

NGOs' visions of development and ignorance of the local context can undermine state building by encouraging the population to bypass, or impose excessive demands on the state.

Second, the book includes chapters whose contributions are rather empirical. Chapters 8 to 12 provide detailed information on Sierra Leonean and Liberian governance challenges and the role of the diaspora and the African Union in reconstruction. With the exception of Chapter 8 by Arthur Abraham, which offers an analytical history of the chieftaincy institution in Sierra Leone and discusses its role in the post-war context, it is disappointing that these chapters are often overly descriptive. It is also regrettable that the introductory and conclusive chapters are redundant in their efforts to summarise each contribution and link them together. It might have been more useful to place the contributions in the current theoretical debates about reconstruction and democratisation.

These weaknesses notwithstanding, the book offers several extremely interesting discussions on post-war situations in Africa. It will interest predominantly scholars and students looking for well-grounded analysis on specific post-conflict challenges. The book will also appeal to those looking for empirical information on the countries explored in the book, especially Sierra Leone and Rwanda.

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### **Ambiguous Pleasures: Sexuality and Middle Class Self-Perceptions in Nairobi**

by RACHEL SPRONK

New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2012. Pp. 310. £60 (hbk)

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In *Ambiguous Pleasures*, Rachel Spronk examines the lifestyles and sexuality of young professionals in Nairobi. She employs an innovative approach that simultaneously questions and aligns the linkages between middle class urban identity, Africanness, gender and sexuality. Asserting the paucity of studies on African sexuality beyond the epidemiological approach, Spronk grounds her motivations as seeking to account for 'the personal, intersubjective and social dimensions of sex' (p. 3) in what she considers a 'worlding' city. This is achieved through a set of six thematically structured chapters, the core of which is based on a collection of vignettes assembled from her informants.

Presenting the methodological framework and remit of her approach, she elucidates her treatment of 'middle class' in Nairobi as merely descriptive of educated and salaried young professionals. Here it is also argued that public discourse on gender, respectability and Africanness is uniquely coalesced and interpreted through sexuality, comprising both social and bodily/personal constituents. Her treatment of the medicalisation of African sexuality, to which she devotes her third chapter, is similarly linked to the Kenyan discourse on gendered morality.

Chapters 4 and 5 comprise the narrative bedrock of her approach. Focusing on a small selection of her informants, she weaves their respective biographies with their sense of gender and sexuality, framing the whole in a shifting context of abstruse modernity. Her treatment of contemporary femininity is linked in

part with the detraditionalisation of gender roles, and a number of her informants are keen to assert that sex – and their sexuality – provides them with a sense of ‘avant-garde’ autonomy. However, societal pressures and other constraints, such as to conform to ideals of pre-marital chastity, simultaneously create particular anxieties for young female professionals.

Spronk also evaluates male sexual self-perceptions, a particularly welcome approach given that male sexuality is ‘discursively understood as existing and active’ (p. 212), though men disassociate this ‘need’ from dependence upon women. Drawing on shifting interpretations of ‘being man’, she aptly conveys a sense of male insecurity in terms of their relations with and treatment of modern women. Although their personal dilemmas convey complex interpretations of sexuality and masculinity, their vignettes do convey a greater sense of gendered and sexual solidarity than those of her female informants.

Finally, Spronk examines the broader societal understandings of relationships and the ways in which the mass media informs gendered interpretations of love, sex and morality. Linking consumerism, materiality and imagery, she unveils the codification of middle class sexuality as practiced and understood by her informants. Here the concepts of modernity, Westernisation and Africanness – a leitmotif of the entire book – are understood as negotiable models of experimentation for Nairobi’s progressive and cosmopolitan middle classes.

The personal narratives threaded throughout *Ambiguous Pleasures* do much to re-humanise the predominantly HIV/AIDS-dominated literature on sexual studies, and Spronk should be credited for the progressively discursive methodology she adopts in this regard. Her astute treatment of cosmopolitan identity as negotiated through sexuality is a novel and much-needed approach. However, there is little sense of relative framing and the reader is left wondering whether other groupings of Kenyans, within and without Nairobi, share in these debates.

Similarly, her comparative historical treatment of sexuality is not as nuanced as one might expect: works by Wenzel Geissler, Ruth Prince, Shane Doyle or Brett Shadle, who work on relational concepts across East Africa, are not cited. Consequently, few questions are asked about historical and developmental variance within or between ethnicities, religious denominations or even classes – categories she asserts as crucial in Kenyan identities and therefore formative in the processes she begins to explore. Nevertheless, this is a clearly argued and strong contribution to an understudied field. Students of gender and sexuality, as well as those of urban and class-based studies, would do well to read this innovative work.

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**War and Politics in Sudan: Cultural Identities and the Challenges of the Peace Process** by J.D. LEACH

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Justin Leach’s readable study of how Sudan’s peace agreements reflect political culture asks us to rethink some commonly held notions about war,