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Having her partner Victor visibly at her side, Spronk admits, was an asset. At times, however, 'he would distance himself, especially when he knew that women were watching him and me to see how we acted as a couple' (p. 45). But this decision to protect her own privacy seemed not to be reciprocal, given the nature of the research interest. Spronk also used part of her own background strategically: 'At the appropriate moment I also let them know about my previous relationship with a Kenyan man. This always triggered a new and more engaging stage in our relationship' (p. 46).

I must confess that I reacted with mixed feelings to these disclosures. Since the study was originally published in 2012, I am therefore keen to learn if it has been shared with the ten women and men who willingly interacted and what their feedback has been. Are there any lessons to be shared? And last but not least: why are Western scholars studying sexuality in Africa by Africans? What is the purpose of, and who benefits from, the knowledge created?

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doi:10.1017/S0001972020000169

Response by the author

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the reviewers and the editors of *Africa* for 're-reviewing' my book eight years after its publication. It is an honour, not only to me but to all scholars writing on sexuality and erotics, as these topics remain somewhat disconcerting and hence marginal. Moreover, this discussion provides me the space to deal with a pressing question that has been lingering with me for all these years.

Exactly twenty years ago I left for fieldwork in Nairobi, a cosmopolitan city I had come to know during my master's research in 1997 when I lived with students and young professionals. I set out to confront two common trends in African studies: viewing 'sex as problem' and focusing on impoverished groups. So *Ambiguous Pleasures* was the product of long-term relationships that continue up to the present, as this project has turned into a longitudinal study.

When reading the generous reviews I realize that the book is partially outdated. I finished the manuscript in 2010 and in the meantime many things have changed.

One is the emerging field of the African middle classes. *Ambiguous Pleasures* came out when the African Development Bank published its famous report on 'the African middle class', triggering a debate that continues up to today. As Julia Pauli rightly points out, the book does not address the question of the middle class and 'crucial information is missing'. Indeed, I decided to take sexuality as my angle and to use 'middle-class' as a descriptive notion and let it do its work for the purpose of this book: to shift focus onto an overlooked group – yuppies. Pauli kindly points out that I did not claim that it is a book on the (emerging) middle classes. Moreover, I welcome her suggestion wholeheartedly to see the book as an example of taking middle classes, in the spirit of Ulf Hannerz, as 'locus but not the focus'. As I wrote about middle-classness as cultural practice in later articles, rather than seeking clearer classification of the term, I propose to embrace its contested nature as productive, seeing 'middle class' not as a category that we can find 'out there' and measure, but as a classification-in-the-making. Middle-class status, or a particular idea of the good life, is a position towards which people strive, but what this entails is variable across the African continent.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972020000182 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Consequently, if 'the' middle classes cannot just be located, we must search for a focal point to study their formation. For me, sexuality is the focus.

An important topic that the reviewers rightly point out is the silence on queer sexualities. Lwando Scott remarks that this silence is indeed queer. Here I have something to explain that has profound ethical aspects. During my research, same-sex intimacies were part of a significant minority of my interlocutors. They asked me not to write about this and I consented. I felt obliged to respect their sentiments as I claimed to do truly collaborative research. Over the years I felt increasingly unhappy with my promise, as the production of knowledge about queer sexualities in Kenya, and in Africa as a whole, is partial, and I believe that my interlocutors' lives could bring this into perspective. I consulted them about whether I could use my undisclosed data. In 2018 I eventually wrote an article called 'Invisible desires in Ghana and Kenya: same-sex erotic experiences in cross-sex oriented lives'. Similarly, I have always been unhappy with the photograph on the cover of my book, but it was the choice of one of my main interlocutors; she loved it. I remain ambiguous about my decisions. On the one hand, I could not have done this study without truly taking seriously what dialogic and participatory ethnographic research entails, while, on the other hand, consenting to the production of partial knowledge about sexuality myself.

Another question to address is Henning Melber's mixed feelings about my ethnographic research. I wrote extensively about methodological implications and my own positionality, all the more so since I struggled with these myself. I was always clear about the nature of our relationship. There was always an opt-out option, but even the man to whom Melber refers contacted me when I had been too silent for his liking. As I describe, I designed a research methodology that used progressively more personal ways of interviewing and this implied becoming increasingly open about my own life. My interlocutors' active continuation of our exchanges indicates their ongoing consent with my role in evidencing the twists and turns in their lives. For scholars not working on sexuality, the ethical questions this topic raises may be daunting. Yet, Melber's question of why Western scholars are studying sexuality in Africa by Africans suggests a counter-question: why is this different from studying, for example, household finances (another intimate topic)? The massive body of research on sexual health may seem less intrusive but by its very scale it objectifies people as 'Africans', while the kind of research in my book privileges people's personality, albeit in a very intimate way.

Melber also wonders what the purpose of this kind of research is. Well, as Lwando Scott suggests, it remains a pertinent question to address 'the diversity of sexuality and sexual identities in different African societies'. The challenge is to create space for this diversity beyond an increasingly hegemonic LGBT+ approach and to include contradictions and ambiguities, such as the way in which homophobia coexists with queer families in Nairobi. Sexuality is a potent theme to tease out what Stella Nyanzi ('Queering queer Africa') demands from Africanists: not only 'queering African studies' but also 'queering queer Africa' so as to move beyond established and self-evident approaches.

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doi:10.1017/S0001972020000182

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972020000182 Published online by Cambridge University Press