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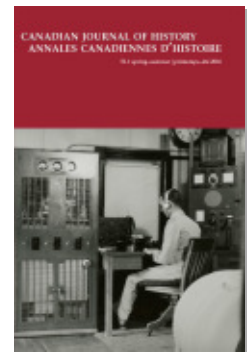
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When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics  
in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958 by Saheed Aderinto (review)

Judith A. Byfield

Canadian Journal of History, Volume 51, Number 1, spring-summer/printemps-été  
2016, pp. 206-208 (Review)

Published by University of Toronto Press  
DOI: 10.1353/cnh.2016.0011



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family structure. It adds to the comparative analysis of Puerto Rican communities in the Midwest with other historical groups, such as Mexican Americans (Lilia Fernández's *Brown in the Windy City*, Chicago, 2012).

*We Are Left without a Father Here* exposes the complexities derived from a colonial apparatus that is carving its own formula of modernization. In the process, concepts of class, gender, and race intersect in very subtle ways throughout the migration process. This book can be used as a reference or complementary text for a college and graduate level course. It is a valuable source for any course on American, Caribbean, Latino, and Latin American studies, and any other related fields.

Milagros Denis-Rosario, *Hunter College, City University of New York*



### Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa Le Moyen-Orient, l'Asie centrale, et l'Afrique

*When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958*, by Saheed Aderinto. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2015. xviii, 241 pp. \$95.00 US (cloth), \$32.00 US (paper).

In seven engaging chapters and an epilogue, Saheed Aderinto has produced a very important contribution to African social history and Nigerian historiography specifically. His intellectual journey, as revealed in his introduction, is a “must read” for graduate students for this book is the outcome of a scholar who listened closely to his sources and grappled with the complex realities they revealed. Aderinto had initially planned to write a history of gender and prostitution in colonial Nigeria by examining the correlation between sex work and social class. However, as he followed his sources along the pathways they presented, he came to appreciate that to do justice to the topic he had to engage multiple archives and literatures (6–7). Sexuality was of concern to legal, medical, social welfare, and military arms of the state, as well as multiple social groups including the clergy, nationalists, elite women, village elders, and landlords. While keeping these different actors and their competing perspectives and objectives in the same frame, Aderinto provides a clear and accessible narrative that locates the evolution of prostitution and state sanctions within the changes in the larger political economy. Sexuality, and more specifically prostitution, also raises questions of morality and Aderinto illustrates throughout

the text the multiple ways in which discussions about morality and prostitution were further nuanced by ideas about race, gender, and class.

Aderinto argues that African men and women were at the forefront of discussions to prohibit prostitution. Without creating monolithic or binary oppositions, he illustrates the points of conversion, overlap, and disagreement as Nigerian men, women, and different branches of the colonial state debated prostitution in public and in private. Africans too connected morality and prostitution; however, that connection unfolded in discourses that challenged colonial racism, critiqued colonial policy and practice, and anticipated a post-colonial future. The Lagos Women's League offered the first concerted effort to compel the government to prohibit prostitution (65). Motivated in part by a politics of respectability and guided by their cosmopolitan experiences in London, the Lagosian elite wanted the colonial state to invest similar levels of resources to address prostitution in Lagos. Both colonial officials and the Lagosian elite expressed moral panic about child prostitutes, and shared the developmentalist notion that mitigating adult crime required juvenile intervention (158). Whereas elite women imagined that they would play a significant role in the infrastructure created to address female delinquents, colonial officials could not imagine educated African women serving in any administrative capacity.

The Nigerian colonial state took little action against prostitution before World War II though they were concerned about the medical, moral, and security implications of the sex work industry. In 1919 the Colonial Office demanded detailed information about the prevalence of venereal disease (VD), its impact on Britain's civilizing mission, and the cost of establishing and running VD clinics (102). Epidemiological data was faulty for a host of reasons, nonetheless, as Aderinto illustrates, the discussion among colonial officials is germane to a much broader understanding of the cultural frameworks and inter-agency conflicts that shaped colonial policies in this area. Using an idealized notion of European sexual mores as a yardstick, they pathologized African sexuality. Colonial officials theorized that the prevalence of venereal disease reflected the still shallow roots of Britain's civilizing mission — Western education, biomedicine, and Christianity — therefore Nigerians, like other colonial subjects, needed sexual discipline to both address the prevalence of VD and to climb the "ladder of civilization" (106). Medical officers devised a plan to combat VD in the civilian population, but it was not implemented.

The fall of France in the early months of World War II forced Britain to rely more heavily on the resources of its African colonies. Equally important, the war led to the significant expansion of military personnel in Lagos. In 1941, the Unlicensed Guide (Prohibition) Ordinance came into effect. It institutionalized a tour guide system in the hope of restricting sex tourism and the army of unemployed and underemployed young men

who directed foreigners to red-light districts. Operating on the presumption that the best way to safeguard the health of its Nigerian soldiers was to control VD among the civilian population, the Nigerian colonial state passed its first anti-VD ordinance in 1943. Thus, the study contributes to a social history of World War II in Nigeria as it explores the impact and consequences of the colonial state's public health policy.

Finally, this study is further enriched by its epilogue where Aderinto illustrates the importance of this study to understanding Nigeria's policies on transnational prostitution and HIV/AIDS. *When Sex Threatened the State* can be used in graduate and advanced undergraduate courses. It will be of great value to scholars interested in public health, colonial law and policy, gender studies, as well as urban history.

Judith A. Byfield, *Cornell University*



*Paths toward the Nation: Islam, Community, and Early Nationalist Mobilization in Eritrea, 1941–1961*, by Joseph L. Venosa. Athens, Ohio University Press, 2014. xix, 283 pp. \$29.95 US (paper).

Eritrean nationalist historiography has suffered from two biases: pro-Christian and pro-Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Since the Christian-dominated EPLF was the one that eventually delivered on Eritrean independence, the prejudice echoed the old cliché about history being written by victors. The major significance of Joseph L. Venosa's work lies in its rejection of this hegemonic narrative. In seven chronologically organized chapters that span two decades, plus a detailed introduction and epilogue, Venosa addresses one of the most conspicuous silences in Eritrean history: the history of the Muslim League.

The history of what is now Eritrea starts in the 1890s when Italy, unable to penetrate the Ethiopian interior militarily, managed to annex the Red Sea plateau as a colonial territory. In 1935 Mussolini launched another war on Ethiopia, and this time his army was able to occupy the country for five years. The ejection of Italy from Ethiopia with the help of British forces, in 1941, served as a catalyst for Eritrean decolonization. Eritrea was placed under British Military Administration (BMA), while the international community decided on the ex-colony's fate: union with Ethiopia, federation with Ethiopia, partition between Ethiopia and Sudan, or full independence. It was in this volatile context that the Muslim League came into being in December 1946 as the most vocal champion of Eritrean nationalism (chapters one and two).



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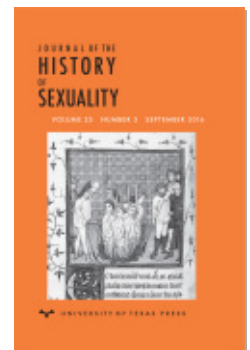
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When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics  
in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958 by Saheed Aderinto (review)

Carina Ray

Journal of the History of Sexuality, Volume 25, Number 3, September 2016,  
pp. 508-510 (Review)

Published by University of Texas Press



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## Book Reviews

*When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958.* By SAHEED ADERINTO. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014. Pp. 264. \$95.00 (cloth); \$32.00 (paper).

Saheed Aderinto has produced a crucially important and innovative study that repositions historical investigation of illicit sexuality, specifically prostitution, from the margins to the center of colonial and nationalist politics in colonial Lagos. Drawing on a vast corpus of primary sources, including colonial correspondence from the lowest level of the administration to the highest, relevant legislation and legislative debates, Nigerian-owned newspapers, locally published memoirs, and novelistic accounts, Aderinto makes a persuasive case for the centrality of prostitution to the social, political, economic, cultural, and rhetorical life of Lagos during a period of intense urbanization, growth, and ethnic diversification as people from all over the colony and beyond were drawn to the colonial capital.

Emerging throughout the book is a sense of female prostitution's particular relevance to the lives of Lagos's large migrant populations, not just because most sex workers were migrants from other parts of Nigeria and even farther afield in West Africa, but also because the city's large migrant male population was particularly reliant on these women to meet their sexual, affective, and pragmatic needs in ways that are consistent with the well-documented nonsexual economy of sex work in other parts of the continent. By attending to those who paid for or otherwise facilitated commercial sex, rather than simply those who sold it, Aderinto laudably makes men visible in the history of prostitution in Lagos (chapters 2, 6). While prostitution was certainly a fact of life elsewhere in the colony, Aderinto convincingly shows that the phenomenon of migration accounts for why it was particularly endemic in Lagos, helping to explain the book's narrower focus on the colonial capital (chapter 1).

Aderinto makes a critical contribution to the historical literature on prostitution in Africa by focusing on the realm of child prostitution, which almost exclusively involved girls (chapter 3). By disaggregating it from adult (female) prostitution, Aderinto is able to explore how age shaped the experiences and outcomes of these two groups—something that most colonial administrators overlooked because they lumped women and girls into a single category. Aderinto routes his discussion of girls' prostitution through the figure of what he calls the "erotic child" and the long-term implications of childhood sex work as these girls matured into women. Rather than a natural condition, he argues that the "erotic child" was eroticized as she became the object of a sexualizing gaze. This process was particularly acute in spaces where girls were the most vulnerable, for instance, while they labored as street hawkers. Greater clarification between increased risk of molestation and increased likelihood of being trafficked into sex work, as well as a deeper discussion of how these categories of sexual exploitation both converged and diverged, would have further strengthened the analytical potential of Aderinto's notion of the "erotic child." Moreover, given the conceptual and experiential fluidity between adolescence and adulthood that the author so expertly demonstrates, the stark binary he draws between child and adult prostitution, in which adult prostitution is wedded to pleasure and childhood prostitution to exploitation, could have benefited from a more nuanced reading. Adult prostitution, in particular, seems to be evacuated of its potential for trauma, even though Aderinto acknowledges that sex workers were frequently exploited.

Among the many compelling arguments and discoveries that Aderinto makes is his reading of the Undesirable Advertisement Ordinance (chapter 5). Moving beyond a narrow understanding of it as an "economic subsidy" of imported British aphrodisiacs "camouflaged in the language of sin and medico-morality," Aderinto powerfully demonstrates that it was an attack on "the entire edifice of non-western therapies" (128) in Nigeria, because these locally produced sexual tonics were also intended to cure quotidian ailments. This example speaks to how pursuing questions of sexuality as a methodology opens up a much wider scope of analysis of the modalities of colonial rule that have little to do with sexuality itself but rather exemplify how sexuality operates in the Foucauldian sense as a strategic linchpin of colonial and later nationalist instrumentality.

Throughout the book both sexuality and illicit sexuality frequently stand in for prostitution, leading to some slippage between the terminology, which in turn leaves the reader with the impression that these three categories were somehow synonymous. This impression is further entrenched by the book's narrow focus on prostitution, with little attention paid to other forms of illicit sexuality, most notably, homosexuality, or to other modes of sexuality that Lagosians were engaged in. Greater discussion of romantic love, concubinage, or even of how relations of prostitution could be converted into

something else would have profitably ameliorated this. If transactional sex in Lagos was a “core component of urban life, its youth-centeredness, and its economic opportunities” (59), what other channels for sexual satisfaction and emotional intimacy did the urban environment open up? Without a wider view of the diverse sexual and affective economies that Lagosians were participating in, there is a risk of reinscribing the very colonialist trope of the hypersexualized African that Aderinto otherwise so convincingly dismantles.

Readers familiar with the history of sexuality in other colonial African contexts will find much that resonates with Aderinto’s perceptive account. From the mapping of diverse colonial and nationalist anxieties onto illicit sexuality (chapters 4, 6, 7); the role of the press in fomenting and disseminating conversations about prostitution (chapter 6); the link between prostitution, the military, and colonial state security (chapter 4); to the role of elite men and women in engaging reformist agendas (chapters 6, 7), what was happening in colonial Lagos was also happening elsewhere, especially in British West Africa, where prostitution and sex trafficking were regionally linked enterprises. A broader engagement with the secondary literature, in addition to the impressive corpus of primary sources that the book is largely based on, would help bring greater clarity to what is exceptional and what is more widely representational about the Lagos case study.

A final note: This book ends with a compelling conclusion about the Nigerian government’s comparative disengagement with contemporary prostitution in favor of addressing international sex trafficking because of the latter’s implications on Nigeria’s global standing. Aderinto’s conclusion powerfully illustrates how state politics continue to turn on questions of illicit sexuality with differing and often devastating consequences for those whose lives are conditioned by the domestic rather than international realities of the sex trade. Engagingly written, perceptive in its analysis, and concerned with issues of deep historical and contemporary importance, this book has much to offer those interested in not only African and sexuality studies but also urbanization and migration studies, as well as colonialism, nationalism, and race.

CARINA RAY  
*Brandeis University*



*Mobilizing New York: AIDS, Antipoverty, and Feminist Activism.* By TAMAR W. CARROLL. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. Pp. 304. \$34.95 (paper); \$27.99 (e-book).

Someday, because of historians like Tamar Carroll, the history of postwar radical feminism will be understood as the rich cross-class, multiracial movement that it was. Made up of neighborhoods full of immigrants and people



critical gaps for a new generation of scholars to pursue. There is a lot in this book that offers leads for new directions, notably in the dimension of a prayer economy. With the new work by Nimi Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism* (2014), greater space has been opened up to include Nigeria's Middle Belt, the current zone of vibrant Christian activism, as well as to connect with the global literature on Christianity, Islam, religious encounters, and comparative religion. When this historiography is written, Shankar's book will receive its own full insertion and commendation.

TOYIN FALOLA  
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SAHEED ADERINTO. *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015. Pp. xviii, 241. Cloth \$95.00, paper \$32.00.

Saheed Aderinto investigates the history of the regulation and practice of child and adult heterosexual prostitution in twentieth-century colonial Lagos, Nigeria. Aderinto refers to the African residents of the town as Lagosians, emphasizing how Africans shaped city life prior to and during the period of British colonial rule. The book chronicles the reconfiguration of sexual politics from the first decade of the twentieth century to 1958. An epilogue briefly analyzes the regulation of domestic and transnational sexual human trafficking in postcolonial Nigeria.

The text forwards three arguments. One emphasizes that the significance of sexuality can be understood in the context of broader historical processes such as the meaning of colonial governance and modernity. Second, age is a central, but overlooked lens of analysis for the history of sexuality in Africa. Aderinto argues that elite Lagosians and colonialists alike feared the existence of the erotic child and viewed the girl child as in need of protection from being the object of adults' sexual pleasure. Third, sexuality and nationalism are intertwined; the book stresses that elite Nigerian men and women formulated ideas about nation-building and selective modernity within the context of the sexualization of nationalism.

The book develops thematically and chronologically in seven chapters that analyze the changing practices, moral discourses, and policies on prostitution. Chapter 1 shows how elite African women, not colonialists nor African men, were the "arrowhead" of decrying prostitution as a vice to be prohibited in the early twentieth century. Chapter 2 deftly analyzes the role of men in prostitution. *Boma boys* and *jaguda boys*, youth whom Lagosians decried as delinquents, undergirded the sex industry as bodyguards and intermediaries for clients and prostitutes. Bachelor soldiers and married men sought out prostitutes for sexual pleasure, to have a roof over their heads, and to eat cooked meals. Fleeting evidence also demonstrates that British and European men

of varied classes were also clients. Chapter 3 analyzes the policing of girlhood beginning in the 1940s by the Colonial Welfare Office. Colonialists viewed child prostitution, often confounded with child marriage, as a sex crime and punished adults and sought to reform girls. Elite Nigerian women also sought to minimize the exploitation of girl children, but under their own direction. Chapter 4 explains how British military and civilian medical personnel racialized and pathologized African sexual practices as imbued with venereal diseases in the 1920s and 1940s. Chapter 5 tracks varied anti-prostitution laws of the 1940s, ranging from the criminalization of advertisements for aphrodisiacs and medical treatments for venereal diseases in newspapers to raising the age of consent for sexual contact from thirteen to sixteen years old. These laws infringed upon the rights of Lagosians to move freely about the town or earn a living. Chapters 5 and 6 focus respectively on the reactions of Lagosian men and women to the prohibitionist laws. Men's opinions varied, but elite men began defending prostitutes' rights as preserving the integrity of "traditional" customs and nationalism. Elite women consistently argued that prostitution should be prohibited yet claimed that they, not British men and women, should direct reformist policies and agencies.

This book contributes to four important themes in African history. First, it fills in the dearth of research on the history of sexuality in Africa. It explicates how Nigerians of varied classes, ethnicities, and genders conceived of their own sexuality and expands the geographic focus beyond settler colonies in Southern Africa. Aderinto elucidates sexist and racist colonial thinking about African sexualities that bolstered imperial rule. Second, the book expands research that questions the fetishization of oral histories as "authentic" African sources. Aderinto makes use of the tremendous amount of written source materials produced by Lagosians—articles, editorials, and advertisements in newspapers, correspondence and petitions to colonial officials, and novels—as well as the lyrics of songs. Third, the book articulates gender as pertaining to both men and women. The text examines colonial ideas about the sexuality of African men, military and civilian, as well as how men conceived their own sexuality. Also presented is a rare analysis of how African women directly communicated with colonial officials and shaped colonial governance. Fourth, it expands research that questions the trope of cities in Africa as colonial cities.

However, the book suffers from insufficient theorization and in-depth engagement with the historiography of gender, sexuality, and urbanism elsewhere in Africa. The significance of concepts like "the erotic child" and "selective modernity" remain underdeveloped and the rich source material is not always fully analyzed. The book would have also benefitted from greater critical engagement with the rich body of source materials and the subjectivities of their production, as well as a more critical articulation of methodologies of interpretation.

Nevertheless, this book makes important inroads in the history of sexuality and gender, childhood, urban history, colonialism, the military, and the history of medicine in Africa and in twentieth-century world history.

RACHEL JEAN-BAPTISTE  
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MEGHAN HEALY-CLANCY. *A World of Their Own: A History of South African Women's Education*. (Reconsiderations in Southern African History.) Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013. Pp. xiv, 312. \$29.50.

*A World of Their Own: A History of South African Women's Education* is a savvy book that identifies and fills a large hole in the social history of South African education. In telling the story of Inanda Seminary, a high school for African girls founded in the colonial province of Natal in 1869 by the American Zulu Mission, Meghan Healy-Clancy deftly stitches a story of the Christian remodeling of African women's aspirations to the larger political strategies of South Africa's political powers over the course of almost a century and a half. This is no mean feat.

In focusing on Inanda as an institution, the book provides a new perspective on the growth of gendered strategies of material advancement by black South Africans, and on the individual labors of white foreign missionaries. Early U.S. missionaries' horror at the "sinfulness" of African culture led to dual strategies for African educational development: political subalternity for men bolstered by psychological domestication of women, and to various African reshaping of those lessons. This is a familiar story for readers versed in the growth of educational ideologies of domesticity, respectability, and social reproduction in other southern African contexts. When comparative ballast is required, the book most often looks cross-continently to experiences and histories of American women, presumably because of Inanda's ties to missionaries whose referents were U.S. institutions like Mount Holyoke. Healy-Clancy engages minimally with histories of gendered social reproduction, domesticity, and respectability closer to South Africa's regional borders. Perhaps we are gradually moving toward a truly regionalized historiography of African women which will privilege their common bonds rather than the colonially imposed borders between them; this study will be a valuable contribution to such an effort.

The accustomed strength of women's history is that it forces a reassessment of platitudinous historical tropes. Notably, Healy-Clancy seizes on a rich contradiction of apartheid-era education: in the midst of a barren desert of educational options for black South Africans, African women had a few more options than African men. This is the kind of detail that has been bypassed by most other scholars. When African education was forced into the straitjacket of apartheid, we have been told up to now, mission schools were either forced to turn their facilities, curricula, and staff over to the state or decided to close altogether. This was not true of Inanda, however, where the combination of the determination of the

school's leadership and the self-interest of the apartheid state allowed the continuation of independent education of a few skilled African women. In Healy-Clancy's hands, this hitherto untold story becomes a structure on which to pin larger questions about individual aspirations, community development, and political maneuvers.

One of the book's strengths is its narration of generational continuities in educational strategies, in many cases, from grandmother to daughter to granddaughter. These stories are told with verve and a keen ear for detail; and the women's "world of their own" comes alive. Healy-Clancy balances the women's "school-days" nostalgia with assessments both of Inanda's educational strengths and its social limitations.

As the title states, this is a story of South African women's education, not the story. It does not cover the education of women of other races, nor in the later period does it examine experiences of African women's education in run-of-the-mill government high schools. In the larger context of African education as a whole, it specifically traces the experiences and strategies of better-off African families who had opportunities and the means to send their daughters to boarding school. However, Healy-Clancy does a wonderful job of evoking the joys of learning in a place where Africans girls were encouraged to hold their heads high—almost uniquely in the country—and were taught, led first by white Americans and then by black South Africans, that nothing was beyond their reach.

Against the odds, Inanda survives to this day, even in the tricky crosswinds of democratic South Africa. The book surveys the difficult terrain where individual and family respectability has intersected with African nationalism, enabling us to probe more deeply into the new country's social complexities. For example, for women such as Ms. Baleka Mbete, an Inanda graduate who became a leading light in the African National Congress, and served as Speaker of Parliament in democratic South Africa—how revolutionary can respectability really be? On the other hand, some "Inanda girls" must have ridden the conservative lessons of respectability straight into non-political materialism and/or alliance with the calculated, narrow ethnicities associated with African adherents of the pre-democratic Bantustan strategies. How can the legacies of these women's choices be understood?

Overall, this is a fine study of that rarity in South African history: a proud tradition of educational achievement for African students that has endured for more than a century.

TERESA A. BARNES  
*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

KEITH BRECKENRIDGE. *Biometric State: The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xi, 252. \$99.00.

For scholars provoked by Theodore Porter's ideas about government statistics and public trust, and for those of

read outside material that might usefully have been included in this edition. On the other hand, the editor has wisely decided to include the pagination of the original Arabic edition in the English translation, which will allow comparison with the Arabic text, and even with the French translation, which also marks the Arabic pagination.

However, it is difficult to be too critical of this edition. It renders the whole text, translated out of the original Arabic in a manner that is likely to bear favorable attention from Arabists, it is reasonably priced, and produced in way that undergraduate students and the general public can read it. It is an interesting and exciting text, and while its scholarly shortcoming might be a bit annoying to the specialist, it still renders this text available to those who read English and not Arabic, whatever their level of scholarly engagement.

JOHN K. THORNTON

*Boston University*

***When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958.*** By Saheed Aderinto. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. Pp. xvii, 241; illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography. Pp. 288. \$95.00 cloth, \$32.00 paper.

Saheed Aderinto's fine book demonstrates how the politics, policies, and popular cultural debates about sexuality both animated and crystalized many of the ambitions and struggles of colonial and nationalist projects in twentieth-century Nigeria. Focusing on Lagos, and in particular on legal, social, and moral efforts to address illicit sexuality, especially prostitution and venereal disease, Aderinto provides an insightful perspective on issues of race, class, and gender as they played out in contestations over sexuality. In the author's adept hands, the reader learns that regulating sexuality was at the core of colonial and nationalist projects, at once serving as a means and justification for colonialism, but also as part of nationalist agendas for independence. Aderinto shows that preoccupations with illicit sexuality were not peripheral to larger political agendas, but instead central to them.

Drawing on a rich mix of colonial archival sources, court records, newspaper accounts, and oral histories, *When Sex Threatened the State* takes the reader into early twentieth-century Lagos's sexual economy with vivid accounts that neither sugarcoat nor sensationalize the importance of prostitution during this period. Issues such as the definition of marriage (particularly competing views about polygamy and monogamy), indigene-immigrant tensions among Lagos's growing population, regulation versus prohibition of sex work, British racism, the role of medicalization in the control of prostitutes (and populations more generally), and the very definition of prostitution itself are handled deftly by the author, who marshals compelling evidence and puts forth a nuanced analysis.

Particularly persuasive is the author's ability to show how concerns about illicit sexuality could be simultaneously a colonial rationale for subjugating the native population and a pillar of Nigerian nationalists' demands for independence so that they could correct the moral wrongs produced by colonial rule. But Aderinto's analysis is more nuanced still, documenting competing positions within both colonial and nationalist approaches to the nature of the problem and the policies to deal with it. The important role that elite Lagos women played in popular debates about prostitution, revealing both class hierarchies and emerging tensions regarding gender inequality, is but one interesting example of the book's fruitful lines of inquiry. Another is the way that policies to address endemic sexually transmitted diseases revealed how colonial authorities differentiated between military and civilian populations. One particularly interesting chapter explores this issue in detail, and provides wider insights into the importance of local military units for the larger project of colonial rule.

The author examines in great detail the emergence of both British and Nigerian concerns about child prostitution in particular, arguing that this coincides with the rise of new notions about childhood, but also that these moral preoccupations with child prostitution offer an especially insightful window onto the larger political-moral dynamics at play in both colonial and nationalist projects. Anxiety about child prostitution coincided with increasing attention in the 1940s to the question of whether prostitution should be prohibited or better regulated. These questions were not new, but seemed to take on great significance in this period, with the issue of child prostitution often at the forefront.

One appealing aspect of the book is that the history is not told chronologically; rather, the narrative tacks back and forth across time, driven by the author's questions and analysis. While this approach was quite effective, at times I found myself asking why certain historical trends unfolded as they did. For example, while the author clearly demonstrates the emergence of the preoccupation with child prostitution and the heightened concern with questions of prohibiting prostitution in the 1940s, why these things happened when they did was not entirely clear to me.

Finally, a brief concluding chapter connects the themes and historical focus of the book to contemporary events and discourses in Nigeria about human trafficking and about the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Although the chapter is more suggestive than fully fleshed out, it certainly shows that concerns about illicit sexuality continue to be central to postcolonial statecraft, just as Aderinto has persuasively demonstrated for Nigeria's colonial and nationalist projects in this excellent book.

DANIEL JORDAN SMITH

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**Volume:** 2 **Issue:** 1

**Month/Year:** 2016

**Pages:** 211-214

**Article Author:**

**Article Title:** Review: When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1958

**Imprint:** East Lansing, MI : Michigan State University Press, [2014-]

**Notes:** Billing Notes: IFM PREFERRED

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Author(s): Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué

Review by: Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué

Source: *Journal of West African History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 2016), pp. 211-214

Published by: Michigan State University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/jwestafrihist.2.1.0211>

Accessed: 01-06-2016 17:08 UTC

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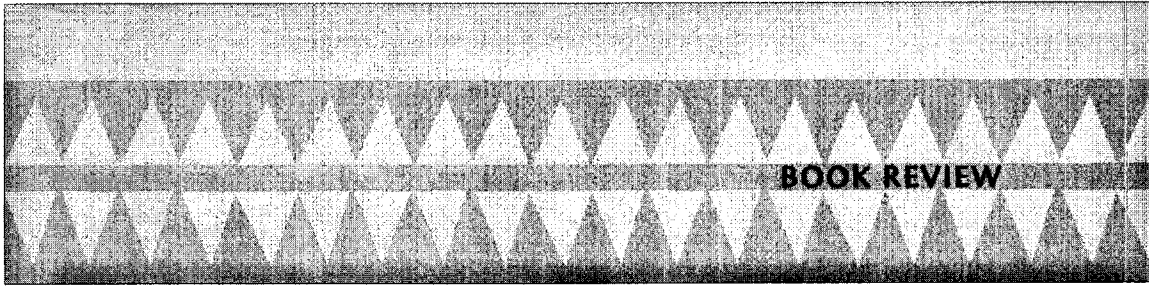
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## When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958

SAHEED ADERINTO

Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015; pp. 264, \$32.00 paper.

This noteworthy text brings to light the intimate connection between sexual politics and nationalism in colonial Nigeria during the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, as the title suggests, sex threatened the colonial state by disrupting power dynamics within the socioeconomic, cultural, and political spheres. More to the point, prostitution and sex workers garnered much attention from British colonial officials and Lagosians (predominately Yoruba Nigerians living in colonial Lagos). Both parties struggled to maintain moral and sociopolitical authority by attempting to control women's sexual behaviors. The book complicates debates about sex by disaggregating the identity of various classes of people involved—from soldiers in the colonial army to Western-educated Nigerian women. The author judiciously reminds readers that race, geography, gender, and power influenced the diverse motivations that colonial administrators and Nigerians had for policing illicit sexuality. Thus, one of the main aims of the book is to “holistically demonstrate how their stance changed over time, as did the conditions responsible for the transition” (10).

Three overarching arguments frame this seven-chapter book. First, understanding sexuality cannot be divorced from broader historical processes. The author addresses this issue by maintaining that sexuality was a platform on which Nigerians and colonial officials voiced conflicting perspectives about modernity and colonial practices. The second fundamental argument is that the age of female sex workers influenced viewpoints and colonial regulations about prostitution. The last key argument is that the sexualization of nationalism illuminated how colonial administrators and Nigerians believed that certain expressions of sex threatened nation-building. This anxiety was shared by colonial authorities, who wanted to maintain the stability and security of the colony, and by Nigerian

elites who envisioned themselves as taking over the political, economic, and moral spheres of the country after independence.

The book contains many compelling contributions. First, it effectively complicates the motivations of the various actors that were at the center of sexual politics. It is not a debate with clearly drawn boundaries and sides. Case in point, Chapter 5 underlines how colonists disagreed about policies regarding sexual conduct and venereal diseases. They further diverged on how these issues might affect the health of the colonial state and its people. Medics claimed that venereal diseases among civilians were a public health problem whereas the civil administration focused on overall sanitation and linked it to the sociopolitical stability of Lagos. Chapters 6 and 7 demonstrate that the women and men of the Lagos elite did not always necessarily hold the same standpoints on the policing of sexuality. Elite men did not speak with one voice. Military soldiers of the Royal West African Frontier's Force advocated for the regulation of prostitution whereas newspaper journal editors pushed for its prohibition by asserting that sex work was foreign and un-African. In contrast to their counterparts, Lagos's elite women were more unified in their ideological approach to the regulation of illegitimate sexuality. They consistently challenged colonial authorities on how they implemented anti-prostitution legislation.

Chapters 6 and 7 do more than unveil how elite women and men diverged on sexual politics. They successfully argue that men (Nigerian and colonial) did not dominate public discourse over illicit sexuality. It cannot be denied that Lagosian elite women "were the first to insert illicit sexuality into their long list of projects aimed at improving women's sociopolitical and economic visibility" (156). Thus, the importance of Chapter 7 is due to the fact that it emphasizes the voices of Western-educated Nigerian women, who were at the forefront of the debates about prostitution in colonial Nigeria. This is unusual because such voices were often muffled within sexual politics in Anglophone African colonies, particularly in West Africa. The author attempts to redress this imbalance by drawing on oral testimonies and the official files of various elite women's associations in order to highlight their stance on prostitution.

A further notable contribution of the text is that it uses age as a tool to recall the anxiety and moral panic that ensued from child prostitution in colonial Nigeria. Chapter 3 illustrates that colonial officials relied on ethnocentric beliefs to craft policies about the appropriate age of consent (raising it from 13 to 16). However, many Nigerians did not determine adulthood by using chronological age but on traditional rites of passage. The author avers that prostitution must be viewed through an age-specific lens (along with race, gender, and class). The utility of this approach bring to light the fact that not all prostitutes and sex workers within Anglophone African colonies were viewed in the same ways. Perceptions



about age were surely a determining factor in how colonialists and Africans both attempted to regulate illicit sexuality.

One criticism relates to the author's assertion that the use of newspapers not only brought forth the voices of elite women and men, but also "ordinary" Nigerians in Lagos (albeit in unedited form). It is difficult to believe that many "ordinary" Nigerians (who were mostly likely illiterate and had low socioeconomic status) used newspapers as the main pedestal on which they shared their views about illicit sexuality in colonial Nigeria. Despite this minor drawback, the book is a valuable contribution to scholarship on the sexualization of nationalism in Anglophone Africa. No doubt it will generate debate and induce more critical research on the topic, such as conducting cross-cultural analysis. The book is written and organized in a fashion that makes it highly accessible to a wide audience. For instance, Chapter 1 does a remarkable job of providing a useful historical and geographical context that makes it easier to envision the motivations and agendas of the main characters in the book. It is a solid contribution to scholarly works on sexuality in Africa and is of interest to scholars and students in the fields of African studies, gender, and history.

**Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué**  
Baylor University



2016

Aderinto, Saheed. *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1958*. University of Illinois Press, 2015, 264pp.

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## Recommended Citation

Omobowale, Mofeyisara Oluwatoyin. "Aderinto, Saheed. *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1958*. University of Illinois Press, 2015, 264pp." *Journal of Retracing Africa*: Vol. 3, Issue 1 (2016): 59-61. <http://encompass.eku.edu/jora/vol3/iss1/6>

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Aderinto, Saheed.** *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1958.* University of Illinois Press, 2015, 264pp.

*When Sex Threatened the State*, the first book-length history of prostitution in colonial Nigeria by Saheed Aderinto, examines the contestations over the control of illicit sexuality in Africa's most populous country. Aderinto renders an impressive interpretation of diverse primary and secondary sources to explain the significance of sex and sexuality in Nigeria during the first half of the twentieth century. The author makes three core arguments: First, he posits that sexuality cannot be understood in isolation from the broader history of a society. "The language of sex" he points out, is not just about such vague categories as "immorality" but also about contestation normally couched in the vocabulary of civilization. Second, he contends that the difference between adult and child sexualities was a significant factor that shaped sexual politics. Unlike existing works that pay overwhelming attention to adult prostitution, Aderinto shows that a comparative discussion of adult and child sexualities would expand the scope of scholarly research in a fruitful manner. Third, the intersection between sexuality and nationalism in Africa, the author argues, is far more complex than the present literature reveals. Throughout the colonial era, Nigerians espoused conflicting forms of nationalism as they interpreted sexual vice and its consequences from their prejudiced perspectives. One of Aderinto's methodological interventions is the idea of a "Total History of Sexuality." (pp 6) He contends that historical scholarship on sexuality has been over-compartmentalized. Thus he calls for a paradigm that combines many fields—economic, urban, social, gender, childhood, race, political, medical, military—in shedding light on the experiences of men and women who sold and patronized sexual services in the past.

*When Sex Threatened the State* has a total of seven chapters. In Chapter One, Aderinto lays the foundation of the work by examining the history of colonial Lagos within the context of social, gender, and racial relations. This intriguing chapter argues that the history of prostitution in colonial Lagos cannot be understood in isolation from the rapid social, political, and economic changes of the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, illicit sexuality, Aderinto argues, was one of the numerous sites of struggle among diverse groups of people who defined "social" and "moral" respectability to conform to African and European notions of responsible use of time, leisure, and the body. He introduced the men and women (Nigerians and British) who shaped the politics of sexuality in Lagos, exposing the

internal and external factors, which informed their disposition.

Chapter Two then turns to the narrative of sex and vice with particular focus on adult prostitutes. This chapter allows Aderinto to articulate one of his main arguments that the difference between adult and child sexualities shaped the tenor of politics in Nigeria. Aderinto unveils the identities of women who sold sex, integrating their ethnic and social identities within the context of a modern colonial society. But unlike several existing works, which only discuss the experience of women who sold sex, Aderinto gives detailed insight about men who bought sexual favor. His analysis allows us to come to terms with the “inevitability” of sex work in the colonial society. All classes of Nigerian and European men patronized prostitutes. But if prostitution had remained a secret affair between adult men and women, the “moralists” of Lagos might not have contested it. Prostitution related activities such as street-walking supported the activities of young delinquent criminals who undermined the colonial ideals of public peace and decency.

The involvement of underage girls in prostitution was also a serious moral question in Lagos. In Chapter Three, Aderinto presents the history of child prostitution. He takes us through the underworld of girls who worked in Lagos brothels and the kinds of relationship that existed between them and other members of the prostitution subculture such as the *Boma* boys and the madams. One of the biggest questions about child prostitution was the relationship between age and psychosexual development. Child prostitution was morally unacceptable, not only because it involved sexual and financial exploitation of minors, but also because it endangered the medical and psychological health of girls who the Colony Welfare Office, the government establishment that policed child prostitution, and the leading Nigerian elites believed needed state paternalism. While the impact of prostitution on public order and the exploitation of children worried Nigerians and the British colonialists, the increase in the cases of venereal disease (VD) among the Nigeria Regiment of the colonial army, the Royal West African Frontier Force, placed the crisis of illicit sexuality at the center of colonial security. In Chapter Four, Aderinto explores the relationship between prostitution and the survival of the British colony of Nigeria during the WWII. The high incidence of VD in the colonial force became a major security issue, which needed to be addressed.

Chapter Five is about the laws passed to deal with the real and imagined consequences of prostitution. By dividing the anti-prostitution laws into “adult” and “child” related legislations, Aderinto is able to present interesting data about how the government conceived the criminal justice system as the main solution to the “problem” of prostitution. His engagement of VD laws also placed the war against sex work within the framework of medical and legal history. According to Aderinto, colonial laws on prostitution tended to homogenize children’s

experience by disregarding the diverse definitions of childhood across the hundreds of Nigerian ethnic groups. The author focuses on the reactions of Nigerian men to anti-prostitution laws in Chapter Six. His conviction is that men and women responded to anti-prostitution laws differently, because sex work affected them in diverse ways. Chapter Seven tackles the position of the Lagos elite women on the government's decision not to formally enlist their associations (the Women's Welfare Council and the Nigerian Women's Party) in the fight against prostitution. Aderinto notes that the government's decision was based on the well-established notion among British political officials that African women lacked the intellectual capacity to manage resources on behalf of the state. In the Epilogue, the author links the past with the present. He explores the changes and continuities in the politics of sexuality regulation between 1960 and 2014, and notes that the postcolonial government revised the colonial stance on prohibiting sex work by making it an "illegal but tolerated" offense.

My prediction is that *When Sex Threatened the State* will stand the test of time, not only for the quality of Aderinto's analyses, sources, and interpretations, but also for the ways he placed sexuality at the center of core structures of everyday life in colonial Nigeria. This is a major contribution to African studies and historical scholarship on Nigeria.

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**SAHEED ADERINTO, *When Sex Threatened the State: illicit sexuality, nationalism, and politics in colonial Nigeria 1900–1958*. Champaign IL: University of Illinois Press (hb \ \$95 – 978 0 252 03888 4; pb \ \$32 – 978 0 252 08042 5). 2015, 264 pp.**

ABOSEDE GEORGE

Africa / Volume 86 / Issue 02 / May 2016, pp 364 - 365

DOI: 10.1017/S0001972016000188, Published online: 06 April 2016

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0001972016000188](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0001972016000188)

## How to cite this article:

ABOSEDE GEORGE (2016). Africa, 86, pp 364-365 doi:10.1017/S0001972016000188

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SAHEED ADERINTO, *When Sex Threatened the State: illicit sexuality, nationalism, and politics in colonial Nigeria 1900–1958*. Champaign IL: University of Illinois Press (hb \$95 – 978 0 252 03888 4; pb \$32 – 978 0 252 08042 5). 2015, 264 pp.

This monograph addresses the politics of the regulation of prostitution in colonial Nigeria. The key concepts in the title are illicit sexuality, which mainly means prostitution, and politics, which includes nationalist politics but also extends beyond this. In seven chapters and an epilogue, ‘Prostitution and trafficking in the age of HIV/AIDS’, Aderinto tracks the practice and ideological underpinnings of prostitution control in Lagos from the first decades of colonial rule through the nationalist era, and also in the present-day Fourth Republic. The central questions of the book are: how did successive regimes conceive of the threat of prostitution, what policies were followed, and what actually changed over time?

Aderinto argues that answering the question of how different regimes conceived of the threat of prostitution requires first that we identify two characters: the figure of the prostitute and the figure of the customer. Whether the individual sex worker was an adult or an underage child made a difference in how lawmakers and enforcers conceived of the degree of menace posed by prostitution. Whether the sex customer was a civilian or a member of the colonial armies and whether they were Nigerian or European also had an impact on the degree of seriousness with which prostitution was treated as a threat to the political order. In short, prostitution threatened the state to different degrees depending on who was selling sex and who was buying it.

Aderinto’s exploration of the special role of soldiers in the history of prostitution control in Lagos is especially fascinating and insightful. The West African Frontier Force (later the Royal West African Frontier Force), on which colonists relied to police the subject civilian population, was itself imagined as relying on ready access to commercial sex in order to maintain its martial masculinity. European sailors in Lagos during the First and Second World Wars were similarly the focus of policy discussions that prioritized protecting the health of the soldier (and thus the imperial might) while preserving his sense of entitlement to sexual pleasure and privacy. Thus prostitution regulation, from the colonial state’s point of view, was driven more by a need to appease or control colonial militias and imperial armies than by any concern for the well-being of sex workers or the larger public.

Colonial officials were, of course, not the only ones engaged with the issue of prostitution control. Aderinto offers a thoughtful reading of the changing engagement of elite Nigerian women with this issue and how the politics of prostitution control splintered African elites along gender lines. Aderinto’s study of the history of prostitution control organically opens up other fascinating subjects, such as the history of venereal disease control in Nigeria, the long-standing wars between native medicine practitioners and purveyors of Western pharmaceuticals, local sexual ideologies and vocabularies, the urban underclass world populated with *boma* boys, crooked cops, bar girls, belligerent touts, drunken sailors and young musicians, who documented urban dramas in song for posterity. Aderinto draws on a wide array of cultural and social history sources, including music, the Segilola novel and advertisements, as well as medical records, military records, court records, contemporary newspapers and colonial welfare reports. Aderinto’s evident facility with Yoruba and Pidgin also allows for the rich use of oral evidence on sexual cultures in colonial Lagos.



Any African history book addressing the topic of prostitution is going to invite comparison with Luise White's seminal project *The Comforts of Home*. Aderinto's use of an oral history method invites a double comparison. What White was able to accomplish in *Comforts* was to focus the reader on a view of the sex economy in colonial Nairobi as narrated from the point of view of the women who were at the heart of that economy. From the point of view of sex workers, we gained a more nuanced view of the variations among different forms of sex work, and the variations that emerged in that industry over time. Aderinto's book differs from White's in that it moves its focus, chapter by chapter, between child prostitutes, soldiers, adult prostitutes, commercial sex consumers (also known as 'John Bulls') and elite women. In the introduction, Aderinto mentions an early ambition to write 'a total history of sexuality'. While he seems to have scaled down the project, he still packs into this first book many innovative meditations about sexual practices, ideologies and economies, and their relation to the governance of colonial Lagos.

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doi:10.1017/S0001972016000188

ROBERT LORWAY, *Namibia's Rainbow Project: gay rights in an African nation*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press (hb \$60 – 978 0 253 01514 3; pb \$24 – 978 0 253 01520 4). 2015, 155 pp.

In *Namibia's Rainbow Project*, Robert Lorway provides an ethnographic study of a Namibian LGBT organization in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Like other countries in southern Africa, Namibia has a history of state-sponsored homophobia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, with SWAPO politicians calling for the arrest, detention and deportation of LGBT citizens. LGBT Namibians founded the Rainbow Project (TRP) in 1997 to combat this persecution. From its Windhoek-based office, TRP also aimed to persuade the government to supply full equal rights to LGBT Namibians, despite the government's rhetoric that they were immoral, un-African and outside the bounds of the morality of the nation state. Lorway details for readers the experiences of a group of young people (whom he calls the Rainbow Youth) – men and women in their late teens and early twenties who lived in townships, attended TRP workshops and classes, and cooperated with advocacy and political organizing to combat state-sponsored and local homophobia.

Much of the text addresses the intended and unintended effects and consequences of TRP's rhetoric and practices on how the Rainbow Youth learned to see themselves, experience their gender and sexual identities, and relate to other LGBT people, their family, neighbours, communities, and the nation state. TRP taught attendees at their workshops how to get in touch with their desires – both for intimate and sexual relationships and also for affect and self-presentations. TRP encouraged youth to be out and proud about their gender and sexual identities and to celebrate sexual differences and diversity. However, there were limitations to how TRP intervened in the lives of this group of young people. At the same time that youth were encouraged to embrace themselves, their bodies and their desires, the organization was silent about other aspects of their lives. In particular, Lorway draws attention to the way in which TRP largely ignored the effects of neoliberalism and structural violence – in

AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

*When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1958.* By Saheed Aderinto. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015. Pp. xiii, 241. \$32.00.)

Finally since Luise White's groundbreaking *Comforts of Home* [1990], which detailed the problem of prostitution in colonial Nairobi, students of African studies are once again provided with an intriguing conversation on sexuality as an arena of politics, nationalism, masculinity, and pop culture in urbanized colonial Nigeria. Deploying a repertoire of sources that include court, medical, and military records; musical lyrics; published advertisements; colonial welfare reports; as well as indigenous idioms and historical novels that highlight incidents of pimping, girl trafficking, prostitution, and settlements, Saheed Aderinto tells how uncontrolled appetites for sex and graft created moral panic in society in the twentieth century as venereal diseases beleaguered the sex workers and their patrons. Also lucidly covered in the book are the laws that were rolled out by the British colonial officials to address the problem and attempts by Africans to undermine these laws, which they considered as alien to the indigenous society.

The book is important because it details the British perception of prostitution as a problem of a lack of progress on the part of the "primitive" African whose lifestyle, in the Eurocentric parlance, was an aberration to what was modern. Though this view aligns with the "civilizing mission" grand narrative, it is noteworthy that prostitution was synonymous with urbanization and the customers of prostitutes in colonial Lagos included both Africans and Europeans. More fascinating is that in its effort to combat prostitution, the colonial state was more concerned with protecting randy and corrupt colonial officials (soldiers, policemen, visiting businessmen, and sailors) than the sex workers or the larger population.

The book is neatly ordered into seven chapters with an epilogue that draws attention to the resilience of commercial sex in Lagos even as the scourge of HIV/AIDS grows around the world. In chapter 1, the author provides a historical emergence of the port city of Lagos in the nineteenth century as one of Africa's most culturally diverse cities (28–29). Indeed, the interracial, interethnic, and intraethnic character of the "No Man's Land" embedded politics of sex into the existing tension over social privileges, urban citizenship, class stratification, and race relations.

In chapters 2 to 5, Aderinto covers the narration of sex as an obstacle to modernization and social progress. Yet, without "places of socialization like hotels, pubs, and cinemas," as the author notes, the discrete practices of

commercial sex, child prostitution, sexual exploitation, and spread of venereal diseases would have been uncommon (36). In chapters 6 and 7, the contradictions and consequences of antiprostitution laws, enacted to checkmate the problem, are covered. The antiprostitution discourse delineates issues surrounding power and gendered ideologies premised on cultural ideals rather than the realities on the ground. Also revealed are the differences between elite men and women in Lagos, and how roguish and desperate policemen would rather arrest and punish innocent people than endanger their source of illegal earnings (including payoffs with free sex) by arresting the enablers of prostitution. Even a policeman, Mr. Flavian Opara, on one occasion swallowed a bribe of £5 “to escape arrest by his colleagues” (139).

Overall, this book is a great addition to an area of African studies that has not been adequately covered by research. Future studies of a similar nature on Port Harcourt, Calabar, and colonial cities in Nigeria will make a delightful read. Aderinto must be praised for his vigor, vision, clarity of expressions, and intelligent use of humor to treat this complex subject.

*Idaho State University*

Raphael Chijioke Njoku

*The Ba‘thification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein’s Totalitarianism.* By Aaron M. Faust. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015. Pp. xxi, 296. \$55.00.)

The Iraqi archives, based at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, contain millions of documents relating to the thirty-five year period [1968–2003] when Iraq was ruled by the Ba‘th Party. These archives comprise, inter alia, the correspondence of the ruling party, the presidential palace, and the intelligence services and allow researchers to examine how the country was ruled.

Coming on the heels of other books that heavily used the archives (the reviewer is the author of one of them), the expectation is that new ones further expand our knowledge of the system. Aaron M. Faust’s focus is on how Saddam Hussein Ba‘thified the country, and the book’s title and contents inform readers time and again that the regime was a totalitarian one. The book is basically divided into three parts: ideology; organization (of the party and society); and terror and enticement. Throughout the book, Faust compares Saddam Hussein to Hitler and/or Stalin rather than to other regimes in the Arab world, such as Syria under Hafiz al-Asad or Libya under Muammar al-Qaddafi. These authoritarian Arab leaders controlled their countries with an iron fist, and their systems were essentially similar to Iraq’s.



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Gender, Sexuality, and the State in West Africa

Sarah Zimmerman

Journal of Women's History, Volume 31, Number 1, Spring 2019, pp. 160-164  
(Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2019.0008>



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## Gender, Sexuality, and the State in West Africa

Jessica Cammaert. *Undesirable Practices: Women, Children, and the Politics of the Body in Northern Ghana, 1930–1972*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. xv + 306 pp.; ISBN 978-0-8032-8680-1 (cl); 978-0-8032-8696-2 (pdf); 978-0-8032-8694-8 (epub).

Saheed Aderinto. *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. xviii + 264 pp.; ill. ISBN 978-0-2520-3888-4; 978-0-2520-8042-5 (pb); 978-0-2520-9684-6 (epub).

### Sarah Zimmerman

According to Achille Mbembe, “given the degeneracy and vice that, from the colonial viewpoint, characterized native life, colonialism found it necessary to rein in the abundant sexuality of the native, to tame his or her spirit, police his/her body.”<sup>1</sup> Mbembe characterized colonialism as a disciplining, violent field of force determined to transform indigenous Africans into economically useful and socially compliant modern subjects. The texts under review qualify the degree and methods with which colonial states intervened in the practices of African women and girls. Jessica Cammaert and Saheed Aderinto historicize the detrimental gendered effects of British indirect rule in Gold Coast/Ghana and Nigeria. Their work highlights the progressive marginalization of African women in rural and urban public spheres. The authors draw our attention to the ways in which colonialism impacted female sexuality, girlhood, and gendered traditions related to marriage and reproduction. They examine colonial governance and illustrate how male (and a few female) actors—African and European—participated in the production of knowledge around female sexuality and traditional practices. *Undesirable Practices* and *When Sexuality Threatened the State* show how anxieties surrounding female circumcision and prostitution reveal deep ambiguities at the heart of governmental policy making, as well as how vocal African subjects (and later citizens) petitioned the state to achieve their desired outcomes. The gendered language of colonial intervention made a lasting impact on the development of discourses that continue to inform contemporary relief and aid initiatives on the African continent.

Cammaert’s monograph examines governmental debates concerning “undesirable practices” associated with rural women and girls in northeastern Gold Coast/Ghana. These practices include female genital cutting

(FGC), human trafficking, prostitution, nudity, and illicit adoption/child abduction. This study employs colonial and postcolonial government documents to chart the production of information related to gendered traditions, its contestation, and the circulation of this information as bureaucratic knowledge. Policymakers struggled over the institutionalization of this knowledge, as well as its use in the management of women's reproductive capacities and the maintenance of moral economies (2–4). In lieu of development and its trappings of progress, Cammaert uses the concept of “trusteeship” to describe the ultimate goal of governmental reformers—maintaining authority over rural African populations. Trusteeship facilitates Cammaert's historicization of state action and inaction concerning undesirable practices from the 1930s to the 1970s. This narrative bridges the colonial/postcolonial divide and calls attention to continuities and discontinuities in development discourses as they changed in orientation and scale over time. Cammaert demonstrates that the expansion of colonial social welfare initiatives in the interwar era coincided with the state's promotion of patriarchy and paternalism. Gendered colonial authority continued to have salience during the period of heightened nationalism as well as in international aid campaigns operating in postcolonial Ghana. At each historical moment, Cammaert underscores how states compromised rural Africans' sovereignty and normalized gendered interventions into their everyday practices. *Undesirable Practices* begins with three chapters on FGC in the interwar period. The second half of the monograph widens its scope to address slavery and female pawing in the 1940s, female anti-nudity campaigns in the 1950s–1960s, and orphaned girls and illicit adoption in the 1960s–1970s.

Cammaert's work appears at a moment of renewed scholarly concern with FGC in Africa and the legacies of anti-FGC campaigns of the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> The three interwar chapters on FGC provide new insights on colonial nonintervention into African women's reproductive rights/rites in British Africa. The interwar period is an era in which gender relationships, local authority, and the articulation of power evolved in conjunction with the expansion of colonial capitalism, imposition of indirect rule, and the erasure of matrilineality in Gold Coast. Colonial officials, local leaders, and newly minted experts (like the anthropologist Robert Sutherland Rattray) competed for fluency in and authority over gendered sociocultural practices that threatened state initiatives to introduce “modernity” and “civilization” to the rural Northern Territories. Indirect rule encouraged local and state competition for patriarchal authority and expertise over female circumcision, while simultaneously facilitating the state's inaction regarding this “undesirable practice.” Amid this ambiguity, the debates surrounding FGC uniformly disempowered the women and girls at their center.

The second half of Cammaert's monograph addresses slavery, nudity, prostitution, and illicit adoption in order to track the ways in which the paternalistic custodianship of girls and women transferred from the colonial state to the independent Ghanaian state and later to international aid organizations. Cammaert argues that abolition shifted the burden of labor onto premarital-aged girls in post-emancipation societies, which likely increased female slavery and pawning during the 1940s in rural Gold Coast. Since these practices were directly linked to marriage, household, and reproduction, rural colonial administrators opted for inaction in order to maintain state and paternalistic control over women and girls (123). In an innovative chapter on nudity, Cammaert compellingly argues that the rise of nationalism and promises of decolonization reframed undesirable practices within a language of modernity. Predominantly male Ghanaian politicians, in anticipation of decolonization, hastened to eradicate "backward" sociocultural practices like female nudity and scarification on the eve of Ghana's independence (166). The final chapter illustrates how the post-Nkrumah Ghanaian state failed to provide welfare for orphaned children or eradicate illicit adoption. As a result, international development and aid organizations cast Ghanaian children as synecdoches of failed, postcolonial African states (214–15). The discourse around development in Africa cast the state as obstructing modernity, which paved the way for international intervention in the era of structural adjustment and neoliberalism.

Saheed Aderinto's *When Sexuality Threatened the State* joins a recent uptick in publications on female sexuality in urban colonial African studies.<sup>3</sup> His monograph examines gendered colonialism and "selective modernity" by way of illicit sexuality—predominantly prostitution—in Lagos from 1900 to 1958. Lagos is a unique site to study illicit sexuality because of the presence of vocal, educated Christian elites who invested in the social development of colonial Lagos and its moral order. Their concerns spilled across Lagos's newspapers, where prostitution sat at a nexus of interrelated concerns about girlhood, sexuality, urbanism, and nationalism. Aderinto uses the phrase "selective modernity" to describe a strategy deployed by Lagosians to selectively appropriate "'positive' practices of social advancement and doing away with those constructed as 'negative'" as they advanced Nigeria on the path towards modern statehood (14). Aderinto importantly emphasizes that prostitution is "as much about men as it is about women" (51). His study of public debate on sex work makes intelligible the ways in which gender, authority, and power shifted through the colonial period. Colonial Lagos was an urban space of constant renewal, where competing gendered, racial, and socioeconomic forces shaped sexual politics. These forces, however, were not neutral and resulted in a gendered colonialism that disempowered women and "made gender inequality an official policy

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of the state" (32). Aderinto threads this argument across four chapters on prostitution and two post-WWII chapters in which elite male and female Lagosians struggled for legitimacy in the public sphere.

The chapters on prostitution illustrate that civilian male elites and governmental representatives gradually reduced women's public power and brought their social institutions and practices under the regulation of the colonial state. The first chapter focuses on adult prostitution and the physical, ethnic, and racial geography of sex work in Lagos. In other African colonial cities, the colonial state or members of white settler societies dictated the nature of and interventions into prostitution.<sup>4</sup> Aderinto found that Lagosians directed public opinion and state responses to prostitution. The second chapter addresses underage prostitution and the emergence of the idea of the erotic child. This innovative chapter focuses on how girls' sexuality became central to debates about selective modernity and the moral obligations of African elites. The colonial state moved to define and protect urban girlhood, which paradoxically elicited new concerns about the state's attempt to redefine and potentially criminalize indigenous marital practices. The third chapter places prostitution at the intersection of public health concerns and the colonial military. The military buildup of single, male African colonial soldiers in Lagos during WWII precipitated new medical initiatives to protect the sexual health of enlisted men. Aderinto illustrates how "the moralization of sex and pathologization of the African body as a vessel of venereal disease" allowed medical officials to manipulate public concern over prostitution and reposition colonialism as a constituent element of positive development (94). The fourth chapter examines how the criminal justice system, through policing and legislative measures, influenced how the public perceived urban women. The bundle of anti-prostitution laws passed during WWII made public flirting and lewdness criminal behaviors, which pathologized "all women and extended the geography of policing prostitution . . . to virtually any domain" (119).

The final chapters of *When Sex Threatened the State* address how public discourses related to prostitution affected male and female Lagosians' access to and image in the public sphere. Anti-prostitution legislation had gendered consequences—intended and unintended—for men and women. Male elites wanted to regulate prostitution yet ensure that young women remained sexually available to them. Erstwhile moralists who once cast prostitution as a negative component of modernity defended prostitution in the post-WWII era and framed sex work within the "rhetoric of national self-determination" (136). Illicit sexuality was a "battleground of contestation over gendered colonialism," which portrays how women's involvement in public initiatives related to prostitution opened them up to state and discursive attacks on their rights (157). Prostitution provides another

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lens through which to map the marginalization and delegitimization of African women in the colonial era as well as explain their absence in the postcolonial public sphere.

Before concluding, I want to air a few light criticisms. These monographs exhibit odd image decisions. Aderinto's cover features a Tanzanian girl, and most of Cammaert's illustrations are located on her Wordpress site.<sup>5</sup> Both texts could have provided more insight into how African stakeholders recognized the difference between childhood and adulthood. Legitimate marriage was and remains fundamental in defining African women's public social status, sexual availability, and respectability. Finally, these texts could have more explicitly engaged with the literature on West African marital traditions.

In the main, *Undesirable Practices* and *When Sexuality Threatened the State* deepen our understanding of sexuality, reproduction, girlhood, and the state. They provide new insights regarding how colonial governments functioned along axes of gender. Colonial rule disempowered African women, the consequences of which are starkly visible in contemporary Africa. Cammaert and Aderinto demonstrate that colonialism ultimately aimed to alter Africans' sexuality and that its objectives were gendered.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 113.

<sup>2</sup>Saida Hodžić, *The Twilight of Cutting: African Activism and Life after NGOs* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); and Miroslava Prazak, *Making the Mark: Gender, Identity, and Genital Cutting* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016).

<sup>3</sup>Ndubueze Mbah, "Female Masculinities, Dissident Sexualities, and the Material Politics of Gender in Early Twentieth Century Igboland," *Journal of Women's History* 29, no. 4 (2017): 35–60; Carina E. Ray, *Crossing the Color Line: Race, Sex, and the Contested Politics of Colonialism in Ghana* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015); and Rachel Jean-Baptiste, *Conjugal Rights: Marriage, Sexuality, and Urban Life in Colonial Libreville, Gabon* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014).

<sup>4</sup>Luise White, *Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Diana Jeater, *Marriage, Perversion, and Power: The Construction of Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia, 1894–1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, "The Shadow Theater of Prostitution in French Colonial Tonkin: Faceless Prostitutes under the Colonial Gaze," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 7, no. 1 (2012): 10–51.

<sup>5</sup>Jessica Cammaert, *JCammaert* (blog), <https://jcammaert.wordpress.com/author/jcammaert/>.



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*When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit sexuality,  
nationalism, and politics in colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958*  
by Saheed Aderinto (review)

Oluwakemi A. Adesina

Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History, Volume 18, Number 3, Winter  
2017, (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cch.2017.0052>



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## ***When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit sexuality, nationalism, and politics in colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958***

**By Saheed Aderinto. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015.**

In his 241-page book, Saheed Aderinto looks at the historical significance of illicit sexuality and the structures put in place by the British colonial administration in Lagos, Nigeria to control the obnoxious practice. This book is an important contribution to Sexuality Studies and the colonial history of Nigeria. This work, the first full book dedicated to researching sexuality in colonial Nigeria, is centred on sex, sexuality, sexual politics, class conflicts, urbanisation, and gender. *When Sex Threatened the State* analyses Nigerian responses to British sexuality laws and the contradictory ways in which the British and African reformers advocated for the regulation and/or prohibition of prostitution. Aderinto builds on earlier works of scholars like Luise White's *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in colonial Nairobi*, George Mosse's pioneering study on *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-class morality and sexual norms in modern Europe* and Phillipa Levine's *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing venereal disease in the British Empire*. The book is divided into seven chapters and an epilogue.

In the introduction, the author incisively engages with the issues of prostitution and corruption. The introduction examines sexual politics, the criminal justice system as it affects prostitution, and girl trafficking. Aderinto carefully details the historical evolution of Lagos—the environment under which prostitution flourished. The author asserts that corruption was devised by officers of the Nigeria Police force, officers of the Colony Welfare Office (CWO) and sex workers as an escape route from the severity of criminal justice system, thus affirming the notion that corruption is a postcolonial problem is ahistorical “given the spate of corruption during the 1940s.” (3).

In the second chapter, he “unveils” the gendered narrative of prostitution that elicited concerns from the colonial government and the nationalists. Aderinto provides compelling arguments that established the link between prostitution and juvenile delinquency, exemplified by the *boma* and *jaguda* boys, as a “mutually constitutive and symbiotic” relation (69). The author emphasizes the relevance of newspaper articles as

a veritable source for the writing of colonial history while citing the story of the Lagos prostitute *Segilola: Eleyinju ege*, whose story was published as a novel and serialised in *Akede Eko (Lagos Herald)* in 1930 and which provided the author with a vivid image of the social life in colonial Lagos (53). This novel has recently been edited, translated and introduced by Karin Barber.<sup>1</sup> Most important in this chapter is his emphasis on “adult prostitution” as distinct from “child prostitution” (72). It is interesting to note that the colonial experiences in Lagos are replicated elsewhere on the continent. Whilst Aderinto documents the incidence of child prostitution in colonial Lagos (120–21), Luise White also highlights the prevalence of juvenile prostitution in colonial Nairobi.<sup>2</sup>

The third chapter of the book illustrates the “moral degeneration” of society as “criminally minded adults” introduced underage girls to prostitution. This development drove new interventionist initiatives from the colonial state, with the establishment of the Colonial Welfare Office (CWO) (74) and child prostitution laws. However, the claim by the author that “the age of consent in Nigeria was thirteen, meaning that an individual legally ceased to be a child at this age” (75) needs further clarification because there is no reference to any document to corroborate this assertion. The questions this raises are: Given the fact that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society, is this age of consent applicable to all ethnic groups? In what areas of life is this age of consent employed? Also, is this age of consent gendered?

Chapter Four deals with the concomitant of “illicit sexuality”: the “sexual scourge,” that is, venereal diseases, and how they permeated society and the measures proffered to stem the tide of the menace. This issue was salient in the age (before the late 1940s) when the army, a strong colonial institution, discouraged marriage and expected soldiers not to have strong family ties or responsibilities that could militate against their productivity and mobility (98). The prohibition of prostitution became the primary official measure for the reduction of venereal diseases. Aderinto explicitly states that colonial officials were, however, not united about the best methods (112) to combat both civilian and military prostitution.

In Chapter Five the author discusses the “prohibitionist agenda” of the colonial administration in the establishment of anti-prostitution / “sexualized laws” that the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was expected to enforce (113). Aderinto also discusses the

CWO's development approach to addressing the social vices in colonial Nigeria through the CWO-sponsored Children and Young Persons Ordinance of 1943 (121) where adulthood was declared to begin at age seventeen, and according to the author; "the science of childhood development (was) introduced", and adults were made liable to punishment for engaging children in prostitution (123). The author concludes this chapter by highlighting the inconsistent nature of the anti-prostitution legislation. Aderinto lays emphasis on the selfish nature of the colonial government's commitment to matters that affected it, opining that "the well-implemented ordinances were those that were presumed to have a greater impact on the colonial political economy, public order, health, and security" (133).

In Chapters Six and Seven, the author presents gendered and political analyses of sexual control, highlighting the contributions of elite Lagosian women as well as men. Here, the author reveals that the perceptions of these persons were not static but guided by identity and social class. Women's involvement in sexual politics reveals "a new perspective on established knowledge about colonialism as a male-centred institution" (168). Aderinto concludes that anti-prostitution laws failed and suggests that they failed not solely because of "racial and gender bias and a lack of sensitivity to cultural variations among the myriad of Nigerian ethnic groups" but also because "the adoption of a short-term approach to controlling vice meant that the colonialists were merely attacking the superficial aspects of the "problem of prostitution" (154). To address the inadequacies of the colonialists, elite women injected moral and cultural tones that reflected largely on the future of women, as respectable wives, mothers, politicians, administrators and law-abiding members of society (169).

In the Epilogue, entitled *Prostitution and Trafficking in the Age of HIV/AIDS*, Aderinto articulates the dynamisms of post-colonial Nigeria and the challenges posed by globalisation. He compares the problems of child trafficking, prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, between colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. It is a conglomeration of diverse topics that makes the section a little bit ambitious. Nevertheless, it serves as a pointer to other themes that needs to be addressed by future researchers.

Implicit in Aderinto's study is the complexity of the social, political and economic developments in the colonial period. From the available evidence, he draws a conclusion similar to Phillipa Levine's *Prostitution, Race and Politics* (7) that the colonial government's concern was born out of health implications of prostitution for the military – “the defender of the empire” (21) – rather than for the welfare of the people.

*When Sex Threatened the State* has been written in clear and fluid language. It exhibits a thorough historical scholarship that is firmly grounded in archival sources and periodicals. This book lives up to the expectations of contemporary scholars of history, sociology and anthropology as it establishes the connections between colonial concerns, nationalism, sexuality and social vices which resonates in similar studies in other parts of Africa and the modern world.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Karin Barber, *Print Culture and the First Yoruba Novel: I.B. Thomas's "Life Story of Me, Segilola" and other Texts* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 154–58.



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## Histories of Heterosexualities in Colonial Africa

Marc Epprecht

GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, Volume 24, Numbers 2-3, June 2018, pp. 367-374 (Review)

Published by Duke University Press



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# HISTORIES OF HETEROSEXUALITIES IN COLONIAL AFRICA

**Marc Epprecht**

*Conjugal Rights: Marriage, Sexuality, and Urban Life  
in Colonial Libreville, Gabon*

Rachel Jean-Baptiste

Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014. xiv + 300 pp.

*When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism,  
and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958*

Saheed Aderinto

Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. xviii + 241 pp.

*Medicine and Morality in Egypt: Gender and Sexuality  
in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*

Sherry Sayed Gadelrab

London: I. B. Taurus, 2016. x + 204 pp.

Three new monographs add significantly to our understanding of the transformations of gender relations and sexual mores from premodern to modern times in diverse contexts in Africa. While the focus in all three is overwhelmingly on heterosexual relationships, they contribute to the theorization of “global queer” by introducing meticulously gathered empirical evidence from otherwise under-



researched historical African contexts. This evidence underscores how unnatural heterosexuality is: today's heteronormative gender relations and sexual mores did not become hegemonic except through a lot of hard ideological, legal, and other labor over decades of sometimes wrenching economic, political, and social change. Even then, heterosexuality as practiced is clearly a broad tent under which all kinds of relationships have flourished frequently in glaring contradiction to commonly heard claims about "African culture" or "African sexuality." These books also bring fresh insights into how and why colonial subjects were often attracted to and sought to shape for their own benefit certain aspects of metropolitan culture under the umbrella of modernity.

Rachel Jean-Baptiste's elegant history of colonial Gabon opens with an anecdote that poignantly reveals the yawning gaps between European intentions and African aspirations. France had abolished slavery and the slave trade in 1848. It thus found itself in a similar situation as the British had from 1807, with its navy patrolling the coasts of West Africa encountering ships laden with now-illegal human cargo. What to do with the liberated contraband? Like Britain with Freetown, France established an outpost on a convenient stretch of coast that was otherwise of little interest to it. This became Libreville ("Free Town"), where recaptives could be resettled with a hut and a plot of land. Within months, however, the first beneficiaries of French generosity rebelled. Roughly half of the freed slaves took up arms to attack France's African allies in the neighborhood. They wanted more wives than Libreville itself allowed, and for several weeks the men kidnapped young women from villages along the Gabon River. After the mutiny was quelled, the French state and Catholic missionaries hastily facilitated a mass, "proper" marriage for the survivors to restore the reputation of the civilizing mission.

This dramatic incident sets the stage for Jean-Baptiste to ask her big questions. How and why did heterosexual relationships change over time? What were the roles of African women in particular in effecting those changes? And how did sexuality affect the development of other social, economic, and political structures up to the end of the colonial era in 1960? Chapters unfold in rough chronological order, beginning with a close reconstruction of precolonial gender relations and the emergence of a vibrant transactional sexual economy (this makes the book a rare study of sexualities in Africa to include significant content from the nineteenth century). Chapters in the second part of the book focus on specific French and African anxieties and campaigns as the French state sought to mitigate perceived negative consequences of the emergent sexual economy: changes to the bride-wealth economy, marriage and divorce laws, the regulation of extramarital

sex, and the propriety of interracial sex. The key concern was how best to manage people's often unruly affairs as the city transitioned from colonial backwater to booming, cosmopolitan center on the verge of independence.

In posing these questions, Jean-Baptiste acknowledges her indebtedness not just to the rich feminist historiography of women and gender in Africa but also to the more recent scholarship on same-sex sexuality. In that vein, she describes looking for evidence of homosexual relations to provide a fuller picture of the history but comes upon complete archival silence and oral informants' flat denials. She then made a strategic decision to focus on the majority practices, albeit applying a critical queer perspective to the evidence. For example, Jean-Baptiste does not accept that formal monogamous marriage in a heteropatriarchal society meant that Gabonese wives were unable to make their own autonomous informal arrangements. Indeed, she shows (e.g., pp. 32, 63) that legally monogamous wives sometimes had sex with other men with the permission of their husbands, and that those husbands in some cases may even have encouraged informal polyandry when the extramarital sex involved white men and the exchange of cash.

Libreville provides an important case study for queering heterosexuality for several reasons. First, with a few notable exceptions, the historiography of women, gender, and sexuality in colonial Africa is heavily dominated by studies from the Anglophone colonies and South Africa. *Conjugal Rights* is thus a welcome contribution to broadening the evidentiary base. It draws largely on French archival sources (notably, civil court records), Gabonese texts in French (which was the lingua franca among Africans in the multi-ethnic city), and oral interviews (in both French and the main African languages, Mpongwé and Fang).

Second, unlike more-studied cities in eastern and southern Africa, where the sex ratio among Africans was heavily skewed male, Libreville from the beginning always had a rough gender balance, and even a female majority at times. As Jean-Baptiste makes clear, this had a significant impact on gender and sexual relations and thus offers a distinctive comparison to Nairobi, Lagos, Harare, or Johannesburg. Notably, the scholarship of the latter cities tends to argue that their demographic imbalance gave women a negotiating edge. Many men seeking the company of a few women allowed the women to bid their services up and to carve out a foothold in the city despite the many social and legal obstacles. Jean-Baptiste suggests, however, that there is more to the story than supply and demand. Even when the potential supply of wives was high, women were still able to negotiate advantages through innovative claims around custom, opportunistic relationships, and even overt political and legal activism.

And finally, Libreville had a distinctive multicultural ambience long after

the resettlement of freed slaves dwindled. The main indigenous African population of Mpongwé people had played a key role as middlemen in the local slave trade. Thereafter they enthusiastically adopted elements of French culture and had a history of profiting from sex with French men, including as formalized through marriage. This partly explains the rise of a class of local women with independent wealth, political voice, and sexual autonomy.

The French, meanwhile, were perpetually frustrated by Africans' refusal to conform to heteronormative expectations. For example, despite the healthy gender balance, Gabon suffered from chronically low birth rates (and hence chronic labor shortages). The French attributed this to African women having too much freedom to divorce and to conduct adulterous affairs (hence high rates of sexually transmitted infections that reduced fertility). Attempts to solve the problem included codifying stricter patriarchal "traditional" law and bolstering the power of chiefs to impose moral authority. The chiefs' behavior, unfortunately, sometimes made matters worse. By delaying rulings in cases of runaway wives seeking divorces, some chiefs exploited the women's labor in their own fields or added them to already large, market-oriented farming households. They also tended to side with women in order to increase their earnings through court fees, thus abetting women's "looseness." Birth rates were not boosted in the process.

Jean-Baptiste makes another contribution through her analysis of urban racial segregation. A common explanation for why so many African cities had segregated areas is whites' anxiety about the dangers of proximity to Africans. The "sanitation syndrome," notably, has been widely invoked as a shorthand for whites' exaggerated fears of catching contagious disease from blacks, while others have discerned fear of "black peril" (African men's lust for white women) as a driving motive in that geography. In Libreville the French did indeed seek to enhance their political power by establishing a whites-only zone and consolidating different ethnic groups in discrete neighborhoods. They failed, however, because of strong African resistance. That resistance in some cases hinged on fears that the proposed neighborhoods were a threat to African gender and sexual norms. Fang men, notably, feared that being forced to live together as a single group, when they had traditionally been scattered clans with no unifying social ethic, would increase the practice of adultery among them, with all the problems that that implied (57).

Overall, *Conjugal Rights* makes a compelling case that the culture, and even the physical layout of the contemporary city, owes much to the long history of struggle and joy found in the negotiation of erotic bonds between its citizens. "The geography of Libreville was not determined by only the built environment, but by the movement of women's and men's bodies and expressions of eros" (223). This is

a theme that Saheed Aderinto also develops in his analysis of conflicts over sexuality that have given Lagos, Nigeria, its distinctive character.

Like Jean-Baptiste, Aderinto opens his book with a revealing tale. In 1947 a leading female welfare officer in Lagos was convicted for accepting bribes. Three scandals swirled around the case. First, the corrupt official was responsible for the repression of child sex-trafficking. Thus, while the bribe payers were adults, the case drew attention to the issue of men having sex with girl children facilitated in part by the girls' mothers. Second, the bribe appeared to be part of a normal cost of operation for the city's thriving sex work scene. And third, relatedly, the official involved did not appear to be ashamed of her role in the sordid business. On the contrary, she retained five expensive lawyers and fought the allegations through to the highest court in British West Africa.

From here, Aderinto asks of the Lagos evidence many of the same questions as Jean-Baptiste does in *Libreville*, but with a stronger focus on the role that debates around sexuality played in nation building and decolonization. As Aderinto explains (7), the silencing of the history of contestation around sexuality both in official sources and in the scholarship on Nigeria impoverishes our understanding of other contestations in and around state formation. The opening anecdote is a striking nod to that impoverishment. It provides a small window into the history of elite privilege and government corruption that have so plagued the Nigerian nation-building experience but that clearly predated independence.

Aderinto weaves a subtle narrative of different groups trying to advance their social and political aspirations through their preferred visions of sexual propriety. At root, the British did not trust that Nigerians were culturally capable of demonstrating the kind of sexual self-control that was believed needed to exercise governance over a modern state, and the British did not hesitate to express that view in overtly racist language. Indeed, supposedly primitive or overexuberant sexuality among Africans had been an important justification for the colonial "civilizing mission" and underpinned the subsequent concept of a dual mandate of paternalistic, gradualist movement toward self-government. Many Christianized Nigerians actually accepted the basic outlines of that view but bridled at the tone. They offered their own counternarrative of sexual dignity within African culture as defined by them (to justify independence from the British) and selectively promoted aspects of British gender ideology (to make claims for Nigeria's modernity and potential for development under their leadership).

Aderinto also stresses an aspect of intersectionality commonly overlooked in the historiography: age. Disputes over when exactly ostensibly asexual and agency-less girls became women, with erotic (and other) agency playing an impor-

tant role in defining who, as a group, could be considered moral. People so defined would be the most appropriate leaders of the emerging national state. The book ends in 1958 when the British and their elite Nigerian partners in the decolonization process raised the legal age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen, demonstrating to the world their suitability as modern leaders.

Aderinto moves methodically through the sundry issues as they unfolded in the local, English-language press and government documents supplemented, to a limited extent, by oral interviews. But there are gaps. Given his attention to age, for example, it is curious that Aderinto does not discuss or even mention masturbation. Are we to assume that African youth in Nigeria did not do such things, or that the topic was not a concern to sexual moralists? Also, like Jean-Baptiste, Aderinto is aware and respectful of the scholarship on same-sex sexuality and gender variance, and he similarly pleads the invisibility of those topics in the archives to justify the almost exclusive focus on heterosexual sexuality. I say “almost” because he mentions a case of male-male sodomy in the military in 1921 (97). One could quibble that this seems a weak challenge to the heteronormativity of the sources, or be hopeful that it will be more actively addressed in a future study.

The book’s epilogue fascinatingly extrapolates these historical debates to a contemporary scandal—the trafficking of Nigerian women to Europe for sex work, and the proliferation, and normalization, of sex work domestically. Dispiriting parallels are drawn between now and the colonial era. As before, the laws and bureaucracies established to protect women and children appear less interested in the victims of exploitation than in the performance of respectability by the state and the elites who control it. In this case, the performance of cracking down on trafficking is intended to boost Nigeria’s tarnished international reputation.

*Medicine and Morality in Egypt* touches on many of the same issues as the previous books but with a much broader scope of time and more diverse sources (the author was Egyptian and consulted her Arabic- and Turkish-language sources directly). As this is the shortest of the three books under consideration, the race across centuries and decade hopping in the later chapters can be dizzying. I should also note with sadness that Sherry Sayed Gadelrab died in an untimely way and that the book was published posthumously. This may explain some disconcerting lack of attention to copyediting. The book nonetheless makes a coherent exposition on the ways that Western scientific knowledge—typically infused with orientalist, racist, sexist, and homophobic prejudice, as well as riven by great swathes of ignorance particularly around female sexuality—helped consolidate cultural and religious arguments for Egyptian women’s inferiority to men.

Chapter 1 begins with an overview of the principal ancient Greek philoso-

phers' theories of sexual difference and function. These were influentially translated into Arabic and Persian, and disseminated throughout the Islamic world over the millennium preceding Egypt's period of self-conscious modernization. Gadelrab relies heavily here on Thomas Laqueur's thesis that the ancient Greeks' "one sex" model of biological difference underpinned the edifice of heteropatriarchy, sexism, and misogyny that became Western civilization. According to that view, humans were physiologically of one sex, and females were simply flawed versions of the ideal. This notion was eventually upended by Enlightenment-era scientific observation. The central question Gadelrab assesses is how these ideas of biological sexual difference percolated through Islamic knowledge in the Middle East, eventually to frame the debates about women's and men's distinctive roles in a modernizing society.

Chapter 1 ends with the observation that classical Western science was interpreted over the centuries by Muslim scholars to adhere to teachings of the Koran, *hadith*, and *fiqh*. These teachings supported heteropatriarchal culture but also actively encouraged female sexual pleasure within the bounds of heterosexual marriage. They further allowed for significant tolerance of nonnormative expressions of gender and sexuality. Gadelrab analyzes several discussions of homosexuality, for example, where science backed the exegesis of sacred texts to reduce the severity of the moral infraction in certain circumstances. Indifference to male-male sexual relationships provided that they did not endanger the sanctity of heterosexual marriage and family honor was thus justified both by Koranic ambiguities and by physiological explanations around men's anatomical needs.

The majority of the book focuses on 1827–1949, bounded by the establishment of the first school dedicated to training Egyptians in Western medical knowledge and the criminalization of prostitution. Topics explored include female excision, polygyny, child betrothals, prostitution, the role of the veil, the rights of women, and much more as revealed through the writings of Egyptian intellectuals, feminist activists, and Islamic scholars. A trend quickly emerges in Gadelrab's analysis. Where Western observers judged Egyptians to have low morals, since they did not adhere to biologically suggested norms of civilized sexual behavior, Egyptians themselves tended to take a pragmatic view that put defense of family unity ahead of sexual ideals. For example, a husband who went to prostitutes or took a "temporary wife" or even had anal sex with a male was not necessarily immoral. If his sexual decisions did not interfere with the stability of the marriage, then they were tolerable, or even, if they protected the marriage from a husband's excessive demands on a wife, his queer sexual choices could be the preferable, moral options.

Chapter 4 is particularly revealing in this way by delving into some of the thousands of *fatwas* issued by prominent muftis in the mid- to late nineteenth century. In contrast to decisions by judges in formal court cases, *fatwas* were informed recommendations often issued in response to direct personal inquiries from people concerned about specific ethical questions. A pattern emerges over this period as *fatwas* moved from expressing pragmatic, relatively tolerant attitudes to become a weapon for regulating harsher interpretations of Islam backed by bowdlerized Western science. This trend was driven by a similar desire for respectability and modernity among Egyptian elites, as Aderinto describes. Here too that desire arose partly in reaction to orientalist slanders against Egyptian morals, and Egyptian women's in particular. Yet ironically, economic modernization tended to undermine that very desire to demonstrate respectability. Freed slaves and peasant women displaced by commercial agriculture had few survival options except to move to the cities and to sell sex.

As with Nigeria's raising of the age of consent, the eventual criminalization of prostitution in Egypt symbolically legitimized the moral authority of Egypt's ruling elite to steer the nation to what they perceived as its rightful place among the modern nations of the world, which British colonialism had denied. An important contribution of Gadelrab's study is to illuminate the role of elite Egyptian women in this assertion of modernity, and specifically in reconstructing the supposed nature of female sexuality in contradistinction to male. The irony is that Western science was invoked to promote both colonial and anticolonial discourses around sexual propriety. Regarding the latter, Gadelrab writes that the "behaviour of new Egyptian woman was expected to closely resemble her English Victorian counterpart: a loving wife and mother preoccupied mainly with the domestic sphere, and a woman with self-regulated sexuality" (107).

What a wealth of empirical evidence from hitherto largely unexamined sources, and what an enrichment these three books make to our understanding of colonialism and colonial science in the transformation of premodern gender and sexual relations globally. These books deserve to be read widely.

# NOTES DE LECTURE

## LES FEMMES DANS L'ACTION COLLECTIVE

**Saheed ADERINTO.** – *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1958*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2014, 264 pages.

L'ouvrage de Saheed Aderinto se propose d'étudier la prostitution et les politiques sexuelles qui en découlent en se penchant sur la ville nigériane de Lagos, du début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'en 1958. Cette période qui précède l'indépendance du pays, obtenue en 1960, comprend un moment de rupture : en 1940, les Britanniques, qui avaient auparavant toléré la prostitution, mettent en place un ensemble de règles contre cette forme de « sexualité illégale » (*illicit sexuality*) et créent une institution, à l'intérieur de l'appareil colonial, pour protéger les filles du trafic et de l'exploitation sexuelle. L'ouvrage porte principalement sur la prostitution hétérosexuelle, entre des femmes qui vendent du sexe et des hommes qui payent en échange de ces services sexuels, au sein de laquelle on peut distinguer prostitution enfantine et prostitution adulte. Dans le but de comprendre la place de la sexualité et de la prostitution dans le projet colonial, le choix de se centrer sur Lagos, première ville du pays à être placée sous le contrôle colonial et capitale du Nigeria pendant la période étudiée, paraît particulièrement judicieux : c'est dans cette cité que les colonisateurs et les Nigériens ont concentré la plus grande partie de leurs efforts pour contrôler les ressources politiques.

La singularité de l'ouvrage de Saheed Aderinto vient de ce qu'il appréhende la prostitution et les politiques qui lui sont liées comme des phénomènes révélateurs de dynamiques sociales et politiques de plus grande ampleur. Considérée comme un élément central du processus historique, la prostitution et le langage du sexe et de l'amoralité qui l'accompagne sont replacés dans un vocabulaire plus large de la « civilisation » qui s'exprime en couples de valeurs binaires et dialectiques, telles que légitimité/illégitimité, tradition/modernité, progrès/faillite, normal/anormal. La prostitution est perçue différemment selon la région d'origine, le genre et la classe sociale des acteurs étudiés et selon l'âge des prostituées. C'est un sujet qui suscite des oppositions en fonction des projets et des ambitions des différents groupes sociaux et politiques à l'intérieur du système colonial. La prostitution, longtemps considérée comme relevant de l'ordre du privé, est désormais pensée comme un problème collectif, une menace pour la structure de l'État colonial, « un des sites complexes à travers lesquels diverses représentations des pratiques coloniales et différentes pensées sur la modernité étaient configurées et reconfigurées » (p. 4).

Constitué de sept chapitres, l'ouvrage se fonde sur différentes sources d'archives et une analyse de la presse pour identifier les acteurs impliqués dans cette « sexualité illégale » étudier les lois sur la prostitution et sur les maladies vénériennes et saisir les réactions des différents acteurs à la prostitution. Les trois premiers chapitres se concentrent sur les acteurs et les significations de la prostitution. Le premier dresse un cadre historique et socio-économique de Lagos. Il s'attarde sur les lieux de sociabilité de la ville et sur l'émergence d'une construction coloniale de la prostitution comme un « crime moral » et une « menace » pour la société. Après avoir retracé ces éléments de l'histoire urbaine, l'auteur passe aux politiques sexuelles qui s'y



insèrent. Dans les deux chapitres qui suivent, l'attention est portée sur les prostituées, avec un tableau contrasté des prostitutions adulte et infantine. Le deuxième chapitre se centre sur la prostitution des adultes en décrivant les prostituées et leurs clients. Âgées de vingt à trente ans, célibataires, mariées, divorcées, veuves ou séparées, les prostituées de Lagos offraient à leurs clients des relations sexuelles mais aussi d'autres types d'activités (cuisine, danse, accompagnement...). Du fait de cette dimension sociale des relations de prostitution, les hommes fréquentaient généralement des prostituées de même provenance qu'eux, donnant lieu à une « ethnisation » de la prostitution. Les clients étaient majoritairement des soldats. Mais il y avait aussi des Européens parmi les clients assidus, bien que leurs pratiques soient moins documentées – dès 1909, en effet, toute forme de relation sexuelle entre officiers coloniaux et femmes natives était formellement interdite. Si cette histoire sociale des prostituées et de leurs clients se révèle très intéressante pour compléter notre connaissance de la société lagosienne, en sortant les prostituées de la marge de l'histoire, ce chapitre permet également de saisir les relations entre prostitution, immoralité et crime à travers les changements sociaux de la première moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Si la prostitution était tolérée par certains (propriétaires de bars et de bordels, propriétaires tirant profit de la location des locaux, familles des prostituées), d'autres l'assimilaient à une dégénération sexuelle. À la différence d'autres colonies où les débats liés à la sexualité étaient monopolisés par les colonisateurs, à Lagos, les Nigériens émirent des protestations contre la prostitution. L'élite nationaliste nigérienne se fit notamment la porte-parole de ce combat, en condamnant la tolérance des Britanniques. Ils dénonçaient la faillite de la mission civilisatrice et la volonté de miner les bases d'un Nigeria indépendant. Un troisième chapitre se penche plus particulièrement sur la prostitution des filles de moins de 17 ans. Saheed Aderinto cherche à retracer les différences dans le traitement de ce type de prostitution en analysant les dispositifs coloniaux mis en place pour le combattre. Il montre comment, à partir des années 1940, la prostitution infantine est perçue comme un grave danger social, reflétant la faillite des adultes dans l'éducation des enfants et d'un État incapable de protéger une nouvelle génération de femmes et de mères.

Le quatrième chapitre se concentre sur les maladies vénériennes qui commencent, au début du siècle, à être considérées comme une sorte de manifestation pathologique et psychologique de l'infériorité de la race noire par rapport à la race blanche. Le corps africain, particulièrement celui des femmes, était considéré comme un véhicule de maladies sexuelles. Par conséquent, les investissements dans les soins médicaux pour lutter contre ces pathologies étaient perçus comme s'inscrivant dans la mission civilisatrice des colonisateurs. Ce chapitre illustre donc en détail les mesures prises pour contenir ces maladies, sur un plan sanitaire (ouverture de cliniques, dépistages, soins gratuits, etc.) mais aussi social (promotion du mariage, contrôle de la prostitution, etc.). La diffusion de maladies sexuellement transmissibles, associée aux contraintes budgétaires auxquelles les Britanniques font face dans les années 1940 à la suite du conflit mondial, fait que la prostitution commence à obtenir une place centrale dans les affaires de l'État. Cela débouche sur une révision des lois contre la prostitution, avec l'objectif d'y mettre un terme. Différents dispositifs, décrits dans le cinquième chapitre, entrent en vigueur aux fins d'éliminer à la fois la prostitution infantine et celle des adultes. Une série de lois est également mise en place pour contenir les maladies vénériennes. Dans son analyse de cet ensemble de lois, Aderinto met en évidence la façon dont elles appliquent à l'ensemble de la colonie des règlements imprégnés d'une culture occidentale qui modifie le tissu social du pays.

Les deux derniers chapitres analysent les réactions lagosiennes à l'ensemble de ces lois en distinguant celles des hommes et des femmes. Au-delà du genre, ces

réactions sont influencées par la classe sociale, les salaires, l'éducation, l'état civil des Lagosiens, ainsi que par l'âge des prostituées. Les hommes étaient partagés entre ceux qui étaient favorables à la prostitution, considérée comme un travail légitime nécessitant une réglementation (ouverture de bordels légaux et codifiés, taxation de prostituées, etc.), et les prohibitionnistes pour qui, moralement inacceptable, elle devait être interdite. Du côté des femmes, celles de l'élite, qui auraient été les seules à s'intéresser à la question, se déclaraient unanimement en faveur de la lutte contre la prostitution, lutte qu'elles menaient dans le cadre d'associations féminines. Premières à se mobiliser, au début des années 1920, en faveur de l'abolition de la prostitution, elles combattent surtout la prostitution infantine et militent pour la réhabilitation des filles prostituées.

En sondant tous ces aspects de la prostitution, Aderinto en arrive à la présenter comme un aspect de la vie sociale, économique et politique d'un pays, comme un angle d'analyse permettant d'étudier les divers projets qui animent la société coloniale. La « sexualité illégale » devient un facteur de déséquilibre qui met en danger la structure étatique et qui suscite en conséquence des réactions multiples dont l'analyse permet de mieux comprendre les dynamiques qui animent ces cinquante années. En considérant la prostitution comme un fait collectif de première importance, l'ouvrage propose une approche novatrice. Il manque cependant d'un cadre conceptuel et d'une perspective comparatiste. Cela en fait un cas d'étude qu'un lecteur non expérimenté aura du mal à inscrire dans un cadre plus général, y compris historiographique (on pense en particulier aux travaux de Luise White). Ce qui rend difficile de saisir les singularités de l'expérience nigérienne par rapport à celle d'autres pays du continent africain, mais aussi de l'Angleterre qui a influencé, via les colonisateurs, le traitement nigérien de la prostitution.

Sara PANATA

**Karen BOUWER. – *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo. The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 247 pages.**

À quelques heures de l'indépendance de la jeune République du Congo, Pauline, la femme de Patrice Lumumba, est inquiète : son mari va devenir premier ministre et elle pense qu'il va être tenté de prendre une nouvelle femme plus éduquée, plus « européanisée », pour tenir son rôle auprès de lui dans les cérémonies diplomatiques. Elle organise une manifestation de femmes pour protester contre le possible comportement de son mari et des futurs ministres.

Le pari de Karen Bouwer est original et audacieux : utiliser la figure de Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961), le leader charismatique congolais mort assassiné en 1961 et devenu mythique, pour favoriser la recherche sur le genre et la décolonisation. Cette initiative place au centre la cellule familiale, comme un espace de contestation des rapports de genre. L'autrice met en lumière les interconnexions entre les sphères privée et publique de Patrice Lumumba à un moment clé de l'histoire de la jeune République du Congo. Karen Bouwer revient aussi sur la manière dont la construction mémorielle de la figure du leader congolais a participé à l'occultation des femmes et de leur rôle durant cette période, contribuant ainsi à l'émergence d'une mémoire sexuée de l'indépendance.

Les chapitres 1 et 2 révèlent le décalage entre les idées théoriques de Patrice Lumumba sur les femmes congolaises, exprimées dans ses écrits, et ses propres actions envers les femmes dans sa sphère privée. La radicalisation politique progressive du leader est soulignée par l'autrice, la rupture de 1958 est réaffirmée : la participation de Patrice Lumumba à la Conférence des peuples africains, qui se tient à Accra le