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## Book review: war and politics in Sudan: cultural identities and the challenges of the peace process

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## ***War and Politics in Sudan: Cultural Identities and the Challenges of the Peace Process* by J.D. Leach** London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. Pp. 268. £56-00 (hbk)

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part with the detraditionalisation of gender roles, and a number of her informants are keen to assert that sex – and their sexuality – provides them with a sense of ‘avant-garde’ autonomy. However, societal pressures and other constraints, such as to conform to ideals of pre-marital chastity, simultaneously create particular anxieties for young female professionals.

Spronk also evaluates male sexual self-perceptions, a particularly welcome approach given that male sexuality is ‘discursively understood as existing and active’ (p. 212), though men disassociate this ‘need’ from dependence upon women. Drawing on shifting interpretations of ‘being man’, she aptly conveys a sense of male insecurity in terms of their relations with and treatment of modern women. Although their personal dilemmas convey complex interpretations of sexuality and masculinity, their vignettes do convey a greater sense of gendered and sexual solidarity than those of her female informants.

Finally, Spronk examines the broader societal understandings of relationships and the ways in which the mass media informs gendered interpretations of love, sex and morality. Linking consumerism, materiality and imagery, she unveils the codification of middle class sexuality as practiced and understood by her informants. Here the concepts of modernity, Westernisation and Africanness – a leitmotif of the entire book – are understood as negotiable models of experimentation for Nairobi’s progressive and cosmopolitan middle classes.

The personal narratives threaded throughout *Ambiguous Pleasures* do much to re-humanise the predominantly HIV/AIDS-dominated literature on sexual studies, and Spronk should be credited for the progressively discursive methodology she adopts in this regard. Her astute treatment of cosmopolitan identity as negotiated through sexuality is a novel and much-needed approach. However, there is little sense of relative framing and the reader is left wondering whether other groupings of Kenyans, within and without Nairobi, share in these debates.

Similarly, her comparative historical treatment of sexuality is not as nuanced as one might expect: works by Wenzel Geissler, Ruth Prince, Shane Doyle or Brett Shadle, who work on relational concepts across East Africa, are not cited. Consequently, few questions are asked about historical and developmental variance within or between ethnicities, religious denominations or even classes – categories she asserts as crucial in Kenyan identities and therefore formative in the processes she begins to explore. Nevertheless, this is a clearly argued and strong contribution to an understudied field. Students of gender and sexuality, as well as those of urban and class-based studies, would do well to read this innovative work.

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**War and Politics in Sudan: Cultural Identities and the Challenges of the Peace Process** by J.D. LEACH

London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. Pp. 268. £56.00 (hbk)

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Justin Leach’s readable study of how Sudan’s peace agreements reflect political culture asks us to rethink some commonly held notions about war,

peace and society in the two Sudans, and by extension some conflict resolution orthodoxies. The book ventures to analyse conflict resolution in a temporal dimension of successive peace agreements. It reviews how the two big peace agreements – the Addis Ababa Agreement (AAA) of 1972 and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 – were fought over in battle and at the table. In order to understand Sudan's political patronage culture, Leach comprehensively maps what demands were voiced by the two sides – the central government in Khartoum and the various incarnations of southern rebels – at different times, why these evolved, and how they were integrated into the bargaining process. He also focuses on evolving rebel motivations and changes in southern identity from the 1970s to the time of the signing of the CPA. Instead of a prolonged conflict interrupted by one peace agreement, what emerges are shifts in the shape of conflict.

The book's contribution thus lies in clearly presenting the history of Sudan's wars and peace agreements as a conflict trajectory, with detail on institutions and experiences often forgotten in less historical accounts. The author reminds us that Sudan's state structures had always been home to quasi-autonomous groups with little connection to the state. He convincingly illustrates conflict resolution concepts in practice by showing how mechanics shift rapidly depending on outside interests. At times, these concepts are analysed in depth and point towards broader issues outside the realm of this work, such as the tension between bridging ethnic gaps and emphasising tribal institutions or continued state-building as a political culture for which democracy is only a stopgap. Thus the book provides many paths towards a fresh perspective on the Sudans and broader conflict resolution concepts.

The weaknesses of the book are mainly that it does not deliver on some of its ambitions. First, Leach's treatment of identity, prominently foregrounded in the title, is perfunctory. While stressing the need to disaggregate the different and shifting ingredients for identity, the author employs the stereotypes the book aims to debunk. Even though Leach argues that southern identity was often primarily 'shared frustration' (p. 48), his claim that the Southern People's Liberation Army's (SPLA) identity as fighting for an equitable whole Sudan was proof for a new southern identity after the AAA is not convincing. This is particularly so because the author also discusses disappointments with factionalism and parliamentarism, which would suggest that the SPLA also instrumentalised identity in reaction to that experience. The notion of identity becomes cursory when the SPLA is treated as a coherent force representing all southerners. Equally problematic are sweeping conclusions derived from highly specific situations, such as the argument that the CPA delivered proof that 'Africans' had 'been willing to put aside traditional post-colonial nationalism and look at new solutions to end the history of failed states' (p. 75). Second, Leach uses established concepts like the war/peace dichotomy without enough questioning. While he successfully contextualises the two peace agreements in the patron-client culture, he does not apply the same perspective of continuation to the blurred line between war and peace, overlooking more recent findings that the years between 1955 and 1963 were largely peaceful, and that some official peace years were rather violent.

Nonetheless, Leach tackles the bigger questions of war and peace when he argues that in Sudan signatory parties remained disconnected from the formal democratic institutions that ought to help in implementing the agreed peace agreements and in driving change. The book thus provides an important launching pad from which to think about the complexities that continue to be at work in the realm between war, peace and political culture in Sudan and beyond, including the question of whether peace agreements are actually a crucial ingredient in transformative change.

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**Authority Stealing: Anti-Corruption War and Democratic Politics in Post-Military Nigeria** by WALE ADEBANWI

Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2012. Pp. 450. \$55 (pbk)

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Wale Adebani has written an important and illuminating account of Nigeria's anti-corruption war during Nuhu Ribadu's courageous leadership of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Ribadu's tenure coincided with Obasanjo's second term as president from 2003–7. The book also covers the Yar'Adua government's removal of Ribadu from the EFCC and its undermining of the anti-corruption struggle, from 2007–10. The title of the book, 'Authority Stealing', refers to the grand corruption of those in positions of authority in Nigeria. It comes from a song of the same title by the late Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, renowned Afro-beat musician and scathing critic of the corrupt Nigerian political establishment.

The EFCC, formed after the passing into law of the Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act in 2002, set out to curtail corruption and fraud, and promote the rule of law in Nigerian public life. It has been successful in prosecuting a wide range of crooks, including kingpins of advance fee fraud, several state governors, a serving inspector general of police, a serving governor of the Bank of the North, and other top civil servants and businessmen. An observation in the book is that had the National Assembly known what would be unleashed by the EFCC, a majority would not have signed the Act establishing it. The EFCC's early success was largely due to the appointment of Nuhu Ribadu – an outstanding Assistant Commissioner of Police from Yola, Adamawa State (north-east Nigeria) – as Executive Chairman, and the assemblage of a talented and dedicated team within the commission. Crucially, reformists within the Obasanjo administration supported them. The EFCC also worked closely with civil society activists and progressives in the media and legal professions. The author had good access to Ribadu and the EFCC's supporters. The book has vivid portraits of these *dramatis personae*.

Adebani is good at navigating the thickets of conflicting information that emanated from each high-profile corruption case. The EFCC confronted some of the most powerful vested interests in Nigeria and this inevitably generated a ferocious counter-struggle by very influential elites. There was a steady flow of disinformation to the media as those under investigation or prosecution and their clients and supporters attempted to discredit the EFCC and its chairman.