

suppression of a Somali nationalist uprising in the Ethiopian Ogaden region that was led by Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hasan.

His marriage in 1910 to Qatsala Tullu, daughter of a prominent Oromo notable in the outskirts of Addis Ababa, was a landmark event; Garretson describes it as ‘the most important event of Warqenah’s adult life’ (p. 75). Not only was the marriage blessed with many children – six sons and seven daughters – but it also proved to be a mutually rewarding relationship for the spouses. Qatsala evolved into one of the most progressive women of her time while her connections with the palace brightened Warqenah’s political fortunes. Their acrimonious divorce in 1935 marked the beginning of his declining influence in the court. This was followed some two years later by the execution of his two favourite sons, Yosef and Benyam, in the wake of an attempt on the life of Fascist Italian viceroy, Rodolfo Graziani. In between those dates, Warqenah was to serve his country in various capacities: as physician to the ailing Emperor Menilek; medical director of the Menilek II Hospital; administrator of the hot springs, Fel Weha, in Addis Ababa; superintendent of the second modern school in the country, Tafari Makonnen School; governor of the model province of Charchar in eastern Ethiopia; and Ethiopian ambassador to London at the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war in 1935.

Exhaustive as Garretson’s treatment of Warqenah’s variegated life is, it suffers from over-reliance on the subject’s diary, at times even for some of the general developments in the country’s history. The book would also have benefitted from a good introductory chapter, which could have set the general political and social context for the biography, thus sparing the author from contextual digressions at various points. As it stands, the disappointingly short introduction reads more like a summary of the book. The book could also have benefitted from some more rigorous copy-editing. These imperfections aside, students of Ethiopian history are greatly indebted to Garretson for this comprehensive account of the life of a unique member of a fascinating generation of Ethiopian intellectuals.

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## AN UNEASY SEXUAL VANGUARD

*Ambiguous Pleasures: Sexuality & Middle Class Self-Perceptions in Nairobi.*

By Rachel Spronk.

New York: Berghahn Books, 2012. Pp. xi+310. \$95, hardback (ISBN 978-0-85745-478-2).

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**Key Words:** Kenya, class, gender, generational conflict, identity, sexuality.

Rachel Spronk’s *Ambiguous Pleasures* is an engaging and thoughtful ethnography of young professionals, sexuality, and social change in contemporary Nairobi. The book provides an intimate perspective on how sexuality is tightly intertwined with aspirations related not only to the performance of class and gendered identities, but also to deep

anxieties about issues of cultural heritage and belonging. Spronk makes a number of significant contributions across a range of theoretical and social questions including: the effects of capitalism and class formation in urban Africa; the gender-specific aspects of these transformations; and the meaning and consequences of AIDS beyond its health impact.

In my opinion, the book starts slowly. Spronk opens the introduction with a story about female circumcision that she immediately admits is not central to her material. The introduction's biggest theoretical claim is that the book will bridge the gulf in sexuality studies between social constructionist/discursive analyses (which Spronk says dominate the literature) and an exploration of lived, bodily experiences of sexuality (which she suggests is mostly absent in sexuality scholarship, particularly in work on Africa). I found this to be much less interesting – and less completely delivered – than the broader sociological insights derived from Spronk's intimate, perceptive description and analysis of urban middle-class lifestyles in Nairobi. While the book contains page-turning material about the dating and sexual relationships of her 49 informants (all twenty to thirty years old), there is actually relatively little (in my view perhaps thankfully) about people's bodily experiences of sexuality. But there is a great deal about her study subjects' views and struggles with questions of class, consumption, ethnicity, 'Westernization', changing gender dynamics, and much more. It is here that the book makes an invaluable contribution. Although the introduction is often the strongest and most important section of a book, in *Ambiguous Pleasures* this is not the case. The reader is much rewarded by close attention to the middle chapters, which deliver more than the introduction, offering rich ethnography and clear and intriguing analysis.

Spronk combines a great rapport with her subjects, a keen ethnographic sensibility, and a well demonstrated understanding of the social context – both historical and contemporary – in Nairobi, with sharp analytical interpretations and accessible writing. Despite focusing on a very small segment of Kenya's population, the book provides an incisive perspective on important processes of social transformation that affect much wider segments of Kenyan (and African) society. Although young professionals in Nairobi are an elite population, they are in many ways a vanguard whose experiences illuminate trends characteristic of many African societies that are increasingly influenced by the spread of capitalism, urbanization, and growing aspirations for middle-class consumption and lifestyles.

One of the most interesting themes in the book is the link between modern urban sexualities and anxieties about what Spronk labels 'cultural heritage'. While her study subjects largely reject what she describes as 'political ethnicity', living professional and personal lives that tend to cross and breakdown ethnic boundaries, young professionals are at the same time deeply anxious about the ways that modern urban lifestyles pose threats to valued notions of authentic African heritage. In the lives of Spronk's informants, these anxieties manifest themselves in deep suspicions about Westernization (even as many seemingly Western influences are embraced) and in a sense of belonging expressed in terms of 'Africanness' rather than tribe or ethnicity. The intimate arenas of sexuality and gender relations prove to be revealing spheres in which to follow and understand these social transformations and their consequences in people's everyday lives.

Spronk also perceptively examines moral concerns about modern-day sexuality as they stand for wider anxieties about social change. Her chapter about AIDS shows how interpretations of the epidemic are embedded in more broadly shared concerns about the consequences of social transformations associated with capitalism and urbanization. Spronk situates AIDS's status as an emblem of social and moral decay in the context of the demise of a gerontocratic social order. Indeed, she suggests that many of the social concerns surrounding young urban professionals' sexuality stem from an intergenerational struggle for the future of Kenyan society. But as Spronk herself indicates, many young people share their elders' moral anxieties about shifting social norms. Perhaps this unease is about threats to valued forms of sociality more generally, of which intergenerational relationships are just one example, a potential interpretation that Spronk might well have addressed in greater detail.

While focusing on the lives of just a small number of young professionals in Nairobi, *Ambiguous Pleasures* provides valuable insights into the changes sweeping across the rapidly urbanizing African continent. In its entirety, the ethnography proves a richly rewarding and highly recommended read.

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## REFINING CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEORY

*Liberating Namibia: The Long Diplomatic Struggle Between the United Nations and South Africa.*

By E. Ike Udogu.

Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2012. Pp. ix+253. \$55, paperback (ISBN 978-0-7864-6576-7).

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**Key Words:** Namibia, South Africa, diplomatic relations/diplomacy.

Professor E. Ike Udogu neatly explores the diplomatic struggle over Namibia by SWAPO and the United Nations against South Africa in the context of existing theories and practices of conflict resolutions, and suggests that the Namibian case can be a very good basis to develop a conflict resolution model for Africa. In a historical overview of the Namibian conflict, Udogu introduces the main subjects; describes the beginning, development, and nature of colonialism in Namibia; and argues that Namibia's natural resources and colonialist's lasting desire to control them were at the root of the eruption of conflict. As colonial agents (missionaries, hunters, and traders) interacted with Namibians in the central and southern regions, contestations over land increased, and Namibians attacked each other for cattle to sell to European merchants. The takeover of Namibia by Germany and later the South African colonialists then led to the dispossession of Namibians' resources; they were subsequently forced into an exploitative labor economy that they eventually contested.