

leaders, the book reminds readers of his engagement with less celebrated struggles, such as those in Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Angola, and even Western Sahara.

By and large, Collins chooses to focus on Houser's professional life. She includes a moving account of his and his wife's written romance, conducted while Houser was in jail, and discusses family decision making about Houser's work. Her research was also supported by his family members. However, the book's focus is largely on Houser's public work. This is a reasonable approach, although some readers may find themselves wondering how his long absences for African travel affected his young family. Equally, an understandable result of the biography genre is that Houser looms large in the account of ACOA's work; it could be interesting for future studies to consider ACOA beyond Houser.

Overall, this is a deeply readable book that is relevant for scholars working on transnational activism, African decolonization, American engagements on the African continent, and Africa's presence in the USA. It is accessible enough that it would work well in graduate seminars, and chapters from it could be taught in undergraduate classes on African decolonization.

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Ignatius Chukwumah (ed.), *Sexual Humour in Africa: Gender, Jokes, and Societal Change*. Abingdon: Routledge (hb £130 – 978 0 3677 7624 4). 2022, 310 pp.

Some books have a way of breaking into a class of their own or cementing notions that were often known but never so well crafted for the consumption of the reader. That is what Ignatius Chukwumah's eminently edited volume, *Sexual Humour in Africa*, has done.

Gathering fourteen illuminating essays on five countries representative of Africa and grouped into five broad parts, the volume tackles sexual humour, one of the most common themes in popular culture, in ways that are enlightening. In this review, I give a succinct general description of the book and then concentrate on the chapter I consider, by virtue of my area of expertise – traditional African oral culture – the most revelatory of the pieces. In departing from extant literature's treatment of humour as a mere assembling of data on sexual themes, *Sexual Humour in Africa* brings together essays that productively contend that African sex jokes do more than simply transmit lewdness.

Flourishing in pop music lyrics, on the internet, in physical social space, in verbal cultural productions such as erotic proverbs, films, pictures and advertising, and in popular fiction across Africa, sex humour is discussed in this volume in its diverse forms. These include pop fictional/musical sex jokes and performed sex jokes, as well as jokes that tackle sensitive and stigmatized topics such as rape and homosexuality. Much more than just joking, these forms of sexual humour construct spaces,

guarantee discourse conformity, inaugurate communality, subvert decency, ensure gender filiation, encapsulate traditional African linguistic strategies, aid a subject's navigation of pressured environments, enhance dominion and inequality of genders, upstage oppression, and heighten violence against women. The essays tackle matrices of gender, socio-historical-cultural praxis and implications, and other varied marks of the milieu of sexual humour.

The work does not just present original research through its treatment of sexual humour, a subject that few studies have tackled; it also unveils unique, multi-vocal perspectives on the analysis of sex humour in Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia, representing North, West, East and Southern Africa. Sexual humour takes on a heightened significance as scholars unearth the many acts this phenomenon inadvertently accomplishes for the audience. The contributors use perspectives drawn from postcolonialism, performative gender studies, typology, semiotics, queer studies, postmodernism, radical feminism, critical discourse analysis and psychoanalysis. These varied approaches expose the diverse sexual humour that abounds in Africa, thus offering an articulate and accessible description of the culturally durable object that is the sex joke.

Of the three essays appearing in Part II ('African language, folk music and rhetorical strategies'), Chapter 4, J. B. Amissah-Arthur's 'Pudencic cult and public discourse: pornogrammar as a rhetorical strategy in Ghana's public spaces' (pp. 65–87), presents a study steeped in the Akan cultural tradition. He argues effectively that sexual humour in Ghanaian public space – or, at least, in the immediate Akan speech community – is dependent on what he calls 'the veneration of the pudenda' (p. 73), a certain cultural, rhetorical and ritualistic speech and dramatic modelling in which sexual notions are overlaid with more socially acceptable terms in public arenas. With a focus on settlement names, proverbs, gold weights, fecundity practices, linguistic arts, puberty rites and folk songs (all part of the Akan folkloric tradition), this chapter marshals different modes of sacralizing the sexual idea when engaging in humour.

Amissah-Arthur uses Roland Barthes's relatively unknown concept of pornogrammar (an evasive expression used to disguise overt sexual references) to evaluate indigenous rhetorical strategies against the mediated expressive moulds that social media offers, a theme that can be found in other essays in the volume. Such rhetorical schemes (including the use of special characters in obscene words, for instance, d&ck, p++sy and f^ck in Chapter 14) are deployed to avoid breaking Akan social norms, while also allowing the sexual humour to slip through verbal exchanges in public spaces. Amissah-Arthur points to the enigmatic ways in which traditional African cultural practices have become the precursors to today's internet sexual humour, albeit without much notice or recognition. He thus offers us a view of the sophistication of public discussions of sexual matters in traditional Africa before the advent of social media, which in many ways has increased the overtness of sexualized conversations while also greatly anonymizing the speakers. The rhetorical strategies discussed in this chapter contrast greatly with what has become the norm today, as described in Chapter 14 of the book. Side by side, Amissah-Arthur's Chapter 4 and Nwagboso and Okafor's Chapter 14 show us the old and new ways of enacting sexual humour

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.