



in Africa today. Overall, *Sexual Humour in Africa* is an illuminating work that sexologists, Africanists, sociologists, gender scholars, literary scholars, anthropologists, ethnographers and the general public will find compelling and rewarding.

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Peer Schouten, *Roadblock Politics: The Origins of Violence in Central Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (hb £64.99 – 978 1 108 49401 4; pb £22.99 – 978 1 108 71381 8). 2022, 299 pp.

When travelling across Africa by land, traders and other types of travellers are likely to run into roadblocks. Sometimes these can simply be a piece of rope draped across a road to nominally halt traffic. In other instances, large rocks are lined up to demarcate a roadblock. Roadblocks can be staffed by any number of individuals who represent parts of the state, including police, immigration or customs officials. In regions where there are active conflicts or violent competition over state control, armed groups might staff a checkpoint.

The role of roadblocks in the formal and informal political economies of African countries is simultaneously rich with meaning and deeply overlooked, even though roadblocks themselves are ubiquitous across the continent. This is despite canonical scholarship regularly taught in African studies and history courses that articulates why roads are essential to 'broadcasting' state authority.¹ Likewise, Frederick Cooper's concept of the 'gatekeeper state' captures how authority is typically centralized within African states and hinges on transport routes that ensure exports reach international commodity markets.² In *Roadblock Politics*, Peer Schouten tackles these and other ideas about the importance of logistics, centring roadblocks as a meaningful subject of inquiry.

With this text, Schouten has the well-earned distinction of being the first Cambridge University Press author to capture Africanists' attention with a manuscript devoted to checkpoints. The penultimate chapter on the hypocrisies of international initiatives to improve the ethics of mining, which a range of diverse communities, authorities and national and multinational businesses conduct in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is especially persuasive. This chapter should be embraced within classrooms and multinational boardrooms alike for its well-articulated case for how contemporary extractive industry actors maintain the economic and political subjugation of the DRC and other African countries through well-meaning but deleterious policy choices.

¹ J. Herbst (2000) *States and Power in Africa: comparative lessons in authority and control*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

² F. Cooper (2002) *Africa Since 1940: the past of the present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

However, the more *Roadblock Politics* strays from the present into the past (as it often does in its first four chapters), the more uneven the text becomes, which ensures that it will not be the final word on the subject. This may trouble historians of Africa, as chapters rely heavily on secondary literature rather than the copious volumes of primary sources available in African and European archives, which Schouten could have used to enrich the text and his argument. When Schouten does cite written sources within these chapters, he frequently invokes European travelogues, overlooking other kinds of primary sources, despite evincing the capacity to identify and read archival texts ‘against the grain’ to find the missing African voices within them.³

Unlike Jan Vansina, whose work he often references, Schouten does not engage in the kind of meticulous research that would enable him to trace the longstanding impacts of roadblocks on the continent, at times turning instead to tropes about the region. This is at its most glaring when Schouten describes contemporary trade routes in the Central African Republic (CAR), which are dominated by what are likely to be Sudanese merchant networks, as ‘ancient trade routes’. When this kind of ahistorical summation is combined with his own regular field research anecdotes that uncritically examine his positionality as a Northern traveller-researcher, Schouten falls prey to similar descriptive fumbles as the European colonial-era excursionists he cites in the first few chapters, detracting readers from his main arguments.

All of this is distracting, because Schouten’s main thesis – that roadblocks need to become a topic of inquiry in themselves – is deeply compelling. But this argument is undermined by two separate empirical and analytical shortcomings. The first is that the text often lacks conceptual clarity and is not adequately evidenced. This is most pronounced at the text’s outset, when Schouten neglects to define what he means by ‘Central Africa’. For instance, Schouten’s empirical chapters focus on the DRC and the CAR, but in the first few chapters he heavily draws on literature from what is now Tanzania. The text also relies on only a handful of surveys, which the author undertook with in-country research teams at various points over the past decade. Schouten subsequently makes grand assertions about a region that, depending on how he defines it, is likely the size of the USA. Consequently, many readers may conclude that the text is impressionistic and patchy.

Second, rather than derive theory from what is an incredibly fecund and much-needed topic of academic inquiry, Schouten regularly leaves the intellectual heavy lifting to others, most notably James C. Scott and other canonical thinkers. Even with regular homages to what are now classic scholars, close readers of the text will nevertheless be dismayed to find that Sara Berry’s seminal ideas on colonial ‘hegemony on a shoestring’ are not referenced, even though Schouten dedicates the title of his introductory chapter to ‘shoestring’ politics. When the paucity of evidence is combined with the text’s weak theoretical engagement and conceptualization, the reader is left uncertain as to why or how checkpoints are in fact the ‘origins of violence’, as the title misleadingly suggests, which is a missed opportunity. Instead, the author asserts that roadblocks are evidence of contested public authorities ‘keeping the

³ A. Stoler (2008) *Along the Archival Grain: epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

build-up of centralized control over logistical space at bay' (p. 264). Fortunately, these kinds of oversights blaze the way for future scholarship, which Schouten and his contemporaries will hopefully redress collaboratively in future work.

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Karine Ginisty, *Services Urbains et Justice Spatiale à Maputo (Urban Services and Spatial Justice in Maputo)*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Nanterre (hb €23 – 978 2 84016 379 4). 2021, 354 pp.

Equal access to goods and services is an essential condition for affirming that a given society is developed. Unfortunately, this ideal remains utopian, even in 'developed' countries, but the situation is all the more worrying in so-called developing countries, where the population's access to goods and services (including basic ones) remains extremely unequal.

Urban Services and Spatial Justice in Maputo is the result of a doctoral thesis in geography carried out at the University of Paris Nanterre between 2007 and 2014. It focuses on inequalities in access to urban services (water and urban waste management) and their role in the construction of local experiences of justice and injustice in the capital of Mozambique.

The book is comprised of five chapters. The first is a historical presentation of the urban duality of Lourenço Marques (now known as Maputo) and the influence of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique or FRELIMO). The second chapter focuses on AGRESU (Apoio a Gestão dos Resíduos Sólidos Urbanos na Área de Grande Maputo or Support for Urban Waste Management in the Greater Maputo Area). This project is given greater attention in Chapter 3, which also discusses the Maputo Water Supply Project, which was supposed to grant water access to peripheral districts. The fourth chapter explores city dwellers' relationship to public space when feelings of injustice arise in the context of access to water. The last chapter looks at the political experience of city dwellers in order to understand the choice of silence when feelings of injustice arise.

Maputo (Lourenço Marques until 1976) could be a prototype of many cities in the 'developing' world – that is, cities in countries with a history of colonial rule, independence and an authoritarian regime, followed by a form of democratic government. Such cities are also typically marked by visible segregation. Maputo was structured around a dichotomy between the *Cidade* (city), the space urbanized by European settlers during the colonial period, and the periphery, underequipped and marked by a partly informal urban fabric. The latter was named the *Caniço* (or 'bamboo reed', after the most commonly used construction material), a space designated for Black populations, outside the jurisdiction of the municipality, dominated by small straw huts.