

of uncertainty in Inhambane, and there is no question that the volume is a welcome contribution to the ethnography of Mozambique.

Notes

- 1 I am particularly thankful to my students Kaitlyn Howard, April Terwelp, Krista Esposito and Breana Jackson for these insights.

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Liu, Jieyu, *Gender, Sexuality and Power in Chinese Companies: Beauties at Work*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 158 pages.

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This book is the first ethnographic account of the work and life of "white-collar beauties" in contemporary China. It addresses the gendered and sexualised issues in the workplace of the "one child generation." Women of this generation are presented by the media as living an enviable life: urban, highly educated, professional, intelligent, pretty and the only children of their natal families – young women who grew up in a child-centred environment and received unprecedented care and investment from their parents. Simply put, few gendered differences in their education have meant these young women have strong career ambitions. Liu argues that the way young women strategise has significantly shaped their negotiations of the gender-based inequality that they still face in the workplace. The social, economic and cultural processes that lead to the making of the "white-collar beauty" in post-Maoist China are the topics of Chapter 2. The media feature such women and, in doing so, influence the aspirations of young women of a generation. White-collar beauties are constructed to embody nationalist and neoliberal desires, which clash with earlier ideologies. One question the book develops is how much such depictions are a media fantasy and how much they are a reality. Is the enviable lifestyle real?

In rethinking the concept of gender and sexuality, two fundamental notions of feminist theory, Liu argues, in Chapter 3, for the importance of reformulating local feminist frameworks to account for the gendered and sexual control and resistance experienced by her interlocutors. The ethnographic material of the book is foregrounded in Chapter 4, where the ideas of gender of her interlocutors collide with the essentialisation of gender categories by company management. Management ideologies legitimise male domination, which offers poor career advancement possibilities for young and highly educated women with career ambition. Liu shows the interplay between

women's consent and resistance to their experience in a highly patriarchal Chinese work environment. As a matter of fact, many women reject the gendered expectations of their work. This refusal arises in a context where women, growing up as the only children of their families, do not experience gender differences in educational development. Liu succeeds in documenting the complexity of the politics of the naturalisation of gender and its interaction with class as a central issue in the white-collar workplace.

Next Liu turns, in Chapter 5, to the ways that the objectification of women's sexuality is put in place and sustained by managers to enhance workplace productivity. Liu shows how "white-collar beauties" are subject to a deep level of objectification and commodification. Indeed, women become the targets of sexual jokes in the private setting, and when their reputability is less of an issue, women may even become the tellers of such jokes. In what amounts to a highly patriarchal and eroticised work setting, with few procedures for dealing with sexual harassment, white-collar women learn to behave strategically.

Chapter 6 addresses the relationships between women and their clients to reveal the sexist politics and sexual content of interaction between women workers and clients. Here, selling women's sexuality is institutionally and deliberately deployed by management. Women treat clients to banquets, karaoke parties, and saunas. Such business practices are exhausting and extremely stressful for women. As the sexuality of women is highly moralised, white-collar beauties find themselves walking a fine line between respectability and disreputability. They strive to look pretty, but not sexy. Women, in addition to having to abide by business practices, have to take great care to manage their sexual reputations. This is a burden their male colleagues need not undertake. This insight allows Liu to challenge Hakim's (2010) claim that women use erotic capital as a way to advance in modern societies. Liu argues this ignores how sexuality is culturally shaped, and that such a strategy, which overlooks local gender politics, further perpetuates and naturalises a Chinese gendered order.

The politics of the relationship between women and men, but also of that among women themselves, is the subject of Chapter 7. The women who are included and excluded in women's social activities outside the work setting reveal deep segregations and hierarchies that are based on background (such as rural versus urban) between female co-workers. What are the different ways in which resistance becomes possible and what is the importance of the mobilisation of women's capacity to do emotional labour in a context where the pursuit of harmony is paramount?

The experiences and expectations of marriage and family, in Chapter 8, show how the changes in private life, such as singlehood and increasing divorce, challenge the working assumption of the traditional division of the public and private sphere. To women of the "one child generation," marriage and family are essential places from which to manoeuvre, strategise and exercise power. In the Conclusion Liu shows how, contrary to Western feminist discussions that consider the dichotomy between family and work a cause of inequality in the family and segregation in the workplace, a reconstitution of the private sphere away from the workplace facilitates the ability of young women to enact the Chinese family.

This concise book is a welcome contribution to the understanding of highly educated young women in the labour market of China. White-collar women face many gender-based

obstacles, and yet their inability to break through a glass ceiling should not be considered a failure, as even such an assumption is based upon masculinised notions of success. Instead, women resort to different individualised paths in their pursuit of progress and development. Drawing on detailed ethnographic descriptions and analysis, Liu shows the agency of women at work as they comply with and resist these double standards. The book sheds light on how gender and sexuality are integral to the processes of compliance and resistance in structural masculine domination. It is a welcome addition to feminist theory, which is grounded in local research and which takes into consideration complex realities embedded in the wider world. In this way, the approach engages in a deimperialisation of knowledge, which challenges Western feminist comprehension of gender inequalities in the workplace and in the family.

Despite this, corporations do seem to use “Chinese beauties” and the demand for women to perform aesthetic and sexual labour in their encounters with clients strategically. Such forms of labour are mandatory for the job, and yet they are unpaid. In addition, making oneself beautiful and acting in a “feminine” way implies a considerable investment of time, energy, and money. Of course, detailed ethnography and analysis of such labours would be welcome in feminist studies, which, until recently, focused mostly on Western contexts. Despite this shortcoming, anyone eager to learn more about the lives of young, highly educated urban women in China will find this book an exciting resource. Researchers interested in a comparative analysis with other East Asian countries will find good material in this publication. Feminist scholars interested in gender and sexuality in a global context will find this book insightful.

References

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Pascal Boyer is a French and American cognitive anthropologist teaching at Washington University in St. Louis. He gained renown for his study of religion as a by-product of specialised brain machinery (Boyer 2001). *Minds Make Societies* champions the same approach in new fields, using mostly second-hand data. Boyer intends to draw the outlines of a new social science arising from convergent research in biology, psychology, economy, anthropology and other disciplines. As a new natural science of social phenomena, it distances itself from distinguishing nature from nurture and reverts to the infra- or subpersonal working of neural circuits rather than to agents’ conscious will, social facts or cultural norms. Boyer wants anthropologists and

fellow social scientists to use natural selection as a methodological estrangement against false evidence, and as a ground on which to build precise, testable hypotheses about puzzling aspects of the human mind.

Each of the seven chapters attempts to demonstrate that we exhibit specific preferences and myopias in several domains because our biological cognitive systems were designed by natural selection to meet what pressures were recurrent in the Pleistocene (2.5 million to 12,000 years before the Common Era). The rival hypotheses Boyer considers are said to share a naive conception of information as something entering agents’ minds without any need for dedicated mechanisms with rules and content of their own.

In Chapter 1, ideological depictions of ethnic others as invaders are seen as secondary interpretations of intuitions sparked by an unconscious framing of situations as zero-sum games, a framing adapted to keep encroaching groups away from key territories (such as water holes or hunting grounds) and to put threatening males of the other group in a subordinate position. Cognitive specialisations to recruit social support and to perform (or prevent) raids and ambushes are taken to account more satisfactorily for ethnic tensions in contemporary urban settings and for the “predictable script” of civil conflicts than social psychology’s hypothesis about tribalism and discriminatory stereotypes.

An evolved epistemic vigilance helps us detect liars and manipulators, by motivating us to gain reputational information and to question the likeliness of others’ sayings. However, people fall prey to rumours and even show up wanting to see these taken seriously. This apparent paradox is unfolded throughout Chapter 2, where Boyer hypothesizes an adaptively lighter and faster processing of threat signals, and an evolved capacity not only to seek support, but also to moralise recruitment (turning the acceptance or refusal to disseminate the threat signal into an “either with or against us” thinking).

Building on *Religion Explained* (Boyer 2001), in Chapter 3, Boyer defines supernatural concepts as by-products of cognitive systems dedicated to inanimate things, to animate beings, to intentionality, to fairness and the like, systems whose intuitive expectations are overtly violated or subtly confirmed by supernatural concepts. He holds that the “primitive” supernatural concepts were mainly imagistic and pragmatic-minded, not contained in any doctrine, nor uniting believers in communities. As such, they would have few, if any parallel with religions, understood as professionalised organisations born of large kingdoms, empires and city-states, which standardised both the content and the use of supernatural concepts. On this account, the functionalist explanation of religion as a human universal, answering an urge to make sense and to cooperate, is no longer tenable. Religion as such no longer has a *raison d’être* as a concept.

Against their description as natural or self-evident parts of human nature, family and kinship are shown in Chapter 4 to be compromises between diverse evolved preferences that work independently and sometimes in conflict. The evolutionary rise of stable pair bonding is reconstructed through the once hotly debated “primitive contract” of sex for meat, which Boyers reappraises to mean meat and protection against rape and infanticide for the certainty of fatherhood. This latter concern, Boyer advances, motivates male control over female mobility,