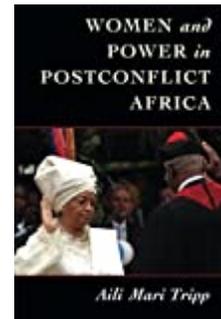**Aili Mari Tripp.** *Women and Power in Postconflict Africa.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 315 pp. $29.99 (paper), ISBN 978-1-107-53587-9.

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The media and popular narratives often portray women as powerless victims of seemingly incessant wars and conflicts in Africa. In contrast, *Women and Power in Postconflict Africa* offers a strikingly different reality of African womenâs experiences on the ground and the importance of womenâs movements and activism in pursuing justice and change. This book provides a rich, historical, and comparative account of the impact of women and conflicts in shaping evolving gender regimes. One of the bookâs greatest strengths is its disruptions of the essentialist arguments often tied to sub-Saharan Africa via its recognition of African womenâs agency in shaping their own destiny as well as international, mainstream discourses of gender equality and empowerment. Aili Mari Tripp accomplishes this by exploring the causal relationship between womenâs rights and leadership and post-independence armed conflicts in Africa through in-depth mixed research (both quantitative and qualitative) that spans two decades (1980s-2000s).

Focusing on three case studies, Uganda, Liberia, and Angola, Tripp uses cross-national comparative data to examine how conflicts have impacted gender regime change–changes in gender roles and gender relations–in these countries. She found that a number of factors account for changes in gender relations and represen-

tation in African countries that ended bloody and extended civil wars after 1985: 1) gender disruptions, 2) womenâs movements, and 3) the spread of new international gender norms (p. 33). Tripp explores how the circumstances of war in all three countries have propelled women into new roles as leaders in their homes, communities, and at the national level. The disruptions of gender relations and norms encouraged women to not only raise their voices against the atrocities of war, but also organize to effect the political change required for peace to prevail. The organizing of womenâs movements during the war was in turn a decisive causal mechanism for their greater political representation and leadership in womenâs rights advocacy. Importantly, Tripp points that if emerging international norms and discourses on gender equality have helped advance womenâs agenda in Africa, it was the energetic and relentless domestic womenâs movements that ultimately prompted the most transformation for African women. These causal mechanisms explain the difference in outcomes between Uganda, Liberia, and Angola. In both Uganda and Liberia all three factors coalesced to create strong engagement by women and greater political power in the postconflict society. In contrast, in Angola, the extensive gender disruptions experienced during conflict did not translate

into extensive gender policy reforms. The abrupt way in which peace was secured–there was no peace negotiation and agreement–and the lack of democracy in Angola set it apart from the cases of Liberia and Uganda.

The book beautifully narrates the ways in which African women were able to leverage their gendered position in society to lay the foundation for peace, acquire political power, and influence the constitution-making process. Forcing their governments to engage in legislative reforms, African women in essence were critical actors in shaping local, regional, and international gender norms. Trippâs analysis is a refreshing and much-needed endeavor to rectify discourses that tend to exclude African women from global processes of gender justice and equality. That women were able to able to create pathways to change in such violent and chaotic contexts speaks of the resilience and importance of womenâs organizing, and complicates the literature on human rights and conflict.

The bookâs main purpose was to highlight the profound gendered transformations that can occur during and after war. However, there is little discussion of the outcomes of womenâs ascension to political and legislative positions for the wider society. In particular, attention to class and geographical location is lacking. Clearly, having more women in position of power does not automatically yield more power for *all* women. How does womenâs leadership in high places translate into less oppression for low-income women, or women in rural and marginalized spaces? Although Tripp briefly alludes to the gendered inequalities that persist in society, she mainly discusses them in the context of customary laws. Hence she argues that despite constitutional protections, womenâs unequal treatment is maintained through customary law. Tripp states, âconstitutional protections for customary law â¦ often pose obstacles to enacting legislative reforms that protect womenâs bodily integrity, â¦

womenâs access to property, â¦ and the related unequal treatment of women as propertyâ (p. 179). While it is true that customary law may hinder legal and constitutional progress, Trippâs discussion of gender-based violence was propitious to a complex examination of the range of factors that contribute to the unequal treatment of women in society. Culture (or traditional practices) is not the only culprit of oppression and the eliding of women. In this sense, Trippâs focus on customary law works to elide the intersections of race, class, and gender with processes of global oppression. Hence, little is said about how global processes (including colonialism) and the adoption of neoliberal policies by African states work to consolidate systems of oppression that affect women in particular. Global inequalities and their outcomes (violent subaltern masculinities, poverty, unemployment, feminization of poverty) generate an environment ripe for gender-based violence and other forms of unspoken violence against women, especially in marginalized communities. While the book offers fascinating historical details of womenâs struggles during war, it stops short of providing similar insights on contemporary barriers to gender equality.

Despite these shortcomings, this book is a testimony of the transformative power of the âlocal.â It challenges notions of âAfricaâ as an undifferentiated space of destruction and powerlessness. It highlights women, often posed as automatic victims, and their ability to fight back and obtain change. Most importantly, it calls for more geographic studies on development and gendered activism. *Women and Power in Postconflict Africa* is a powerful contribution to the scholarship on gender and development in its attention to historical and contextual analyses of womenâs rights and empowerment. It also extends the literature on civil society through its attention to the heterogeneity of womenâs organizing in the region and the spaces of possibilities that exist even in dire circumstances.

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