

institution reproducing, not removing, the hurt and shame. The benefits of participating in demilitarization, demobilization and rehabilitation programs fail to outweigh the risks involved in revealing one's ex-rebel identity.

Analytically the most enlightening part of the study is Coulter's critique of the simplistic victim/perpetrator discourse. In most humanitarian rhetoric women are described as 'victims', which for Coulter is a socially constructed identity that reifies women's experiences of war universally. This conceals the full range of political and social roles that women have in many conflicts, certainly in the Sierra Leonean civil war. 'It is impossible to view *all* women in war as victims *all* the time', Coulter (p. 10) stresses. Although nearly all of her informants were raped and abducted, many of them became fighters themselves who killed and committed atrocities. As she eloquently puts it, her informants were 'neither ill-fated victims with no agency, nor ferocious perpetrators in command of their own destiny' (p. 150). The decisions they made during the war were 'choiceless decisions', Coulter claims, borrowing Aretxaga's term.

Although it is a book about girls and young women, the discussion of their wartime experiences would have been even more complete had Coulter paid at least some parallel attention to men and masculinity. Hardly any of Coulter's informants were men, and Coulter (p. 252) acknowledges this herself at the end of the book. This is puzzling, however, since earlier in the book she had wondered why, considering that rape was and is so commonplace in Sierra Leone, no research has been done on the rapists, on masculinity, and especially on militarized masculinities (p. 133).

Despite being placed in the category of 'women's studies', *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers* is a book of interest not only for its focus on gender nor just for Africanists. Its disturbingly detailed ethnographic gaze on violence, its focus on the choiceless decisions that women (and many men) faced during the war, and on the ills of post-war reconciliation and reintegration make it a highly recommendable book for any anthropologist who wants to learn about everyday reality in a war-torn society, the description of which is not diluted with grand institutional perspectives and softened by censoring the personal narratives.

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TAFT, JESSICA K. *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism & Social Change across the Americas*. New York & London: New York University Press, 2010. Pp. 241. ISBN: 978-0-8147-8324-5 (cloth); ISBN: 978-0-8147-8325-2 (paperback).

Jessica K. Taft's book *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism & Social Change across the Americas* examines the political identities and social movement practices of girl activists in five different locations: San Francisco Bay area, Mexico City, Caracas, Vancouver and Buenos Aires. The book is based on the author's extensive interviews with fifteen to eighteen year

old girls from progressive or left-leaning social movements, as well as one to two months of participant observation in meetings and public gatherings organized by the teenage activists during the years 2005–2006. The author's primary theoretical intention is to illustrate the relationship between identity narratives and activist strategies and to explore the symbolic meanings that girl activists both draw from and reproduce as they develop strategies for political practices.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the identity politics of activist girls while the second part explores how identity claims are related to activist strategies. Girl activism is defined by its faith in the possibility of a 'better world' as well as its strong aim for social change. Taft's primary argument becomes the similarity in girl activists' identity narratives across the Americas based on shared understandings of themselves as girls, as young people and as activists. Taft convincingly argues that, on the one hand, the girls' identity narratives shape their activist strategies, and on the other, that activist identity is performed through the ongoing practice of activism.

Teenage activists, Taft shows, do not demonstrate great interest in formal political channels of participation, such as lobbying or voting, due to a shared dissatisfaction with adult politics, which they see as cynical and inefficient. Because of their young age, they are also often excluded from these practices. Instead, girls' activism is geared toward direct action and prefigurative politics, which create alternative communities and spaces for participation. Through the practicing of activist identities girls also redefine and reject the general understandings of girlhood. Instead, they make claims for a political authority of their own and organize through practices related to their generational experiences such as going to school and participating in formal education or awareness raising. However, instead of limiting their activity to 'girl-related problems' young activists' claims are often connected to the struggles for social justice more generally. Their identity narratives are not reduced simply to 'youth' but are also informed by their race, class, gender and location—issues that concern young activists and to which they claim to bring their unique 'youth perspective'.

Taft mentions repeatedly how local and national histories shape the questions and practices guiding girl activism. However, because of her multi-site ethnography, these nuances are left without deeper analysis as the author concentrates on forwarding generalized characterizations of girlhood and girl activism. These generalizations are sometimes vague and leave the reader wondering if more interesting results would have emerged from locally-bound examination. Considering the context in more detailed manner would also have provided more fertile ground for analyzing how negotiations on gender are carried out in different contexts; at present this element remains ambiguous. Furthermore, Taft's theoretical approach could have benefited from deeper levels of analysis, as the present study portrays her configurations around the concepts of identity, culture and strategy rather generally and thus often imprecisely.

The prevalent discourse on youthful political participation is embedded in notions of apathy and lack of interest in (formal) politics. Taft refuses to adopt this narrative, analyzing youth activism instead from the viewpoint of girls. This is an original move as young people, especially girls, are rarely considered as serious political actors and, thus, many studies of youthful participation are not based on the conception of youth empowerment but rather on examining how young people are incorporated into adult

institutions. Taft emphasizes how this is a pity as 'the centrality of girlhood to the global economy and to global civil society provides a theoretically rich reason for looking at the political identities and practices of teenage girl activists' (p. 6).

Another of Jessica Taft's key contributions to existing scholarship is her argument that the discourse on youth's political apathy is a stereotype that in fact renders youth activism invisible and underestimates the abilities of young people. She demonstrates how they are too often associated with political inaction and individual youth activists are seen as exceptions to the stereotypically 'normal' apathy of their age cohort. Taft shows how girl activists see nothing exceptional in their activism and believe that anyone can be an activist. Taft encourages adult activists to take these views seriously and proposes that social movements in general could benefit from including girl activists as empowered participants. Their enthusiasm, hopefulness and faith in a more just world could contribute importantly also to the adult activists' worldviews. *Rebel Girls* is successful in bringing a fresh viewpoint to social movement studies. It succeeds in highlighting the voice of the young girl activists as political actors and thus shows the benefits of ethnographic research in disclosing the subjective experiences and perspective of the often marginalized actors.

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MAYBLIN, MAYA. *Gender, Catholicism, and Morality in Brazil: Virtuous Husbands, Powerful Wives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Pp. 224. ISBN: 978-0-230-62312-5.

One of the major contributions of the anthropology of religion has been to raise critical questions about some of anthropology's most basic concepts. Religious life in different cultures challenges how we understand seemingly basic ideas such as belief, personhood and experience. Maya Mayblin's ethnography of Santa Lucia, a small, rural community of cash-crop farmers in northeastern Brazil, provokes the same kind of questions about the concept of morality. It is a detailed and sensitive discussion of the everyday struggles of men and women over the course of their lives, drawing on deep and fascinating life-history interviews, as well as participant observation. This forms the basis for an argument about moral thinking and moral practice in the making of the person and her relationships. Families and gender roles in peasant societies in Latin America are by no means a new topic for anthropologists. This book, however, engages thoroughly with this extensive literature and offers a provocative and original take on many familiar issues from the region.

The central claim of the book is that Santa Lucians perceive an inescapable contradiction between the Christian ideal of marriage and the inherent sinfulness of the everyday life of married men and women. On the one hand, it is God's will that men and women marry and raise children, but on the other hand, growing up, falling in love, and setting up a