

# BOOK REVIEW

**Rachel Spronk and Thomas Hendriks, eds. *Readings in Sexualities from Africa*.** Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020. 363 pp. Notes. Index. \$ 50.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-253-04761-8.

*Readings in Sexualities from Africa*, edited by Rachel Spronk and Thomas Hendriks, brings together some of the key texts that have shaped the research on African sexuality to date. The book offers a refreshing perspective on a field of research often littered with bias across stereotypical representation in the media, public opinion, and certain segments of the academic world.

The editor's introduction is especially helpful in capturing some of the relevant issues at stake for anyone interested in this subject. Spronk and Hendriks succeed in addressing this vast topic by using an interdisciplinary approach that includes various types of research within the field of African studies. Regrouping and selecting studies from scholars working on African sexuality is no easy task, due to the numerous contributions produced on this topic in Africa, Europe, and the United States. However, the editors manage to include research endeavors from scholars working in diverse English-speaking, Francophone, and Lusophone national settings.

By underscoring the diversity and complexity of practices, discourses, and representation surrounding sexuality in Africa, this volume is insightful in that it contributes to the debate concerning the need to decolonize knowledge production on/in Africa. To this end, the editors participate in decentralizing the discursivity around African sexuality by incorporating several texts from scholars based on the African continent. This inclusion is particularly important, considering the difficulty that African scholars often encounter in gaining access to, and publishing in, international academic journals.

Part I addresses the issue of representation. This section vigorously questions how caricatural and negative images influence the depiction of African sexuality. The section's four articles explore the ways in which some studies perpetuate generalization about sexual practices in Africa, which are often associated with an idea of "sexual permissiveness." Another aspect concerns the essentialization of blackness. In both cases, the selected articles emphasize the need to analyze the ideology originating from such stereotypical representations and to offer counterexamples that contradict these prejudices.

Part II deals with the concepts of health and biopolitics. Here, readers are reminded that sexuality is a dynamic concept and practice whose meaning changes over time. The section examines how the regulation of discourses around sexuality by colonial administrations has led to processes of condemnation and reinterpretation, as well as the preservation of traditional practices by African societies. Additionally, this part explores the way discursivity around sex with respect to HIV/AIDS is associated with new procedures of prevention that impact African subjectivity and modify sexual practices across the continent.

Part III focuses on same-sex practices. These studies rely on various examples that help deconstruct the myth of a “heterosexual Africa.” This section also questions the translation of Western concepts to describe African gender identities and practices. The section’s contributions are therefore helpful in demonstrating the dynamic evolution of minoritarian sexual identities in the African continent concurrent with globalization.

Part IV explores the relationships between sex, money, and pleasure. Running counter to common preconceptions that confine transactional sex to prostitution or a lack of love, the articles of this section provide a stimulating, complex analysis of the implication of the role of money in sexuality. Interestingly, the studies presented here deconstruct the idea of the passivity of women, thus revealing the entanglements between transactional sex, socio-economic issues, and the evolution of gender dynamics in many African societies.

Part V reflects on the ways in which religion and tradition redefine sexuality in Africa. This section scrutinizes the establishment of a hegemonic heterosexual identity in Africa, and it does so with impact. Propelled by the emergence of new nationalist ideologies and religious discourses, such ideological posturing presents same-sex sexualities as un-African practices.

Part VI analyzes the important issue of pleasure and shows how the erotic can either help women to liberate themselves from patriarchal norms or instead reinforce oppression and heteronormative representation of sexuality.

*Readings in Sexualities from Africa* is a valuable contribution to the growing field of research on African sexualities. The volume’s six sections illustrate the wide range of subjects and approaches of which this area of research is composed. In particular, this volume provides an excellent basis for graduate students and scholars who want to either approach this topic or enrich their knowledge on the multiplicity of topics that are assembled under this broad discipline.

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doi:10.1017/asr.2022.11

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