

the criminalization of this particular form of rural custom, political elites are able to weaken some ethnic groups' claims to land, undermining local livelihoods, their continuity and authority. In this way, elites delegitimize rural families' efforts to produce kinship, and, through it, belonging and citizenship, while maintaining their economic and social status. Dorothy Owino Rombo and Anne Namatsi Lutomia apply content analysis to LGBTI-themed interviews in Kenyan media, using such frameworks as *ubuntu* philosophy, which 'embodies an alternative mindset to the Neo-colonial after-effects of colonialism in Kenya' (p. 123). Despite challenging Western notions of homosexuality, which link sexual behaviour to sexual identity, they continue to use the acronym LGBTI, which recalls the logic of enumeration and often reduces people to their sexual orientation or sexual practices as an immutable identity.

In sum, this collection includes many valuable offerings for scholars interested in gender and sexuality in Kenya. The book shows how gender, rather than sexuality, is foundational for one's gendered sense of self in Kenya. It also argues that Western conceptions of personhood offer limited frameworks for understanding Kenyan experiences. The central role of intimate relations in the *ubuntu* philosophy of personhood also emerges throughout the collection. The employment of the human-affirming philosophy of *utu/ubuntu* as a methodological and epistemological principle poses a challenge to the current hierarchy of academic production, underlining – implicitly or overtly, depending on the author – indigenous knowledge systems and practices. However, a concern remains in reference to the failure to historicize the concept of *utu/ubuntu*, which the authors often treat as unchanged over centuries of colonial and postcolonial history. Readers are left uncertain as to its roots, its relation to Christianity, and how its values and norms have evolved (uncontested?) in relation to political, economic and social reconfigurations. Despite this minor weakness, the volume constitutes a political act of ethical significance. It is also an invitation to Western scholars to feel foreign in their conceptual assumptions. *Gender and Sexuality in Kenyan Societies* encourages them to expand human archives and to take African methodologies and theories seriously, which is actually what most anthropologists try to do.

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George Paul Meiu, *Queer Objects to the Rescue: Intimacy and Citizenship in Kenya*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press (hb US\$99 – 978 0 226 83056 8; pb US\$27.50 – 978 0 226 83058 2). 2023, 239 pp.

Every so often, a scholarly text bursts onto the scene and not only challenges existing knowledge and academic practices but also redefines the boundaries of intellectual inquiry and adds a splash of novelty to the canvas of scholarly engagement. George Paul Meiu's *Queer Objects to the Rescue: Intimacy and Citizenship in Kenya* is one such text. While many studies on queerness in Africa focus on human subjects

and how they negotiate their gender and sexual identities, this book, through its focus on objects, makes a bold new intervention in the field of queer studies – African queer studies in particular – with its daring and innovative perspectives. It brings a fresh look at the ongoing discourse on gender, sexuality and citizenship in postcolonial contexts.

Queer Objects to the Rescue is composed of six core chapters, bookended by an introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, Meiu provides a thorough explanation of the concept of ‘queer objects’ and their potential to create ‘unsettling ambiguity’ (p. 2) surrounding gender and sexuality. Examples of these objects include a traditional necklace worn by girls, which takes on a queer tenor when worn by a boy. Diapers are another example of a queer object analysed by Meiu. Meiu argues convincingly that diapers ‘conceal deeper anxieties over anal erotic pleasure’ (p. 160). The main question posed in this book is: ‘What can the objects used to express fears and anxieties about homosexuality reveal about intimacy and citizenship in postcolonial Kenya?’ (pp. 8–9). This question sets the stage for an exploration of how queer objects can foreground the tensions and contradictions inherent in the construction of intimacy and citizenship in postcolonial Kenya. Meiu’s primary objective in discussing these tensions and contradictions is to demonstrate how queer objects attempt to rescue intimacy and citizenship, which leads to the question of why these aspects need rescuing in the first place. Meiu addresses this question by presenting a compelling argument about how political leaders have sought to ‘rescue and secure normative intimate arrangements as foundations of national identity, in order to align the nation with the state and legitimise the state as the ultimate protector of national values’ (p. 10). Meiu approaches the concept of rescue in order to challenge the language and logic of the global humanitarian industry, which often claims to rescue through rehabilitative efforts. According to Meiu, in recent years, this language has also permeated into the personal lives of Kenyans, as there has been a growing call to rescue ‘intimacy from the corrupting forces of contemporary life and to secure it as a condition for the nation’s vitality and futurity’ (p. 33). This highlights the intricate relationship between the state, national identity and the regulation of personal relationships. As Meiu articulates, the title of the book ‘suggests that if indeed a rehabilitative language is widely appealing today, then an ethnographic focus on objects may repurpose it to “rescue” our political imagination from the dominant and obstructive fetishes of contemporary investments in intimate citizenship’ (p. 36).

Methodologically, Meiu introduces the concept of ‘ethnographic detours’ as the framework for his argument. This approach, drawing on Freud’s theory of difference, involves ‘an ethnographic journey that is circuitous rather than linear: it twists and turns, in ever wider concentric circles, around particular objects’ (pp. 33–4). Meiu deliberately avoids directly addressing the politics of sex and sexuality, instead meandering and deferring a direct engagement with these issues. While this approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the complex dynamics surrounding queer objects and their role in shaping intimacy and citizenship, questions arise about the author’s positionality and its impact on the research process. As Meiu articulates his ‘strategy of analysis and writing’, it would also have been beneficial for him to reflect on his own positionality and how it influenced his interactions with research participants and the interpretation of the collected data. For example, how did he navigate potential power imbalances between himself and the research participants? And what

strategies did he employ to ensure ethical and respectful engagement? A more explicit engagement with his own positionality would have strengthened the book's methodological rigour and provided valuable insights into the research processes.

I found the second chapter, entitled 'Intimate rescue: grammars, logics, subjects, scenes', to be compelling. His observations of mundane activities and how he weaves narratives around them make for fascinating reading. For example, starting with a simple story of a nurse named Rose eating a boiled egg and interacting with patients, Meiu demonstrates how the most mundane of actions take on new meanings when understood within the broader 'discursive logics' that connect the mundane action to 'its social and political conditions of existence' (p. 37). As Meiu argues, the 'seemingly mundane practices and routines can be as important to understanding humanitarian rescue as the spectacular interventions with which we often conflate it' (p. 38). He uses intimate scenes of everyday life in which people debate, evaluate, worry about or intervene in intimate matters, whether in person or virtually, via radio, television or social media. Meiu uses this chapter to articulate grammars and logics of rescue and rescuing, which are then further expounded in later chapters of the book. Through his insightful analysis and engaging prose, Meiu invites readers to consider the complexities and contradictions that emerge when the personal and the political intersect in the realm of intimacy. His observations and arguments invite a reconsideration of assumptions and biases, enabling the reader to consider the broader social, cultural and political implications of the grammars and logics of intimate rescue.

Queer Objects to the Rescue is a thought-provoking and significant contribution to the burgeoning field of African queer studies. It stands out for its innovative approach to exploring the complexities of gender, sexuality and citizenship in postcolonial Kenya through the lens of queer objects. Meiu's work is part of a growing body of scholarship that is pushing the boundaries of intellectual inquiry and challenging dominant narratives surrounding queer lives and experiences on the African continent. When read alongside other recent groundbreaking texts, such as Keguro Macharia's *Frottage: frictions of intimacy across the Black diaspora* (2019) and Adriaan van Klinken's *Kenyan, Christian, Queer: religion, LGBT activism, and arts of resistance in Africa* (2019), Meiu's book demonstrates the innovative approaches that scholars are taking to explore the multifaceted nature of African queer experiences. These works collectively highlight the importance of interdisciplinary and intersectional perspectives in understanding the lived experiences of queer individuals in Africa, as well as the broader social, cultural and political contexts in which they navigate their identities and relationships. The accessible and conversational tone of *Queer Objects to the Rescue* means that it can be read by graduate students, specialist and non-specialist readers alike.

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