

stories Mursi women construct a social reality for themselves and for their audience, among others for the author itself, who interprets each of these tales at the end of the chapter. These tales reveal that Mursi women follow a wide range of ritual activities throughout their life, ranging from minor everyday rituals to socially more significant performances, but all are productive forces of social reality and individual positions in this realism. In the following chapter she describes some of these most important female rituals that are used as tools to build up, maintain and protect Mursi identity. Here we can read about the *ula* (the competitive ceremonial fight between girls to influence their social reputation); the *dhebiya tugony* (the lip-plate Mursi girls wear in their lower lip which distinguishes them from neighbouring ethnic groups and acts as a ritual protective device); and the *joni chibin* (a ceremony of newly married girls). As the author argues women's well-being is grounded in these rhetorically charged rituals as they allow women to be 'strong', 'winner', 'attractive' or a 'good wife'. However, these images of the female character in the Mursi society are under heavy scrutiny both from inside and from the outside world. In the following chapter LaTosky discusses how the Mursi female rhetoric of style, dress and aesthetic constantly reconstructs female identity in the changing society. This understanding of the Mursi 'rhetorics of display' leads her to the final chapter which deals with the problem of delivering rhetoric and the predicament of effective delivery of Mursi female narratives to new audiences (tourists, development workers, government officials, missionaries, photographers, researchers etc.). Here LaTosky follows, literally, Mursi women to meetings with outsiders and documents the difficulties these women face when they want to convince their audiences. This often difficult task certainly has an impact upon the general well-being (health, education) of these Mursi girls and women. The closing pages of the book describes how this tension could be addressed and resolved involving Mursi actors in political decision making.

This is a deep ethnography, full of details, narratives and local knowledge. I had an impression that the book could be even better with a longer and deeper concluding chapter where the author would bring together all the issues she discussed throughout the book and lace them together. However the book, as it stands now, is the first monograph about Mursi women and one of the most important contributions of the South-Ethiopian scholarship ever written.

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**Women and the Informal Economy in Urban Africa: From the Margins to the Centre** by MARY NJERI KINYANJUI

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In Nairobi the opportunity has arisen in the post-SAP era for groups of women petty traders to establish themselves in the formal economy-dominated Central Business District (CBD). As spaces in formally operated trading houses have been vacated due to rising rent costs in central locations, some of these have

been subdivided into cubicles and stalls offered to informal female traders. Initiatives in this direction are reported to have been taken by one particular forward-looking male entrepreneur. They have later been followed by enterprising women traders inviting members within their female networks to come and establish themselves there. Women traders have thus recently invaded entire streets in central Nairobi now forming new types of very dense indoor trading spaces where they can operate on comparatively stable commercial conditions, near wider markets and avoiding harassment from the city authorities. Bringing with them their management and organisation experience as market women and hawkers and their collective *ubuntu* tradition of solidarity entrepreneurship, they have still kept much of their classically 'informal' characteristics. This has coincided with another post-SAP development, when well-educated, middle-class women have had to leave formal wage work and have added their competence, and sometimes savings, to those of informal trading groups of women. Smaller banks are also said to have become more willing to extend their loans to more successful female entrepreneurs. With recent expansion of global network relations, traders, individually or collectively, have begun to regularly source their wares from Turkey and Dubai, and we may talk of a new category of informal traders and new spatial patterns of female urban economic activity.

This interesting situation is conveyed to us in this book through interviews of female traders in central Nairobi with a focus on one of its streets. The story is situated against a rich historical account of the way the economy of the original colonial trading post of Nairobi was gendered. Focusing on women, the author traces how women, up until today, have struggled against patriarchal family values, planning ideas and state regulation rules to move from agricultural work in rural areas and household work in residential urban peripheries to petty trading at first in peripheral residential areas, and gradually into more central market areas and hawking streets. Having reached the CBD is seen as a final stage in this process.

One may reflect that the strong focus on women traders might have been a bit more balanced. As it stands the impression conveyed is that men in Nairobi are currently almost all in formal activities or that almost all informal traders are women. Further, the focus on black Christian women neglects the role of ethnicity and religion, especially relevant if one were to realise the claim of the book title to cover all of urban Africa. The situation in Nairobi hardly applies to that of cities in West Africa, e.g. concerning the historic roles of female traders (as in Ghana) or in particular their positions in Muslim-dominated cities. On this last account one may even wonder at the relevance of this story for the case of Mombasa in the same country. Within its actual Nairobi scope, however, the explicit focus on the spatial implications of economic gender relations, and the inclusion of public regulation and planning relations as well as private family relations in the analysis, makes this study a welcome update to African urban studies. The interesting case story in focus also testifies to the relevance of continued attention to the still ongoing transformation of the forms of informality in this context.

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