IdPS Interdisciplinary Political Studies
Volume 8 Issue 1 / July 2022
ISSN 2039-8573 online
DOI: 10.1285/i20398573v8n1p223
Published by
University of Salento
Department of Human and Social Sciences

BOOK REVIEW

Gender, Protests and Political Change in Africa, edited by Awino Okech

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 258

Reviewed by
Mohamed Mahfouz AKADIRY NZAMBA
Social Sciences University of Ankara

Several countries aspiring for democracy and social justice, including the recognition of youth and women's rights, have steadily used non-violent insurrections as a tool to challenge oppression from tyrannical governments. African countries are no exception. In this book, Awino Okech and all the co-authors explore how youth-hood and gender collaborate in raising non-violent movements by challenging state power for social development and political change in recalcitrant patriarchal societies. Through non-violent protests, young men and women trigger popular uprisings making use of their soft power to create social change. Indeed, one might understand the interest of the authors in these themes through their theoretical backgrounds in the fields of gender, feminism, activism, sexuality, and the nation-state in their manifestations in post-conflict societies.

In the book. many African societies appear as been shaped by male-based political and economic perspectives that have been shrinking rights and freedom space for women. For decades after independence, the patriarchal societies have been involved in non-action by the state on violence against women and gender non-conforming people. Therefore, considering that women and youth are among the most fragile and neglected categories, women's rights organizations and youth movements found a common objective to fight together against injustices from authoritarian regimes. However, despite the increased awareness of the current generation of youth and women's rights movements of their potential to claim for political change, there is still the critical threat of co-option by political parties or governments. More specifically, in Sub-Saharan countries such as Senegal, African youth movements and especially students' protests have been criticized for being manipulated by political opposition parties in order to transform them into real opponents of the governmental system. However, how can this threat of instrumentalization of youth be dealt with to foster the most appropriate social structures for women including gender issues? This task may be difficult to examine but it deserves to be approached.

In addition, although the authors do mention patriarchy as a crucial cause of gender and women's injustices, they fail to explore other potential ways on how to deconstruct the patriarchal structures that prevent gender from accessing certain rights or being free from all forms of violence.

The protest action from women and youth including both young men and women is the central element to produce socio-political change through a well and strong organized civil society. In this vein, the book argues that students' movements against authoritarian regimes have been decisive in changing political bases of power in countries like Senegal,

CONTACT Mohamed Mahfouz Akadiry Nzamba, mohamedmahfouz.akadirynzamba@student.asbu.edu.tr, at Social Sciences University of Ankara - Political Science and Public Administration Department, Turkey

Uganda, Sudan, and South Africa. Also, in most of them, digital means have been used by female figures in a highly demonstrative way to fulminate sexism, racism, sexual harassment, injustice at work, and violence in heteronormative societies. To some extent, as stated in the book, the extensive sexual violence seems to be a trigger for the collective action of women in countries like Egypt and Tunisia to stand for their rights and gain a certain power in the socio-political arena. However, although the regimes where the "Spring Revolution" began often claim to make efforts in favour of women, it is possible to notice a significant decline in gender equality and women's backdrop in structures of power in those countries. The outcomes of these protests have not been effective enough to sustainably impact women's lives in the long run. Even though, in some African countries, women's protests and activism have been so meaningful that they contributed to ousting certain dictators such as Omar El Bashir.

As anticipated, while challenging autocratic regimes for socio-political change, youth-hood movements including students and feminist protests are not exempt from corruption and manipulation for the benefit of partisan interests and their leaders can be co-opted. The main problem around co-optation is that once the leaders of protests, either women or men, are approached by governments or opposition for diverse reasons laying between personal interests and ethnic arrangements for power, their actions become biased. Once "corrupted" by the system, they are very often forced to put away their convictions. In the meantime, their political power serves to establish well-rooted and sustainable societal structures in the frame of social and political programs which do not violate youth and especially gender issues. Apart from ousting some dictators, in some contexts women's protests are not that effective to enhance sustainable change or gain gender equality because of the way they are organized and construct their discourses is not elaborate enough. Additionally, when some dictators have been ousted from power, it does not mean that the repressive regime has vanished as new forms of authoritarianism may be established. One disadvantage of the book is its failure to emphasize the question of how to deconstruct patriarchal structures that must be understood as the ideal gateway to equal rights between women and men. This would also integrate African societies' new values and practices that do not violate women's rights or relegate them as inferior to men. In this frame, educated young Africans and open to world diversity will be favourable to fight against anti-gender behaviours and even ethically equipped to turn down political parties or any other entities' proposals aiming at corrupting them to drop the protests.

Besides that, and remarkably, the authors suggest opportunities to embrace new conceptual views to give rise to an understanding of gender freedom in public commitment. However, the threat of co-optation, the corruption of youth, and the deconstruction of patriarchy represent critical issues to be examined deeply.

ORCID
Mohamed Mahfouz Akadiry Nzamba 0000-0003-2037-6702