they present a narrative of security where the local and social outweigh the often totalizing and obscuring rhetoric of the so-called war on terror.

Overall, as a book designed to survey Africa's recent political history for the undergraduate classroom, *Africanizing Democracies* achieves its goals. However, it is also a relatively safe book. Only in the most perfunctory fashion do the authors attempt to question their own and the scholarly use of such core concepts to the book as 'democracy', 'democratization', and 'good governance', let alone the very idea of 'Africanizing democracies'. They initially present their use of the phrase 'Africanizing democracies' as an analytical lens through which to explore how 'Africans have constructed and reshaped democracy in order to fit their own political ideals and agendas' (p. x). What emerges, though, is a reading of Africa's recent past through the often static and confining prism of a neoliberal democracy that marks so much of the political scientific and journalistic work published on Africa. By settling for this definition of democracy, the authors in turn silence the political and institutional processes through which such an understanding of democracy has developed – often in contested fashion – into near hegemonic prominence in African and international political circles over the last three decades. A short undergraduate survey would be the ideal place to do the historical work of complicating this narrative of African democratization. Not only would such a discussion push the analytical boundaries of our idea of 'democracy', but its inclusion in such an undergraduate text would create a unique venue through which to introduce students relatively early in their academic careers to the diversity of ambitions, uncertainties, and pressures comprising twentieth- and twenty-first-century African political thought, aspirations, values, and realities.

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## SITES OF EXCEPTION

*HIV Exceptionalism: Development through Disease in Sierra Leone.*

By Adia Benton.

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