

**Stucki, Andreas. *Violence and Gender in Africa's Iberian Colonies: Feminizing the Portuguese and Spanish Empire, 1950s-1970s*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 362 pp.
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The literature on the history of the final years of European colonial empires has expanded sharply in the last decade or so. As a consequence, the histories of global decolonization have benefited from chronological, epistemological, and thematic recalibrations. For instance, the adoption of the notion of 'late colonialism' as a more adequate analytical framework for understanding the processes of the devolution of power has shown the limitations of a strict approach to the events and individuals that consummated the transfer of sovereign jurisdictions. At the same time, the innovative inclusion of topics that are frequently the subject of critical historical assessments in different colonial contexts, such as health, popular culture, or development, has made it possible to adopt a more comprehensive and refined approach to those turbulent, and far from obvious, years. Efforts to connect what previously appeared to be barely communicating analytical levels—the "local," the "metropolis," the "international," and the multiple instances of transnational entanglements—have resulted in a more complex and stimulating understanding of the global momentum towards decolonization. Some of these changes have been introduced in tandem with earlier historiographical developments, such as the introduction of a gendered perspective or the mobilization of the method of comparative analysis.

Unsurprisingly, these trends are disproportionately discernible in the historiographies of anglophone and francophone imperial trajectories. Andreas Stucki's impressive *Violence and Gender in Africa's Iberian Colonies: Feminizing the Portuguese and Spanish Empire, 1950s-1970s* (Palgrave, 2018) represents a remarkable and highly successful effort to bring the modern Iberian empires into this conversation. By looking at the Portuguese and Spanish empires' final years, Stucki convincingly reminds us that the history of late colonialism and decolonization cannot be fully apprehended without taking into account the Iberian experiences, which took place within rather distinct chronological, political, and socio-

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cultural frameworks from those that governed the so-called transfers of power of the British, French, and Belgian empires. Although similarities should, and can, be identified, the efforts of the Portuguese and Spanish authorities to reform and preserve their colonial empires took place within a substantially different normative and geopolitical context.

Stucki's book thus examines the final years of both empires (and their immediate and long-term legacies) from the perspective of what he calls the "feminization of empires". In other words, he is concerned with the increasing importance of gender roles (and their possible instrumental uses) in Iberian late colonialism, both in the political drives to sustain the imperial project as well as in the multiple initiatives that were taken to contest its continuation, with the aim of producing new, post-colonial nations. Based on his thorough study of a lengthy array of sources (ranging from imperial and colonial official reports to letters sent by African subjects to women's organizations and newspapers and magazines), the author successfully demonstrates how the Iberian empires considered their female subjects to be a fundamental tool, albeit often a passive one, to forge a new sense of imperial unity and belonging, both internally and internationally. Covering the period from the late 1950s to the very moments of political independence, and including the colonies of Angola, Mozambique, the Spanish Sahara, and Equatorial Guinea, the volume addresses the ways in which women were seen as pivotal in the efforts to legitimize a new brand of colonialism, proclaimed to be a modern version, after the juridical integration of the former colonies into new, "multi-racial," "pluri-continental" polities. Mostly viewed as mothers and wives, women were seen as privileged agents for inculcating an allegiance to the Iberian empire-states, in a context in which the longstanding markers of the juridical distinction between "natives" and "citizens" were legally abandoned.

In his clear and elegant prose, the author provides a compelling and balanced set of arguments to demonstrate that, despite the official rhetoric regarding the production of a *new* Portuguese and Spanish woman in colonial contexts, the projects ultimately failed. The main goals of such endeavors—to successfully reproduce an 'Iberian domesticity' as care-giving mothers and wives, capable of running a family economy, doing proper needlework, and fundamentally advancing a nationalizing and nationalist, Catholic-inspired project of socio-cultural integration—proved hard to achieve. They failed for a myriad of reasons, ranging from insufficient administrative or financial resources to the insurmountable barrier of racial inequality that governed daily life in spite of the proclamations of *Luso-* or *Hispano-Tropicalism*. Yet, as Stucki shows, this does not mean that the "feminine turn" in association with a more inclusive imperial discourse did not entail a clear set of consequences. In several

ways, African women did indeed resist the efforts of the colonial state (and its various specialized bodies) to make them conform to the Portuguese or Spanish ideals of gender. They also strove to use the new opportunities to their own advantage, however limited they were. Another crucial point is that, despite their essentially instrumental rationale (in political, military, and diplomatic spheres), the new ideologies and repertoires of imperial justification, largely founded on historical myths, were, to a certain extent, embraced by local and imperial officials. This happened particularly in the Portuguese case in which open military conflicts demanded a tighter control of social relations (although securitarian imperatives frequently took precedence over social and cultural ones). The fact that they did not live up to their expectations or promises does not permit us to ignore the limited possibilities that were opened up by these latter considerations.

One additional asset of the book is that, although it takes the question of gender in late colonialism as its main locus of research, it nonetheless takes an informed and documented look at several crucial aspects of the *colonial situations* in Portuguese and Spanish Africa. Ranging from the topics of attempted counter-insurgency and the associated models of repressive developmentalism to the spatial (dis)organization of urban milieus, *Violence and Gender* represents a deftly researched examination of the social, political, and cultural life in the Iberian African colonies. At its core, one can see the tensions generated by the announced imperative of devising new multiracial polities and the deep and ingrained daily politics of racial discrimination.

The book is organized into eight different chapters. Although, to a certain extent, there is a diachronic succession of events, the book deftly moves back and forth, privileging a thematic distribution, instead. Each chapter zooms in and out, from particular, individual episodes of African women to international gatherings, such as the meeting of the Women's International Democratic Federation.

Chapter 1 sets out the main guidelines for the following chapters, putting forward the main arguments, contextualizing them within the historical trajectories of Portuguese and Spanish women's organizations in the authoritarian regimes and presenting what one might call an international late colonial mindset on African females as instruments of a modern, updated, "civilizing mission."

Chapter 2 focuses more closely on the activities of the *Mocidade Portuguesa Feminina* and *Séccion Femenina* and their institutional developments. It stresses the new opportunities that both organizations benefited from as a corollary of their institutional expansion into Africa. This was the result of the mounting pressure for decolonization, to which the regime

responded with the legal expansion of the right to citizenship in the colonies. At the same time, it reveals the political and institutional obstacles that these women faced, as well as the pervasive racially-biased practices and discourses. The resistance (and especially the “obstruction” by African women is situated in its historical context in order to explain the limits of the dissemination of a projected Iberian domesticity, with clear political and ideological overtones.

Chapter 3 sheds light on the historical dynamics of “repressive developmentalism” in both imperial spaces; in other words, it shows how securitarian concerns became increasingly intertwined with the efforts to promote socio-cultural advancement as a key tool for securing the empire and resisting decolonization. This was the case with the famous Portuguese colonial wars, but it also resonated loudly within the Spanish empire in the wake of the Ifni-Sahara wars. Women were regarded as being of paramount importance for the various efforts to win over the hearts and minds of colonial populations. Yet military considerations ended up taking precedence, and, as the chapter shows, violent operations of societal transformation, both in rural and urban contexts, set the limits for the empowerment of women. The opportunities for the development of women’s organizations did, however, increase as official anxieties grew in view of the dangers of detribalization, especially in the main suburbs, and the increased displacement of rural populations. The need to present international evidence on the socio-economic achievements is duly included in the chapter as a fundamental aspect of these strategies.

Chapter 4 addresses the crucial topic of racial inequalities. It wisely notes that, for all the official proclamations on the absence of discrimination based on biological features, African daily lives continued to be shaped by a huge discrepancy in terms of social opportunities and achievements. Multiple, often micro, conflicts originated by the color of people’s skin regularly called into question the proclamations on racial equality. In this sense, this chapter questions the actual implications of the replacement of biological racism with a culturally-based one. Furthermore, prejudiced views on race (or religion) produced expectations about gender roles or sexuality that questioned the principles (and realities) of Luso- or Hispano-Tropicalism. As Stucki shows, however, these contradictions also opened up new avenues for resistance or social mobility.

Chapter 5 addresses the historical evolution of the dynamics of collaboration and incorporation within both Iberian empires, as traditional authorities were deemed unfit for the new modernizing impetuses. Yet women’s organizations did offer new paths for African women to gain access to empowerment instruments, such as scholarships or visits to the

metropolis. Fears of social and racial displacement (both in the metropolis and back in the colonies) and blatant prejudice did, however, circumvent a substantial co-optation of this set of collaborators.

Chapter 6, in turn, shows the reader the multiple ways through which popular culture and activities were given an instrumental use in order to strengthen the projection of multiracial empires. Examples range from different beauty contests or housework skills competitions to crash courses in “Portugalidade” (Portugueseness). A particular concept of femininity was put forward, one that, once again, was not immune to the prevailing stereotypes linked to tradition, beauty, or civilization.

Chapter 7 tackles the important legacies produced by imperial gendered visions. As Stucki ingeniously shows, women remained both central and passive in the projection of post-colonial imaginations. Mostly focusing on the Angolan and Mozambican examples, the book asserts that despite the important ideological differences that characterized imperial and anti-colonial thinking on the role of women, visions of a post-colonial nation still ascribed women a fundamental role in the creation of new national citizens, even if revolutionary ones. As the author states, women were fundamental in the efforts of nation-building, whether these were imperial or anti-colonial in nature. In both cases, a modernizing impetus and rationale were at the core of political disputes. Finally, Chapter 8, or the epilogue, underlines the important legacies (immediately post-colonial and contemporary) of these historical processes in the societies resulting from imperial disintegration (including the former metropolises).

It is a customary (and bad) habit to write reviews that suggest what books should be instead of what they really are. Plainly, this is a fundamental volume for those who want to delve further into a comparative history of late colonialism, with gender as its core axis. But *Violence and Gender* goes far beyond that. However, perhaps due to its multidimensional approach, we might expect to see some aspects developed further. This is the case, for instance, with the question of how labor issues intersected with the crucial topic of gender. This is just one possible suggestion about the ways in which the author might expand his research. It is the consequence of reading a much-needed, original addition to the interconnected history of the two Iberian empires in the second half of the twentieth century.