

might the elision of a figure such as Konu obscure? Might there be similar activists linking other NGOs to preexisting transregional networks and agendas?

Mann's purpose is to recount the history of postcolonial Malian governmentality in Sahelian terms, thereby fitting the region's "deep historicity" with its "vision of the Sahel as a novel dystopic site" (3). His work is strongest when filling in the empirical details specific to the region and its relationship to metropolitan France. A close-up view of the evolution of the activist networks he examines, and the faces they included, might have filled out the regional picture still more, allowing us to see other connections elucidating the tense relationship between human rights activism and the politics of African sovereignty in the early independence era.

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ABOSEDE A. GEORGE. *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos*. (New African Histories.) Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014. Pp. x, 301. Cloth \$80.00, paper \$32.95.

During the first half of the twentieth century, a group of educated elite women in Lagos, colonial Nigeria's capital, embarked on a project to modernize working-class girlhood by advocating for education as the best pathway for socialization and upward socioeconomic mobility. They also considered certain employment and workplace habits undesirable for girls in the city, where the contradictions of colonialism manifested in the co-habitation of "desirable" and "undesirable" activities and behaviors. In this new book, *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos*, Abosege A. George presents the history of girlhood within the context of a protracted struggle to "save" endangered girls from social problems that inhibited their transformation into "modern" and respectable girls. One of the main planks on which this elegantly written book stands is the ideology of salvation as a political discourse and its deployment in the contestation over the notions of modern girlhood. The significance of *Making Modern Girls* in African studies is incontestable—it is by all standards one of the most sophisticated studies of girlhood in colonial Africa. George presents her carefully mined primary data in an engaging manner, rendering a first-rate analysis of the struggle about the ideas of modern girlhood by a spectrum of people (Nigerians and British). Straddling the overlapping fields of development, gender and women, childhood, labor, and urban history, among other studies, *Making Modern Girls* gives readers a clear and unusual glimpse into what it takes to be a girl in colonial Lagos.

The seven chapter book starts from the right dimension—the biography of the educated elite women who molded the politics of modern childhood. Born predominantly into Christian upper-class families, the educated elite women's ideology toward modern girlhood was shaped by their exposure to Western education and European culture (both at home and abroad) and the

gendered politics of nationalism and decolonization. Chapter 1 also presents useful information about the women's associations such as the Lagos Ladies League, the campaign against high infant mortality, and the background to the debate over girl-work from the early 1920s. The emergence of the idea of the universal African child is chapter 2's main focus. During the interwar years, George argues, the colonial government not only began to perceive children as a threat to colonial rule, it also attempted to disaggregate them from the family, inserting them into a global class of children.

Chapter 3 engages with the rise of the social welfare institution. Here, George turns her searchlight to the activities of the new Colony Welfare Office, established in 1941 by Donald Faulkner, and the struggle by the elite women to get the government to take girl's welfare serious. It highlights the tension over "girl saving" from multiple perspectives—from social class and race, to gender and location. In chapter 4, the author takes readers into the world of a girl street vendor to witness the economic and social environment under which she worked, her daily experience, and the circumstances that placed her activities at the center of the moralists' rhetoric of underdevelopment and sexual objectification. George posits that girl hawkers were economic, cultural, and historical figures within the welfare-activist group. As in the other chapters, the author pays critical attention to core historical developments and actors operating at diverse levels to shed light on the changing meanings of girlhood in Lagos and the conditions responsible for ideological transitions.

Underage prostitution is the main focus of chapter 5. Here the author unveils underground sex work and the experience of underage girls in it. Chapter 6 tackles the courtroom experience of girls accused of violating street trading regulation. The punishment for girl-child delinquency mirrored the ideological undercurrents of girl-saving. The author gives us an unusual view of the daily routine in the girl's hostel and how European-styled socialization enhanced girlhood domesticity. The photos of the girls' hostel in-house activities and the juvenile court proceeding bring the audience closer to the realities and practices of modern girlhood. The final chapter unveils the ideological difference between the elite women and the colonial government over the implementation of the Children and Young Person's Ordinance, the most comprehensive legislation enacted to protect Nigerian minors. Yet, this contestation went beyond the narrow confine of the content and the implementation of the law. Rather, it found expression in bigger issues about the well-being of African girls and their roles as future mothers, wives, and active players in the politics of the independent Nigerian state. Indeed, the fight over the relevance of street trading laws tested the tension between modern ideas of development and established cultural and economic activities in a rapidly modernizing society. The conclusion links the colonial history of street hawking with the postcolonial, highlighting the connections between the public and government's construction of girlhood welfare. If

contemporary Lagosians conceive the “problem” of street hawking as a “new” challenge of underdevelopment, George has successfully proved that in colonial Nigeria, the identity and experience of girl-hawkers was a significant factor in the debate over the place of women and girls in the society.

Making Modern Girls is a successful book. The arguments are clearly articulated with relevant primary and secondary sources. It would spark significant debates and encourage future research into African girlhood history.

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RACHEL JEAN-BAPTISTE. *Conjugal Rights: Marriage, Sexuality, and Urban Life in Colonial Libreville, Gabon*. (New African Histories.) Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014. Pp. xiii, 300. Cloth \$80.00, paper \$32.95.

Upon completing Rachel Jean-Baptiste’s important new study *Conjugal Rights: Marriage, Sexuality, and Urban Life in Colonial Libreville, Gabon*, one will find that several vibrant, unexpected events linger in one’s memory: the Free French in 1940 establishing a marriage fund in the Equatorial African colonies in order to loan cash to African men facing difficulties raising bridewealth; in 1951, a woman presenting her suitor to her father, and (uncharacteristically for a daughter) stating the bride-wealth amount, later explaining “I loved my husband, and he me” (108); and a woman recalling her three partners, none of whom she married, and stating “What is important is that I must raise and provide for my children. I have a man’s character” (176).

Jean-Baptiste has an eye for the telling anecdote, and the ones I note bring to the fore themes that are critical to her book and to advancing our understanding of the history of African marriage, gender, and sexuality. The historiography by now richly documents how colonial governments believed Africans’ most intimate relations to be volatile political matters, and how Europeans and Africans, men and women, tried to define gender, marriage, sexuality, and reproduction in light of new economic realities, urbanization, migrant labor, and metropolitan concerns. Through a judicious use of archival material from all levels of the empire—from Libreville’s “customary courts” on up through French Equatorial Africa-wide inquests—and oral interviews with approximately one hundred Gabonese, the author demonstrates that the growth of the city and the French empire cannot be convincingly written without a full account of the women and men who lived there, their struggles to form intimate relationships, and the strains that resulted from those relationships. She accomplishes this feat by discussing how French officials and missionaries worried over the state of African family life, elite Africans attempted to codify proper family life, African women claimed status through their white lovers, and thousands of Africans made homes, families, and love during Libreville’s first century.

Two themes struck me as particularly valuable. First,

Jean-Baptiste paints a more accurate portrait of life in Africa’s new colonial cities. Libreville’s women were not all prostitutes or beer-brewers (although some did engage in those activities), neither were they all escaping ill-treatment in their rural homes (although some were), nor were they all seeking lives unencumbered by husbands and families (although a small handful did). Many women enjoyed relative independence in urban areas and collected income through trade or unions with Europeans; yet, they retained relations with their families in the villages. Most of these women wanted husbands or mates of some kind, they desired children, and they sought adulthood and respectability. This might mean serial informal marriage, or helping negotiate bridewealth with their families, or using the wealth of European lovers to supplement their families’ income. Thus while one interviewee stated that her independence was born of having a “man’s character,” this did not at all mean that she spurned long-term unions with men. This is not just a book about women, however. As Jean-Baptiste makes clear, African men too sought marriage (or marriage-like) unions with women. Fluctuating economic conditions often made this a difficult goal to reach—hence the government bridewealth loan project—but the quest fundamentally shaped how men experienced urban life.

Second, Jean-Baptiste offers a refreshing reassessment of heterosexual intimacy in African colonial history. According to several scholars, attention to bridewealth and kinship networks should not obscure the fact that some marriages were born of emotional attachments. Jean-Baptiste extends this to considerations of sex. Certainly sex could be commodified in Libreville, although women often outnumbered men there, creating a very different situation compared to Nairobi or Harare. Yet men and women also sought companionship, someone with whom to spend time, someone with whom to share emotional and physical intimacy. While the history of sex (and marriage) is in part about negotiations over resources, it “is also about emotions—such as desire, pleasure, yearning, and pain” (13). For example, the 1950s studio portrait of the woman with a “man’s character” adorns the cover of *Conjugal Rights*. She stands tall, beaming, her husband, half turned from the camera, coaxing a smile from their child she is holding. It is an image of a loving family, preparing for a portrait but caught in a joyful, tender moment. Jean-Baptiste reminds us that while colonialism and courts, economics and urbanization, must be part of our stories, history is impoverished if we fail to hear our subjects say, “I loved him, and he me,” or overlook the bliss evident in a simple family photo.

Conjugal Rights has much to offer readers, more than can be discussed here. Those interested in sexuality, gender, marriage, law, colonialism, and urban history—and not just in an African context—will be richly rewarded by the book.

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