

Reviews

Congo's Dancers: women and work in Kinshasa by LESLEY NICOLE BRAUN
 Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2023. Pp. xiii+201. US\$79.95 (hbk).
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Although Kinshasa's highly influential music scene has received substantial scholarly attention, the role of women as active entrepreneurs in this industry has been profoundly overlooked. Lesley Nicole Braun's new monograph fills that void by studying the world of Kinshasa's female concert dancers. Braun argues that dance, as a technique of the body, is central to the shaping of social relations in Kinshasa. It is a way to express individuality while partaking in embodied modes of community making. Braun places the *danseuse* at the centre of these dynamics by looking at the double binds into which these women are tied. She argues that the female concert dancer discloses moral panics about the role of women in *kinois* society that echo both colonial and Pentecostal imaginations of gender. Through her visibility, the *danseuse* renders supposedly invisible yet widely used mechanisms of social mobility and economic security visible in a way that is uncomfortable to many *kinois*. Because of this undesired exposure, female dancers are often the subject of rumours about promiscuity, wickedness and lack of virtue.

One of the reasons why this book is such an enjoyable read is the fact that Braun reimagined the ethnographic method of participant observation as co-performative witnessing. She actively participated in the world of the concert dancer by becoming one herself, meaning that she also exposed herself to the challenges these women experience in performing their metier, albeit as an outsider who maintains a privileged position. In the introductory chapter, Braun expands on the gendered differences in patronage and 'big man' politics, which she pertinently captures with the *kinois* expression *encadrement*. She uses this framework consistently throughout the book and brings it into relation with the practice of *la débrouillardise*, the act of taking care of oneself, or, in the context of dependency networks, of making sure that someone else does.

Chapter 1 historicises the position of the *danseuse* throughout Kinshasa's colonial and postcolonial political constellations, while Chapter 2 further elaborates on the relation between dance and meanings of femininity. In particular, Braun's reflections on the connection between performance, visibility and vulnerability are highly thought-provoking and tie in with a larger body of literature on Central African power relations that hitherto has paid too little attention to female perspectives. Chapter 3 focuses on the ways in which Kinshasa's *encadrement* functions as a moral economy, and on the concert dancer's day-to-day realities such as motivations to become a *danseuse*, payments and dress codes. In Chapter 4, Braun zooms in on the rumours of entrapment and manipulation that come with moral anxieties about female dancers and women in Kinshasa more generally. These often entail a supernatural component, with the mythical figure Mami Wata as a recurrent protagonist. The closing chapter places the *danseuse* amidst a larger spectrum of working women,

such as journalists, politicians and *femmes commerçantes*. What Braun's monograph elucidates is that *kinois* women are often trapped in the hypocrisy of a double bind. They have no other choice than to partake in the practice of *la débrouillardise* to take care of themselves, often through the *encadrement* of male others. Nevertheless, moral condemnation is always lurking around the corner.

Like its topic, Braun's writing is highly entertaining thanks to her thoroughly selected ethnographic vignettes and embodied exposure to the realities of the *danseuse*. It is a must read, not only for those who have been looking forward to Braun's much needed attention to the role of women in Kinshasa's bristling music industry, but also, more generally, for those interested in how women have to navigate the sometimes narrow boundary between vulnerability and empowerment.

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Whites and Democracy in South Africa by ROGER SOUTHALL

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This book ingeniously attempts to answer the nagging question: 'Is there still white in the rainbow' – the provocative title of Southall's concluding chapter. Amazingly, given the obsessive cruelties of apartheid, whites still for the most part live comfortably in South Africa. They constitute about 8% of South Africa's 55 million population, control some of the pinnacles of economic and professional power, and are even active politically, albeit in a distinctly minor key. For all kinds of structural as well as path-dependent reasons, the white colour not only remains in the vaunted 'rainbow' but also contributes to the state's understanding of its mature self as a complex, still troubled, largely under-performing leader of free Africa.

Settler whites in Kenya and Zimbabwe, fewer in number than in South Africa, quickly experienced diminished status and efficacy in their new states. In Zimbabwe, they even lost their economic potency when President Robert Mugabe forced them off their prosperous farms and into exile, crippling the nation's economy and contributing to massive black unemployment and impoverishment.

Nelson Mandela wanted something very different for South Africa. Reconciliation between peoples of diverse skin hues was critical. And that meant doing nothing overt to generate too much white backlash. Mandela knew that whites could help Africans grow economically and provide skills that Africans would only develop over time. Today's position of whites as an integral part of the rainbow coalition is Mandela's legacy. Southall explores to what extent that legacy is real and whether it endures meaningfully.

The author's opening chapters masterfully show how the white right plotted and then gained political and economic control throughout the years of Union and then, decisively, under apartheid. Southall demonstrates how liberals and liberal ideology were submerged before 1990, only to have critical elements of liberal representative democracy re-emerge as a helpful bridge to the exile African National Congress (ANC)'s expectation of state-dominated socialism. Moreover, Southall provides a very skilled dissection of today's Democratic Alliance, the now key