

list of similarities is tempered by clear differences—charismatic versus technocratic rule, Nkrumah’s “real autocracy” compared with Mbeki’s constitutionalism (15, 17–18)—the comparison rests essentially on declarative assertions of likeness rather than on systematic political analysis. The philosopher-king category is followed by “a second typology of African leadership,” that of prophetic rule (originally developed by Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg). This creates some difficulties. If “Mbeki did not inherit the charisma of his predecessor” Mandela, how relevant is the category if the first characteristic of prophetic rule is that “these leaders are charismatic” (15, 20)? The second main feature of prophetic rule “is its religious dimension” (21), yet neither Nkrumah nor Mbeki appears to demonstrate this in the slightest. The chapter ends with a more promising comparison using Shakespearean tragic figures: Nkrumah as Julius Caesar, a dictator laid low in a coup, and Mbeki as Coriolanus, his demise brought on by obduracy and pride (22–24).

Chapter 5 introduces another comparison, this time between Mbeki and General Olusegun Obasanjo, the Nigerian president, but eschews rhetorical devices such as philosopher-king and prophet in favor of a well-informed account of their relationship. The two men enjoyed a close personal relationship dating back to Mbeki’s diplomatic service in Nigeria during Obasanjo’s tenure as military head of state, but in 1999 both were elected to the presidency of their own country. One was “a pipe-smoking, Sussex-trained economist and intellectual; the other a career soldier and engineer,” and both enjoyed international respect but faced economic and political difficulties domestically (124–25). They were instrumental in shaping the African Union (AU), having persuaded their continental colleagues that the body—unlike the sclerotic Organisation of African Unity that it replaced—had the right to intervene in the internal affairs of member states in egregious instances of human rights abuses. They jointly promoted the pursuit of conflict resolution in Africa, lobbied the G8 on behalf of Africa, and drove

the New Partnership for Africa’s Development process, “which Mbeki had largely devised” (126). They championed bilateral relations between their countries in a broad range of fields. All in all, “Mbeki’s strategic partnership with Nigeria was crucial” to his vision of an African renaissance (122). Adebajo makes a cogent and coherent case that it was his foreign policy—especially its Pan-African outlook and diasporic reach—“that is likely to be the most noteworthy legacy of Thabo Mbeki’s presidency” (111).

Chapter 6 applies this analysis to Mbeki’s activities after his removal from office. He brokered the agreement to create Zimbabwe’s government of national unity, was involved in peacemaking efforts in Sudan and the Ivory Coast, and headed a United Nations panel to investigate illicit financial flows from Africa. Adebajo also identifies “a visibly liberated Mbeki” shorn of the responsibilities of power, who “transformed himself into a public intellectual—as opposed to a philosopher-king” (151). Initially, Mbeki studiously avoided writing or speaking on South Africa’s domestic politics, but continued to promote regional integration, democratic governance, and socioeconomic development across the continent. But from October 2012 onward, Mbeki began to express his concern at the state of the nation under Zuma—although his critique was frequently oblique and coded.

A brief final chapter considers Mbeki’s mixed legacy in fairly conventional terms. His positive achievements in extending services and facilities to the Black majority must be weighed against the AIDS debacle, “the greatest blot on his record” (159). The points made earlier about Mbeki’s Pan-Africanism and foreign policy activities are (rather redundantly) repeated, and the book closes by returning to the Nkrumah/Mbeki comparison. In Ghana, anger at Nkrumah transmuted over time into a nostalgia for his memory. Will South Africans, Adebajo asks, “also come to view Thabo Mbeki more favourably with the passage of time” (164)?

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PAMELA SCULLY. *Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*. (Ohio Short Histories of Africa.) Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016, Pp. 128. Paper \$14.95.

This volume in the Ohio Short Histories of Africa series provides a comprehensive account for a general audience of the life of the first woman to be elected head of state of an African country, Liberia’s Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (b. 1938). Sirleaf was democratically elected to two terms in office and served from 2006–18. She has published her own autobiography (*This Child Will Be Great: Memoir of a Remarkable Life by Africa’s First Woman President* [2010]), and there are other evalua-

tions of her policies and her political career, but this text is a useful and concise summary of her life story. Scully argues that Sirleaf is above all a technocrat, committed to neoliberal development agendas and the use of foreign capital and expertise to jumpstart Liberia’s economy after fourteen years of devastating internal conflict. While her two terms in office saw great success in reducing the foreign debt burden and restoring a sense of normalcy and security to daily life,

her lack of attention to social justice issues and the aspirations of the poor continue to shadow her legacy. There is a good account of Sirleaf's early support for convicted war criminal Charles Taylor, a connection that led the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission to suggest that she be banned from political office for a period of thirty years. Scully does not address widespread charges that Sirleaf tolerated extensive corruption among her political appointees, and to her practice of promoting the business interests of friends and family members. She does not analyze Sirleaf's surprising turn away from her own political party and lack of support for Joseph Boakai—the man who served as her vice president for two terms—in the 2017 election. The book concludes that Sirleaf, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, commands respect internationally but remains a contentious and divisive figure in her own country.

Scully does an excellent job of setting the context in which the young Ellen Johnson came of age. Although she is often associated with the elite class of Liberians claiming descent from nineteenth century African American settlers, three out of Sirleaf's four grandparents were from indigenous groups (her maternal grandfather was a German trader). Her father was the first person of "native" background elected to the national legislature but his health problems compromised the young Ellen's educational prospects and led her into a brief, early, and unhappy marriage to James Sirleaf. A scholarship for her husband to the University of Wisconsin in 1962 led to her first chance to study abroad, at a small business college in Madison where she earned an accounting degree, and ultimately to a master of arts degree from Harvard. Scully situates the Sirleafs and other Liberian students in the United States at the time in the context of 1960s social movements for expanded civil rights; the generation exposed to these campus movements returned to Liberia to challenge entrenched hierarchies and the single political party that had ruled since the 1870s. Scully emphasizes that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was never a radical; she worked with many administrations and governments during her career, including the military regime that took power violently in 1980. Scully notes that she was "attached to government, rather than to revolution" (36), but maintained working relationships across many political divisions. Her road to the presidency was built on years of experience in the Liberian government, at the United Nations and the World Bank, and in private financial institutions.

Scully is clearly interested in Sirleaf as a trailblazer

for women in Liberia, but aside from a brief paragraph about the reforms ushered in under President W. V. S. Tubman and a comment that the small size of the Liberian elite created career opportunities for educated women, she does not develop this theme. There is little discussion of the long history of prominent women in public roles in both indigenous communities and in the national public sector. When Sirleaf was elected, most foreign commentary focused on her as an anomaly in traditional, patriarchal West Africa, and scholars such as Stephen Ellis believed that it was the long years of war and disruption that opened doors for women in political life (Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Roots of an African Civil War* [2007]). Scully's account does not challenge this analysis. A book such as this, intended for a general audience, is something of a missed opportunity to correct the common trope of the "downtrodden African woman."

In general, this book is a better biography of Sirleaf than a history of Liberia during the past half century. Scully cites popular and journalistic sources rather than the scholarly literature on Liberian history and historiography. Her bibliography includes surprisingly few Liberian academics (prominent among the missing are Amos Sawyer, D. Elwood Dunn, Zamba Liberty, and Carl Patrick Burrowes) and she makes no mention of the work of political scientist Gus Liebenow, usually the starting point for political histories of Liberia in the twentieth century. The impact of the Cold War and of US policy toward Liberia, emphasized in most analyses of the civil war and its aftermath, is downplayed. The role of the Carter Center in postconflict Liberian affairs is perhaps overstated.

Although I have not read other volumes in the Ohio Short Histories of Africa series, it is clear that this is not intended as a work of scholarship like the Oxford Very Short Introduction series. In comparison with John Parker and Richard Rathbones's *African History: A Very Short Introduction* (2007), this book is written in simple, engaging language and does not address questions of historiography or competing arguments in the historical literature. Ohio University Press describes the series on its website as a selection "of informative and concise guides, lively biographies, and succinct introductions to important topics in African history." *Ellen Johnson Sirleaf* will be useful to high school students and lower-level undergraduates looking for a quick set of facts about a significant historical personage.

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