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Heather D. Switzer. *When the Light Is Fire: Maasai Schoolgirls in Contemporary Kenya.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018. 248 pp. $28.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-252-08372-3.

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Heather D. Switzer's *When the Light Is Fire: Maasai Schoolgirls in Contemporary Kenya* offers a rich and compelling account of schoolgirlhood among the Maasai, whom many in Kenya erroneously view as "hating" education. Based on extensive interviews with schoolgirls themselves, the book both dispels any misapprehensions about the helplessness, and hopelessness, of Maasai girls *and* directly refutes the developmentalist discourse that sees girls' empowerment as a panacea for the developing world's problems.

The most compelling parts of the book emerge from the many accounts of the girls themselves and Switzer's transparent recounting of their interactions. She is highly conscious of being a white American woman in Kenya and frames all of her stories in terms of her own, and the girls', subjectivity. As readers we therefore come to understand some of the layers of cultural practice and nuance that influence what and how different girls, women, and men might have told her about themselves. We also see the individuals whose sparks of ambition and intelligence are fueling quiet but profound shifts in Maasai communities, reflecting and defying developmentalist logic.

One important intervention is Switzer's rejection of any simplistic division between "girls in the home" and "schoolgirls" (p. 91). Scholarly and developmentalist literatures often see these two categories as fundamentally different, most of all in cultural terms. Yet the girls in the book, for the most part, still value and feel bound by family and community expectations, especially to become wives and mothers. It is more accurate to say they want to transform these roles; girls and mothers alike spoke of gaining independence from "certain patriarchal claims" and coming to depend on themselves, rather than fathers or husbands (p. 69). Their dreams are substantial; one of the girls Switzer interviewed described her grand plans, including building her parents a house, digging boreholes for water, and installing solar lighting (p. 78).

The schoolgirls in the book want to be "better Maasai," though as they remake their identities they struggle with how to articulate their status (p. 14). One of the most interesting discussions in the book is the difficulty of defining "girl" and "woman" in the context of education and the "in-betweenness" these young women experience (p. 93). Nearly all the girls in the book who are in school have undergone ***emurata***, the ritual excision ceremony that traditionally marks a girl as a woman, ready for marriage and childbearing. Yet these school***girls*** do not identify as women. They also reject the term for girls/women who are not yet married: ***enkanyakuai***. For schoolgirls, that term connotes "a person who is just sitting at home without doing any work" (p. 127). The Maa

language does not have a word for how these young women see themselves. They refer to themselves as schoolgirls, even those in their late teens, regardless of emurata status.

Lurking throughout this discussion of these predominately teenaged young women is the specter of early pregnancy, which nearly always leads to leaving school. The assumption is that men and boys try to "disturb" and "cheat" (coerce) girls to have sex, yet it is the girl's responsibility to resist these attentions and assaults (p. 137). Switzer observes that mothers do not "seem to register" the competing demands and pressures on schoolgirls' sexuality (p. 134). She calls this silence "striking" and connects it to the communal investment in girls' educations, a reflection not only of the girls' desires or experiences but also of sacrifices from many families (p. 140).

Switzer's book does an excellent job of highlighting the tension between girls' own desire to be "exceptional, girlpowered girls" and the demands that can easily disrupt their grandest plans (pp. 146-47). In her conclusion, she makes powerful policy critiques and recommendations that center her analysis of Maasai girls' and women's own words and experiences. Rejecting the neoliberal emphasis on "empowering" individual girls, she resituates these girls within the family and community contexts that govern their options and suggests that refiguring existing expectations may be far more powerful than outright rejection (p. 157). With extensive quotations and anecdotes, Switzer anchors the text with the words of Maasai girls and women, whose input is long overdue in developmentalist discourse.

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