



then their own leaders must show the way' (331). Is it true that these people have not yet made *any contributions* to the planet? The author then pledges 'eleemosynary assistances' (328) to southern Africa promising that 'we saw our program as nurturing, and creating an esprit de corps for young African political leaders that would in many respects be modeled on the long-established collectivity (and methods of selection) of Rhodes Scholars' (328). Certainly, the Rhodes Must Fall protests demonstrated how most southern Africans feel about Cecil John Rhodes. Similarly, it's unclear why he continues to use colonial terms like CiShona (232) instead of Chishona or Shona, which language speakers have always used. Furthermore, elevating Mandela above his ANC colleagues in terms of constructing robust state institutions is implausible. Because of such new revisionist histories, others have recently accused Mandela of conceding to neocolonial demands during the independence negotiations. Finally, *Overcoming the Oppressors* advises southern Africans to adopt more neoliberal economic policies which have been shown to be more damaging than helpful.

## NOTES

1. 'Google to pay £183m in back taxes to Irish government', *The Guardian*, 25 November 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/nov/25/google-to-pay-183m-in-back-taxes-to-irish-government>, retrieved on 3 August 2023.

2. D. Rogers et al., 'Decolonisation and methodological nationalism: placing empire at the centre of analysis' *Society and Space*, <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/decolonisation-and-methodological-nationalism-placing-empire-at-the-centre-of-the-analysis>, retrieved on 3 August 2023.

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**The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa: family, religion and the state** by LUDOVIC LADO.

Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2023, Pp. xii+161.

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This book focuses on how gender reform takes place in the West African context. It focuses primarily on the Ivorian state and reflects on how hegemonic modernity is domesticated by engaging with the politics of promulgating the 2013 family bill which, among other things, affirmed the joint headship of the family in Ivorian society. In the first chapter of the book, the author lays out the political context in which this bill was promulgated suggesting that the bill was possible only because the executive wanted it passed presumably in compliance with the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which the state had ratified nearly two decades earlier. The political reasons why the executive wanted it passed at that particular point in Ivorian political history is not clearly articulated in this chapter. Later in the text, the author rectifies this gap somewhat when he states that 'many reforms are undertaken more to please international donors and to access funds than out of concern for the advancement of the cause of the reform itself' (p. 123). Lado goes on to suggest that the Ivorian government wanted to be able to access funding from the

Millennium Challenge Corporation, hence the swift passage of the bill. A more careful, evidence-based analysis would have been useful here.

Chapter 2 lays out the socio-demographic characteristics of those Ivorians who opt for civil marriages thus subjecting themselves to the tenets of the 2013 family bill. The findings are that overwhelmingly, this is an urban, educated, financially secure subset of the Ivorian population. In Chapter 3, we are introduced to the perspectives of average citizens regarding the content of the bill and find that the majority have views which are counter that supported by the bill. Both chapters reinforce the view that the bill is elitist in orientation and that it does not derive from the perspectives/desires of average citizens. Chapter 4 offers a contrast to the Ivorian situation by describing the collaborative manner in which the Nigerien, Senegalese and Malian states, each of which has a predominantly Muslim population, worked on their gender reform bills. In these contexts, reforms were not as transformative as in the Ivorian context. In Chapter 5, the author provides a critique of hegemonic approaches to policy formulation and argues instead for a dialogic and intercultural framework. This is followed by a concluding chapter which sums up the main arguments of the book.

Although CEDAW has been in effect since the 1970s, scholarly attention to its translation into law in the African context has only begun to gain momentum in the last decade with the work of Breton-Le Goff (2013) as one major contribution to the field. Given the paucity of material on the subject, this is an important contribution. In addition, it offers much that calls for critical reflection and debate. One such debatable idea is the manner in which by framing the Ivorian gender reforms as 'interventionist, elitist and undemocratic,' (p. 7) the author erases the agency of Africans, particularly African women in this process. While Lado does acknowledge African agency and its importance in the introductory sections as well as on p. 125, this is not systematically embedded in the text. Thus, we are provided, for example, with very little understanding of the gender dynamics at play in the process of promulgating the 2013 family bill. While Yasmina Ouégnin, a female who was opposed to the bill is profiled in some detail and the basis of her arguments is articulated, Anne Désirée Ouloto and Matto Cissé Loma, two female supporters of the bill are only given perfunctory attention. While their views are articulated, we have no sense of who they are as if to suggest that positionality, in their case does not matter. In so doing, this text unfortunately suggests that ideas of gender equality are alien to the continent, a point that many African feminist scholars such as Steady (1989), Amadiume (2000) and Oyěwùmí (2003) have worked hard to correct.

A second concern is the extent to which Lado's conceptual framing of modernity as not simply a Western project, but a colonial one in the African context is adequate. As the author puts it, 'I understand modernity in Africa as the outcome of interaction between the modern West and Africa in the framework of colonization' (p. 5). Such an analysis overlooks the point made by the famous Ibadan-based historian, Ajayi (1969) that colonialism was simply one episode in Africa's long history, not 'the' episode in the continent's history. Although the author acknowledges Ajayi and others when he says 'as historians have shown, the people of pre-colonial Africa were as familiar with change as those of any human society' (p. 17), he does not take this perspective into consideration in the rest of his analysis.

The undue emphasis on the colonial framing of Africa's history is reflected thirdly in an uncritical acknowledgement of the hegemony of religious organisations. If gender reforms are 'interventionist, elitist and undemocratic', so also was the process by which Islam and Christianity came to be accepted as normative on the

continent, a point the author concedes when he notes that ‘Colonialism in Africa brought new religions with it, fundamentally changing the African ways of life. Islam and Christianity each affected African societies’ (p. 59). In neighbouring Ghana, where I originate, Iheanacho (2014) provides a fascinating account of the country’s first missionary, Theophilus Herman Kofi Opoku (1842–1913). The way in which he was introduced to Christianity, before colonialism by the way, and eventually became a missionary cannot be said to have been non-interventionist, popular and democratic and yet, here we are today, in a country that is overwhelmingly Christian. Indeed, Ghana is one of the only two countries in the world, in the company of Georgia, where its younger population is more religious than its older population (Pew Research Center 2018). In contemporary Ghana, being Christian is in many ways the norm. So, it may well be that the 2013 family bill in Ivory Coast was devoid of public – read Christian and Islamic – interventions, but that makes it no less interventionist, elitist and undemocratic as it would have been if the perspectives of religious organisations were taken into account. The fact is that the religious beliefs held by contemporary francophone West Africans were initially imposed on them in non-democratic ways. In that respect then, the origins of these religious beliefs are similar to the origins of contemporary ideas about family espoused in the 2013 bill; both were imposed as acts of hegemonic modernity. As my Francophone readers will well understand then, *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*.

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**Women and Power in Africa: aspiring, campaigning, and governing** by LEONARDO R. ARRIOLA, MARTHA C. JOHNSON, and MELANIE L. PHILLIPS  
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Executed in the framework of some of the foremost scholarship in the fields of comparative politics and women’s studies, *Women and Power in Africa* mobilizes empirical