

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

(RE)LOCATING THE AFRICAN WOMAN WITHIN AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRODUCING GENDER-BALANCED HISTORY ROOTED IN AFROCENTRIC THEORY

ANTWANISHA ALAMEEN-SHAVERS

African historiography has been inculcated with false assertions made by various groups seeking to boost their own identities for some political agenda. Scholars in Africana Studies have functioned as the first line of defense to this threat to African agency, producing a body of research that directly challenges previous distortions rooted in White supremacy. However, even with such headways, scholarship written on African history still tends to focus primarily on male contributions as the principal influence to the development and maintenance of civilizations while minimizing the roles of women. Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza's study on the content of African historical text revealed that most either failed to mention African women altogether or only discussed women in the context of marriage for a mere few pages.¹ Additionally, African women's power was generally represented as subordinate to the powers of African men. African women were more fundamental to the operation of African societies than the literature on African history suggests. One can surmise that utilizing a Eurocentric framework of African history helped scholars produce male-centered works; that is, working out of a context where men are valued over women meant that the scholars regardless of gender would produce male-centered works. One of the goals in Africana Studies has been to challenge historical racist narratives of Africa and to produce knowledge that is culturally grounded. Therefore, we must be intentional about the ways we approach and record history. If African women's contributions to Africa continues to be denied or diminished, then our

scholarship is no greater in value than those produced to bolster White (male) supremacy. In efforts to avoid these pitfalls, this paper provides researchers with (1) methodological considerations rooted in Afrocentric theory for undertaking the study of African history, and (2) an outline of examples that demonstrate the ubiquitous position of African women in African society and culture, chiefly in the spiritual, political, and social realms.

Afrocentricity: The Challenge to Eurocentric Analysis of African Existence

Until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story. —African Proverb

African history was systematically distorted by Eurocentrists in efforts to claim the superiority of their race. Some claimed that Africa possessed no history and did not produce anything of significance. For example, Georg Hegel (1770–1831), in his book *Philosophy of History*, stated that Africans were “capable of no development or culture, and as we have seen them at this day, such have they always been. . . . At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit.”² Others argued that Africans were inferior to Europeans by denying the existence of African civilization. David Hume (1711–1776), a Scot philosopher, stated that Africans were “naturally inferior to the white” and that “there never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences.”³ Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), anthropologist and philosopher, theorized that nonwhites have no talents or natural gifts due to the dark pigmentation of their skin, which he associated with their incapacity to be educated and civilized, unlike Whites, whose talents and gifts were ordained.⁴ Thomas Jefferson made claims in the essay, “Notes on the Virginia,” that Blacks could not express “thought above the level of plain narration” and they were not able to produce even a “elementary trait of painting or sculpture.”⁵ Samuel Baker, a European writer, referred to Africans as savages who were cruel, selfish, and lacked religion.⁶ European philosophers contended that Africans were animals who did not contribute anything worth mentioning to human history or the progression of humanity.

Molefi Asante states that a significant amount of “historians view Africa as the recipient of everything, the creator of nothing”⁷; such a

viewpoint served as the dominant framework from which African history had been analyzed for centuries. Consequently, Asante asserts the need for an Afrocentric historiography that is culturally grounded and relocates “Africans to a centered position in their own history.”⁸ This discussion finds its philosophical source in the idea that African people—African women in this case—must be examined from the standpoint of their own agency and centrality in their experiences. Afrocentricity is a philosophical perspective that maintains African people should operate from a sense of agency that places their cultural and historical realities and experiences at the center of their lives. Asante argues that people of African descent must have *agency*. He states, “An agent, in our terms, must mean a human being who is capable of acting independently in his or her own best interest.”⁹ The lack of agency among Africans will result in our marginal position within our own story. We become the object rather than the subject in our own realities, and thus our story is told from an outsider’s perspective. According to Asante, the “Afrocentrist is concerned with discovering in every place and in all circumstances the subject position of the African person. This is particularly true in cases where the issues of significance, that is, the themes, topics, and concerns are of African ideas and activists.”¹⁰ Eurocentric accounts of African history positioned Africans as objects that were acted upon by European subjects. African agency was nearly nonexistent in such an arrangement.

Asante further argues that Africans who are operating from a Eurocentric perspective are *dislocated*. They are removed from their own cultural center, which has been replaced with a Eurocentric understanding of who they are in the world. A ramification of *dislocation* is Africans internalizing and accepting the ideological sentiment that their humanity and culture are inferior to European humanity and culture. Asante states that a person’s psychological location is determined by whether they are *dislocated* or *located*.¹¹ He contends that *location* is one’s psychological, cultural, historical, or personal position in which they occupy at a given time. If a person is *dislocated*, then they are operating from a marginal place or within the confinements that their oppressor has outlined. Afrocentricity seeks to liberate Africans from any form of domination that has occurred as a result of foreign invasion or enslavement so that we can (re)locate ourselves to the subject position.

Locating African Women’s Agency

Asante states that the discipline of Africology:

recognizes gender as a substantial research issue in questions dealing with social, political, economic, cultural, or aesthetic problems. Since the liberation of women is not an act of charity but a fundamental part of the Afrocentric project, the researcher must be cognizant of sexist language, terminology, and perspectives. It is impossible for a scholar to deal effectively with either the cultural/aesthetic of the social/behavioral concentrations without attention to the historic impact and achievement of women within the African community. Both female and male scholars must properly examine the roles women have played in liberating Africans and others from oppression, resisting the imposition of sexist repression and subjugation, and exercising economic and political authority.¹²

As stated by Asante, it becomes the responsibility of scholars within the discipline of Africology to ensure that the research produced represents both men and women. Nah Dove further expounds that “any future and continuing African liberationist theory and activism begins with the effort to recover, herstorically, and culturally, the complementary relationship of the woman and the man as the basis for self-determination.”¹³ Asante contends that the goal of the Afrocentric project is a “commitment to a new narrative of Africa” that challenges the European narratives of Africa.¹⁴ European narratives of Africa have claimed that Africa has no place in history and that its history is marked by inferiority. This new narrative of Africa that Asante speaks of must connect classical African history to African history and reestablish African history as part of world history. The restoration of African historiography also has to specifically include African women and their contributions to history.

There have been many consequences that have resulted from the Eurocentric writing of African history, one of which includes the exclusion of African women from the African historiography. Within Eurocentric thought and practice, not only were Whites positioned as superior to Blacks and all other people of color, but also maleness was categorized as superior to femaleness. The purported belief in the inferiority of both Blacks and women directly impacted the ways in which African history was written. When scholars attempted to save African history from the cloaks of White supremacy, African men became the focus while African women were placed on the backburner. The philosophy of Afrocentricity states that Africans should operate from an African-centered perspective. In doing so, we must also acknowledge and accept that within the African worldview, men and women are of equal importance. Therefore, African women’s contributions to African history must be situated in its proper context. It is necessary to locate the avenues through which women exercised personal agency in order to properly write their history.

Women scholars of African descent have also contributed to the inaccurate recording of African women's history. Watkins discusses how some Black feminist theorists attempt to label the work of historical Black women activists as acts of feminism when, in fact, it was much more complex than just a struggle for gender equality.¹⁵ African women were fighting for liberation of their family: men, women, and children. Thus, it is a complete misrepresentation of history to label Black female liberation fighters as feminists. It also becomes vital to challenge narratives that discuss African women as subordinate or inferior to men. It is not to say that sexism did not exist in Africa; such a claim would have to be substantiated. But rather, it is detrimental to analyze the roles occupied by African women and men within a given society from an alien framework because it ultimately leads to inaccurate conclusions.

White feminists observed African women and their roles as mothers and assumed that African women were oppressed since White women felt oppressed due to how they were devalued as mothers in Euro-America.¹⁶ Afrocentricity states that Africans must center their own cultural perspective rather than use alien frameworks to interpret their reality. Hudson-Weems articulated the importance of African women who operated from their own cultural perspective rather than a foreign paradigm such as feminism.¹⁷ The feminist paradigm is governed by presumptions and principles that govern how they critically analyze their reality. One foundational premise is that women are in conflict with men, and thus their goal is to access the power that men maintain over them. Oyewumi maintains that since "feminism is primarily concerned with the liberation of women,"¹⁸ it does not accurately reflect the lives of African women since the notion of "womanhood" is not a real social category, but rather a concept where each individual occupies a number of intersecting/overlapping social positions in which they identify themselves (e.g., mother, trader, wife, Queen mother, priestess, elder), granting them privilege or disadvantage in relation to the other.¹⁹ African women are then seen as agents, not victims. This is not to say that hegemonic patriarchy does not exist in Africa (and hence needs to be challenged), but rather, the oppression experienced by African women cannot be deduced simply to African male domination.

In order to fully understand the position of Africans, one must take into account national and international factors such as the interplay of "economic and political relationships" with Europe and the United States as well as "African socioeconomic norms."²⁰ Pala suggests that "the problems facing African women today, irrespective of their national and social class affiliations, are inextricably bound up in the wider struggle by

African people to free themselves from poverty and ideological domination in both intra-and international spheres.”²¹ Moreover, the “male oppressing female” framework does not fully capture the past and present realities of many African women.

Language has been used as an oppressive tool to keep Africans mentally imprisoned. Asante states, “Liberation from captivity of racist language is first order of the intellectual,” and thus, “there can be no freedom until there is freedom in the mind.”²² Afrocentricity has “a commitment to lexical refinement” because language has been used as a tool to oppress and keep us dislocated.²³ Karenga argues that we must create a different language and logic from the oppressors, thus giving new meanings to old terms and concepts.²⁴

Afrocentric projects seek to discontinue the use of certain terms that are not rooted in our own cultural understanding. It also becomes important to interrogate the meanings attached to terms that we deemed as culturally neutral. For example, from the Eurocentric perspective, men are superior to women. Consequently, the term *woman* is linked to inferiority or weakness. The category of *woman* is loaded with Eurocentric meanings that cannot be used to capture how women are defined in African societies. Other concepts such as *motherhood* or *wife* also have to be defined from an Afrocentric perspective because such concepts within the European experience have been equated to property and burden.

African men and women have found themselves on the margins of European narratives. Afrocentrists must find the African subject in phenomena that deal with Africa and Africans. I would further add to this principle by stating that it is crucial for Afrocentrists to find both the African male subject and the African female subject so that we can avoid the trappings of Eurocentrism, which focuses primarily on men due to its belief in male superiority. In order to adequately present the history of African women, it has to be interpreted from an Afrocentric perspective. In summation: (1) the new narrative of African history must equally address women and men; (2) the position of African women in history must be analyzed through African frameworks to avoid the falsification of African women’s roles as being a result of sexism; and (3) in analyzing the history of African women, one must refrain from using simplistic Eurocentric concepts such as *feminism* and Eurocentric definitions of neutral terms such as *woman* or *wife* to describe the reality of African women.

Centering Concepts of Powers from the African Worldview

Concepts of power such as spirituality, motherhood, and power itself must be culturally centered from the African worldview or else we fail to fully comprehend the data we are analyzing. In the essay, “Afrocentricity and African Spirituality,” Ama Mazama discusses the interconnectedness of the spiritual and physical realms in African life. From the African worldview, though the spiritual world is invisible, it is still very real. Mazama contends that “people do not conceive of themselves as separated from the cosmos but as being completely integrated into a universe that is much larger than any of them and yet is centered around them.”²⁵ She further explains that it is the emphasis on the “unity of being” of all things, from humans to minerals, that fosters “the principle of harmony, based on the organic solidarity and complementarity of all forms.”²⁶ The ancestors are seen as one with the living and are included in the daily lives of their descendants. People maintain constant communication with their ancestors, because they have spiritual powers that can help and protect them as they dwell in the physical realm. For this reason, the ancestors and divinities that reside in the spiritual world are a part of the decisions made at all levels in African societies. Therefore, it would be erroneous to discuss the activities that occur at the political or social level without discussing the integral role that entities in the spiritual world have in the process. Mazama articulates the need to regard the spiritual realm as a crucial factor in one’s analysis of African phenomena. African women were essential to their communities based on the spiritual power that was bestowed exclusively upon them. Their spiritual authority contributed to how African societies were organized and governed.

Nah Dove, in her essay “Defining a Mother-Centered Matrix to Analyze the Status of Women,” argues that in order for modern African states to function in the way that best benefits their development as nations, they need to abandon Eurocentric models of government that are male-centered and that promote male domination. She postulates that such nations need to reconnect and restructure their state model to operate from a mother-centered matrix. Ancient Egypt is used as the classical African example of what a mother-centered state structure entailed. The criterion that Dove puts forth speaks to the balancing of power between women and men and recognizing the value of mothering qualities. Dove states that “within the Mother-centered Matrix, balance between the feminine and masculine principles is sought from the physical and material to the spiritual planes. Mother-centered literally means mother-led societal and

cultural constructs.”²⁷ Dove provided a theoretical model that can be used to investigate how women in patriarchal societies in Africa exercise political power. The balance of power between men and women in the physical and spiritual planes and the high value placed on motherhood are concepts that are central to the African worldview. Ifi Amadiume, in *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion & Culture*, emphasizes the importance of motherhood in Africa. She contends that motherhood in African societies as compared in European societies has different value and meaning. She states:

The very thought of women’s power being based on the logic of motherhood has proved offensive to many Western Feminists. It is easy to see why this is so since in the European system, wifehood and motherhood was a means of enslavement of women. In the African system of matriarchy, it was women’s means of empowerment.²⁸

As explained by Amadiume, motherhood was a source of power for African women, not a reflection of their oppression. Therefore, motherhood must be discussed within the context of the African worldview, not from an alien framework. From the perspective of African women, motherhood was used as a way to exercise agency in their societies.

Power needs to be redefined from an Afrocentric perspective that does not privy group domination or hierarchical relationships based on oppression or forced submission. Our understanding of power that places a higher value on one group above another stems from Eurocentric ideology, which is loaded with negative connotations. White patriarchal rule in the United States and other European-dominated countries has tainted how we see patriarchy in general. Patriarchy is usually seen as the dominant rule of men over women. On the other hand, matriarchy is seen as the reverse, the domination by women over men, which is often dismissed as a fallacy.²⁹ In both extreme cases, either women are powerless or men are powerless. However, using such conceptual frameworks in studying the historical reality of Africa will not suffice.

In accordance, Oyewumi contends that Eurocentric frameworks are not appropriate tools to use to interpret African societies. She discusses issues that arise in Yoruba-to-English translations, which have created false representations of the realities of women in Yoruba society.³⁰ Scholars who operate from a Western tradition assume that women did not have an important position in any society; thus, when they go about the task of translating African history from an African language to the English language, they often write African women out of history. For example,

Oyewumi discusses how the original translation will refer to an *African ruler*, and then it will be translated to an *African king*, which dismisses the possibility that such a ruler could have been an African woman. She refers to this process as the *creation of kings*, which plays a role in changing African history and erasing African women.³¹ Using Eurocentric frameworks not only imposes definitions on African phenomena that are subjectively male focused but also suppresses the roles of women. Thus, as argued by Karenga, it becomes important to alter the definition of terms that have Eurocentric connotations such as *matriarchy* or *patriarchy*.³² It is my contention that from the African view, matriarchy and patriarchy served as configurations of power that women and men could use to access political power that worked in unison with another, forming a complete whole. One does not dominate the other, but rather each fulfills their own unique role that is essential to the society. Uchendu, in his essay, "Women, Power, and Political Institution in Igboland," defined *power* as:

[T]he capacity to affect the quality of another person's outcomes and the ability to get the other person to do what one wants her or him to do, despite initial resistance. Power also means control over resources, including human resources, and of core social institutions; control that makes possible both the effective initiation of actions and decisions and the use of effective sanctions.³³

However, this definition of power is not rooted in cooperation but rather coercion and would inevitably end in the domination of one group over the other.

Conversely, Tiamoya Karenga contends that "power can also simply be an ability to realize one's will or to accomplish a task which does not require power over or imposition on others."³⁴ From the African view, men and women worked in collaboration for the benefit of the entire society. In some cases, women and men worked separately but in concert with another to advance different issues and keep harmony in their community. Women and men were both expected to contribute to the daily operations of a given community. Power as a conceptual tool needs to be redefined in order to highlight aspects that are centered around male-female collaboration, unity, and a person's contribution to the whole. I have defined *power* as the ability to contribute in one way or many ways to how a respective society is able to operate, which includes the active participation in core institutions that form the foundation of the society's structure and inform the course of decisions that impact the community.

The Woman's Place in African History Is Omnipresent

Anna Julia Cooper stated in her seminal text, *A Voice from the South*, that “there is a feminine as well as masculine side to truth, that these are related, not as inferior or superior, not as better or worse, not as weaker or stronger, but as complements—complements in one necessary and symmetric whole.”³⁵ Scholars have argued that men and women coexisted as harmonious units within African societies, which has been referred to as complementary relationships between men and women.³⁶ In such social arrangements, the roles of men and women were equally important to the operation of a given community. This section will briefly outline the histories written on the political position of African women in various parts of Africa in order to provide a context by which African women can be discussed alongside men within the spiritual, political, and social sphere.

In Tolagbe Ogunleye's essay, “Women in Ancient West Africa,” he discusses how women were integral to the development of their communities:

[In] ancient West African societies, relations between women and men seems to have been complementary, and the interdependency and cooperation between the sexes seem to have been supported by sacred principles and secular laws. The expertise, creative, and industriousness of women, highborn and common alike, were indispensable to West Africa's growth and development.³⁷

He argues that the high value placed on female deities in African religion was the root of how African women maintained powerful positions in their respective societies. Female deities were worshipped and revered in the same way as male deities. Among the Ga of Ghana, their supreme god was referred to as both mother and father, and according to Ogunleye, only after the European invasion did the masculine element become more dominant.

He also discusses the impact of Arabic invasions on West African societies. He contends that matrilineal and matriarchal structures were defended by African men who understood the importance of both sexes having an integral part in the descent lines. However, with the imposition of Islam, most female-centered structures were replaced with male-governing structures. Both Arabic and European invasions were responsible for African women being maneuvered from their traditional positions of power.

In the essay, “Women in Nigeria History,” Adele Afigbo discusses the role that African women occupied in precolonial and colonial Nigeria. He challenges the notion that women were greatly oppressed prior to European invasion as compared to women’s role during European imposition. He states that:

what little evidence we have on their role would appear to suggest that whatever women’s limitations were in traditional society, Nigerian women still had the scope and the ability to play vital social, political and economic roles like women in any other society—African or European. When therefore we talk of Christianity and European rule improving the lot of Nigerian or African women, we should know precisely what we are saying. We should at least be clear in our minds that we are not saying that before the coming of European rule our women were the hapless and helpless slaves of their men folk.³⁸

He cites examples of women in rulership positions such as the reign of Amina of Zaria, who led the Hausa. He suggests that such an assignment given to a woman challenges the assumption that sexist notions toward women existed in Hausa culture. He further contends that we must avoid using the “masculine super-ordination/feminine-subordination paradigm” to analyze African history but rather move toward one that can address the different but equally important roles that men and women played. Afigbo further contends that it is necessary to understand that there were elite men and women who employed more power than non-elite men and women.³⁹

For example, in Nigeria, royal women were included in politics; they were able to make decisions and to serve as the eyes and ears for the king. Women within the royal family possessed more power over the affairs of the state than non-elite individuals. However, non-royal women were able to participate in political matters of their communities through women’s organizations, where they brought their issues to the governing officials. He also discusses how women played a leading role in economic activities such as agriculture and trade. They manufactured goods and sold them within their community. Men and women had specific trading activities; men were concentrated in long-distance trading, while women monopolized local trading. Additionally, he argues that women were most likely responsible for the transference of various cultural techniques to other ethnic groups since they were more likely than men to marry outside their community. Afigbo further explains how British rule changed the role of women in Nigerian societies. Some women occupied positions of power within the colonial system, while other women contested, protested, and led anti-colonial resistance movements, which subsequently led to Nigeria’s independence.

Oyeronke Oyewumi, in *The Invention of Women*, also makes similar claims to Afigbo.⁴⁰ She asserts that only after the introduction of Christianity along with the infiltration of European colonists did the power of African women diminish, which created male-dominated arenas that had not been previously present. She explains that due to colonialism, African men were preferred over African women to receive a Western education because European colonialists used African men to work in their interest. Some African men were educated under the European colonial system and placed in positions of power, while African women were excluded. Her research explores gender in Yoruba society before the European invasion. She states that Yoruban society was not divided into the socially constructed Western categories of *man* and *woman*, but rather was divided by age differences. A person of the community, therefore, was given deference according to their age, irrespective of their biological anatomy.

Another unit of analysis that afforded individuals different treatment was their connection to the lineage. A person who was born outside the lineage but married into the community would be viewed differently and, therefore, would be given different responsibilities from the members of the lineage. Another misconception is the idea that African people made gender distinctions within labor or trade. Oyewumi argues that African women were not relegated to any particular type of work because of their gender, unlike White women, who have historically dealt with such issues. Clearly Yoruban society did not use gender as a tool to restrict the agency of women.

Sandra T. Barnes, in her essay “Gender and the Politics of Support and Protection in Precolonial West Africa,” contends that some scholars have depicted women in African history as passive objects in the ruling class whose presence was characterized merely as symbolic representations rather than active political positions. She attributes such narrow interpretations to their perceptions of women rooted in Western thought. She states:

Much of the problem stemmed from the unquestioning acceptance of Western theoretical conventions that objectified women and therefore assumed them to be, and treated them a priori as objects—objects of exchange and alliance-making, and, to raise another deeply embedded theme, objects over whom reproductive rights were held. Simultaneously, but inconsistently, men were treated as acting subjects—subjects who negotiated alliances, and exercised rights over others.⁴¹

However, Barnes’s research challenges early assumptions that placed women as objects in history. She investigates the role of Queen Mothers

and other royal women within the political realm in Lagos in the early 1800s. She found that women played key roles in protecting male rulers who had been exiled and helping men to reestablish a power base. Between the years 1816 and 1853, six rulers were exiled and five of them sought refuge in the homes of their mothers. One woman named Tinubu was very influential during the exile of her husband. During his exile, he married Tinubu, and she began to make serious political moves. She developed a strong trading network that became a dominant force in that region. With her efforts, her husband, Adele, was able to reclaim the throne; however, he died shortly afterward. In order to maintain power, Tinubu strategically helped her brother-in-law become ruler. Barnes's research has implications for this study because it depicts how women used various avenues to claim political power; in this case, it was through marital alliances, economic wealth, and influence. Barnes rightly argues that women must be seen as subjects rather than objects in African history.

Edna G. Bay, in her essay "The Kpojito or 'Queen Mother' of Precolonial Dahomey: Towards an Institutional History," reveals the role of women in the *kpojito* position. The *kpojito* title translates in English as "the person who whelped the leopard."⁴² The office of *kpojito* was a political position held by a woman who worked with the king. The *kpojito* was considered the female counterpart of the king. Bay further states the importance of the position:

The office of *kpojito* of Dahomey . . . was one occupied by a nonroyal woman who had been part of the entourage of the previous monarch. All were linked in some way to their reign mates and were appointed to the office by the reigning king. Some kings, in fact, appear to have owned their very success in gaining power to their alliances with women within the palace.⁴³

Prominent women who occupied the office, such as Adonon and Hwanjile, were instrumental to reestablishing spiritual order, which served as the king's source of power. These women held a political position, but they were also priestesses, which gave them the spiritual authority to exert power over their community. She contends that two outside factors contributed to the decline of the *kpojito* power base: Europeans and the Yoruba. As Europeans observed the events of the kings during the 1800s, they argued that political matters were for men, not women. Additionally, a priesthood that originated from the Yoruba called Fa—which was exclusive to men—became very popular in Dahomey. Bay's research shows that women used spiritual means to retain political power, which helped the ruling class retain power over the community.

Biodun Adediran and Olukoya Ogen, in their work titled “Women, Rituals, and Politics of Precolonial Yorubaland,” emphasize the interconnectivity of spiritual authority and political power. Their research reveals that “even through womanhood in pre-colonial Yorubaland was ritualized, women were, through their control of religious activities, able to influence political activities. In fact, religion and politics were inseparable simply because the religious role of Yoruba women reinforced their political status.”⁴⁴ Their research focuses on the political positions of women among several Yoruba-speaking ethnic groups: the Ife, Oyo, Idaisa, Ondo, and Ikale. It was found that the Yoruba experienced a time in history where women had a more dominant role in politics; however, their power declined during the sixteenth century after some cultural and political restructuring occurred. The state structure transformed into a highly centralized government that relegated women’s source of political power to the palace. Women adapted to the changes and managed to secure power through the influence they possessed as wives and mothers. Women holding important positions such as priestess or “Lady of Rank” outnumbered male officials in the Oyo palace. Mothers of male leaders were responsible for ritual rites and the upkeep of major shires. Among the Idaisa, for every male ruler, there was a female counterpart who was referred to as “mother” whose duties were to “ensure the well-being and proper functioning of their male counterparts.”⁴⁵ The female co-ruler was to be addressed before any decision was made by the male co-ruler. The political government was divided among men, the *Jagun*, and women, *Ina-Jagun*, who came together to create state policy. The Idaisa’s political system was controlled equally by both women and men. Such an example is evidence of a complementary relationship between men and women.

Another example of female-organized political groups can be found among the Ibibio. Ihuoma F. Abaraonye’s essay, “Gender Relationships in Ibibio Traditional Organizations,” outlines the prominent female-centered organizations that existed before the advent of the European invasion. Adult women formed the organization *Iban Isong*, which was “the mother and most powerful of all the women’s organizations in Ibibioland.”⁴⁶ They were a governing body that worked in a similar capacity to their male counterparts, the *Ekpo Ndem Isong*. The *Iban Isong* imposed sanctions on men and women offenders. When situations called for drastic measures, the group of women changed their name to *Iban Isong Esit*, meaning “hard-heart, strong willed women.”⁴⁷ In such cases, their actions were usually directed at men; however, their major objective was to protect the female population from “physical and verbal oppression from male or female members of the community.”⁴⁸ The organization served to protect

women, but they did not discriminate due to the gender of the offender. She further stated that “a man reported his wife secretly to the *Ekpo* cult for discipline, and women reported their husbands who talked rudely about their sexual anatomy to the leaders of Iban Isong.”⁴⁹ The Ibibio political structure was dually operated by women and men who worked in the interest of both groups and thus the entire community.

In the study of Asante Queen Mothers, conducted by Beverly J Stoeltje, a similar example of shared political power between women and men was illuminated. In her essay, “Asante Queen Mothers: A Study in Female Authority,” Stoeltje discusses the role of women who occupied the position of Queen Mother among the Asante of Ghana. The Queen Mother was responsible for performing rituals with the king, pouring libations to recognize past rulers, attending funerals of royal family members, and settling disputes among women and men. Stoeltje found that what existed between the male rulers and the Queen Mother was a “concept of gender parallelism in which leadership is dual.”⁵⁰ She further contends that duality or parallelism does not denote sameness or equality, but rather each position complemented one another. In some cases, a woman would take the throne when the male successor was too young to rule or when she was the most qualified out of her male counterparts. Each position needed the other to be able to fulfill its intended function; thus, it is difficult to discuss one without the other. As such, she rightly opposes any discussion of the king that does not include an analysis of the office of the Queen Mother and its significance to the entire political structure.

The Queen Mother was not the wife of the king; in fact, she possessed her own stool that signified her separate acquired power. The Queen Mother was a person that was of royal heritage and was in some form related to the king in office; however, less commonly she was his actual mother. Although she was not often the actual mother of the king, she was his mother and the symbolic mother of the community, as explained by Stoeltje:

The Ohemaa [Queen Mother] is considered to be the mother of the clan in her town and therefore the mother of the chief. As the mother of the clan she embodies knowledge and wisdom, and through her leadership she is expected to impart that wisdom to the chief and her people. This knowledge and wisdom, derived from the concept of mother, is what legitimates her authority and defines the functions of the queen’s mother.⁵¹

Mothering qualities, therefore, are seen as essential to the political structure of the state, which is evidence of the high value placed on motherhood.

The empire of Benin also viewed motherhood as important, particularly in the state's political function. Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan discusses in her essay, "Iyoba, the Queen Mother of Benin: Images and Ambiguity in Gender and Sex Roles in Court Art," that European colonialization of Benin in 1897 caused a disruption to the political system of Queen Mother rule.⁵² The last Queen Mother to take the throne was in 1888 to 1897; although in recent years, a Queen Mother was crowned in 1981.

In Benin, a mother and son ruled together over the state. The mother occupied the office of Queen Mother, and the son was the king. One of most prominent mother-and-son duos, and possibly the first, to hold office was *Iyoba* (Queen Mother) Idia and *Oba* (King) Esigie, from 1504 to 1550. Idia was given the title, *Iyoba*, by her son for being such a fierce protector of him and their dominion during a war battle. Kaplan further explains how the position of *Iyoba* materialized in the culture:

The *Iyoba* is quintessential woman in Benin, embodying the virtues and accomplishments desired among women, generally, in society. She, like other women, is part of a polygynous household in which relations between wives are competitive. It is not known who will bear the first son and future heir, although the wife and the favorites are most likely to conceive. Nonetheless, Benins do not view this event as accidental. They believe an *Iyoba* is "chosen," predestined for her role even before she was born, and that her success in bringing forth the next *Oba* is a result of both destiny and individual ability. Her special role is recognized through her son, and recorded for posterity in the court art of Benin.⁵³

All women in Benin were able to become the wife of an *Oba*. He could theoretically have as many wives as he desired and thus extended the opportunity to many women to potentially become the next *Iyoba*. The wives that became Queen Mothers were buried in a special place next to the *Oba*, while others were even remembered in oral history. Kaplan explains that one of the major goals of women and men after death was to be remembered as a good person. Only good people received proper burials, which was the only way to become an ancestor. Among common people, art was displayed to represent the person's individual achievement and familial legacy. Among the ruling class, family shrines represented all the Edo peoples as a community, and specifically it ensured the "continuity of the state."⁵⁴ She further argues that the shrine of the *Iyoba* "acknowledges the power of all women in ensuring the continuity of the family."⁵⁵ Therefore, "the Mother" in the form of a politicized position was essential to the political function of the state, which is illuminated in the spiritual ritual tradition.

Annie Lebeuf's research on "The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies" found that mothers and often sisters or wives of the king were essential in the state's political formation. Her research surveys several different African political structures such as the Chamba, the Ashanti, the Bemba, the Kabaka, the Ankole, and the Fulani, among others. She discusses one example from the Lovedu of the North Eastern Transvaal in which women possessed complete sovereignty as sole rulers. The queen was highly respected for her spiritual authority over the elements such as controlling the rains. She had a council of women called the "mothers of the kingdom" that assisted her, acting as intermediaries between the state and local governing bodies.⁵⁶ The political system of the Lovedu evidently was successful since it spread to neighboring groups such as the Khaha and the Mamaila.

However, in her survey of women's political power, she found that women were less commonly supreme rulers, but rather they usually worked in concert with male rulers. In regards to the political position held by African women, Lebeuf concluded the following:

It seldom occurs that a woman is invested with supreme sovereignty, occupying an isolated position at the summit of the social hierarchy; but on the other hand, in most of the monarchical systems there are either one or two women of the highest rank who a par with that of the king or complementary to it.⁵⁷

For example, among the Swazi, the king's mother—called *Indlovukati*—had equal power with her son in the state government. She was seen as the "Elephant, the Earth, the Beautiful, the Mother of the Country," while the king was seen as the "Lion, the Sun, the Great Wild Animal."⁵⁸ Among the Bamileke of Cameroon, the mother, called the *Mafo*, ruled alongside her son, the *Fong*. The *Mafo* is seen by the entire community as "being equivalent to the chief himself."⁵⁹ Among the Kabaka and Ankole, the king is assisted by his mother and sister, in some cases his wife, which Lebeuf identifies as triad governance. Her research is invaluable for accurately rewriting the historiography of Africa, because it shows the continuity that exists between many African countries as it relates to their political philosophy on the importance of men and women sharing involvement in the political realm.

The dominant presence of women in the political realm within African states has led some Western scholars to question the depth of their actual power. Some have apparently assumed that senior women's political positions in relation to the king were simply symbolic or honorable. John Thornton challenges such a premise with his research on Kongo women

during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the essay, “Elite Women in the Kingdom of Kongo: Historical Perspective on Women’s Political Power,” Thornton reveals that women were able to exercise political agency by influencing male family members in positions of power.⁶⁰ However, after a major civil war that took place during 1665, women began to occupy political positions in which they exercised power in their own right.

Similarly, Tarikhu Farar’s study of African women in political power presents evidence that women were not objects, but in fact they effectively exercised agency within politics. Farar argues that scholars have incorrectly dismissed that there were societies in Africa in which “women possessed ‘real’ political authority—authority that gave them power over the lives of men.”⁶¹ Farar’s work, titled “The Queenmother, Matriarchy, and the Question of Female Political Authority in Precolonial West African Monarchy,” discusses the organization and roles of women in the political system. He contends that among the Akan, the Queen mother “wielded true political power and could, under certain conditions, assume full control of central authority: she could become the ‘king’, the omanhene.”⁶² Women were expected to lead their communities and thoughtfully contribute to how the communities functioned, just as their male counterparts did.

Conclusion

It is beyond erroneous to declare that African women were merely objects controlled by African men. It is not simply dishonest, but it also gravely distorts the African historiography and leaves the impression that Africa was a mirror image of other societies that relegated women to inferior beings. As it relates to African women, the history strongly suggests otherwise. The literature shows that African women’s positions as mothers were integral to the political ideology of how a given society governed their state. Such women also were expected to possess spiritual powers or spiritual authority, which was used for various purposes ranging from political to economic.

We must first see African women as agents. As stated by Molefi Kete Asante, “An agent, in our terms, must mean a human being who is capable of acting independently in his or her own best interest.”⁶³ African women found themselves in various situations that called for different measures. Women did not remain idle as history passed by; quite the contrary: they were actively involved in their societies, and thus the history of Africa needs to reflect this reality.

We must recognize and validate the importance of mothers to the development of Africans and their societies. Mothers were highly valued and essential to the socialization of the community as each member grew from a child to an adult. Motherhood, in many ways, served a political function that helped to sustain the society. We cannot overlook this fact. In the writing of African history, scholars emphasize phenomena such as conquest, war battle, and kingship, which tend to focus on men. This is a disservice to African women who played pivotal roles in the political and social structures of their societies as mothers.

From the African view, the spiritual realm was interconnected with the physical realm. In fact, it was believed that the spiritual world controlled all the events in the physical world; thus, people who were well versed as spiritual leaders received much admiration. Any discussion of Africa must include the role of deities, ancestors, and spiritual leaders in African societies. African women held spiritual authority, which gave them the ability to affect decisions at the political level. Thus, it is important to see African women as spiritual leaders. It is just as important to address the role of the female principle in the lives of Africans. By doing this, we will produce African histories that best represent the reality for men and women.

Bibliography

- Abaraonye, Ihuoma. "Gender Relations in Ibibio Traditional Organizations." In *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2010.
- Adediran, Biodun, and Olukoya Ogen. "Women, Ritual, and Politics of Pre-colonial Yorubaland." In *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2010.
- Afigbo, Adiele. "Women in Nigerian History." In *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2010.
- Afolayan, Funso. "Women, Politics, and Society among the Igbomina-Yoruba." In *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2010.
- Amadiaume, I. *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion & Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

- Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1994.
- Asante, Molefi K. *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007.
- . *Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990.
- Barnes, Sandra T. "Gender and the Politics of Support and Protection in Precolonial West Africa." In *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, edited by Flora E. S. Kaplan, vol. 810. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1997.
- Bay, Edna G. "The Kpojito or 'Queen Mother' of Precolonial Dahomey: Towards an Institutional History." In *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, edited by Flora E.S. Kaplan, vol. 810. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1997.
- Cooper, Anna. J. *A Voice from the South*. Xenia, OH: Aldine Printing House, 1892.
- Davidson, Basil. *Africa: The Story of a Continent, Program 1—Different but Equal*. Documentary. 1984.
- Dove, Nah. *Afrikan Mothers: Bearers of Culture, Makers of Social Change*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998.
- . "Defining a Mother-Centered Matrix to Analyze the Status of Women." *Journal of Black Studies* 33 (2002): 3–25.
- . "Defining African Womanist Theory." In *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, edited by Ama Mazama. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2003.
- Eze, Emmanuel C. "The Color of Reason: The Idea of Race in Kant's Anthropology." In *Post-Colonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, edited by Emmanuel C. Eze. Cambridge, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997.
- Farrar, Tarikhu. "Matriarchy, and the Question of Female Political Authority in Precolonial West African Monarchy." *Journal of Black Studies* 27 (1997): 579–97.
- Harris, Joseph E. *Africans and Their History* (2nd rev. ed.). New York: Penguin Books, 1998.
- Hudson-Weems, Clenora. *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. Troy, MI: Bedford, 1993.
- . *Africana Womanist Literary Theory*. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2004.
- Kaplan, Flora E. S. "Iyoba, the Queen Mother of Benin: Images and Ambiguity in Gender and Sex Roles in Court Art." In *Queens, Queen*

- Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, edited by Flora E. S. Kaplan, vol. 810. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1997.
- ed. *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, vol. 810. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1997.
- Karenga, Maulana. “Afrocentricity and Multicultural Education: Concept, Challenge, and Contribution.” In *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, edited by Ama Mazama. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2003.
- . *Introduction to Black Studies* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 2002.
- Karenga, Tiamoyo T. *The Office of the Divine Wife of Amen in the 25th and 26th Dynasties: A Study of Women and Power in Ancient Egypt*. Long Beach: California State University, 2007.
- Lebeuf, Annie M. D. “The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies.” In *Women of Tropical Africa*, edited by Denise Paulame. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.
- Mazama, Ama, ed. *The Afrocentric Paradigm*. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2003.
- . “Afrocentricity and African Spirituality.” *Journal of Black Studies* 33 (2002): 218–34.
- Ogunleye, Tolagbe. “Women in Ancient West Africa.” In *Women’s Roles in Ancient Civilization: A Reference Guide*, edited by Bella Vivante, 188–215. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.
- Oyewumi, Oyeronke. *African Gender Studies: A Reader*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- . *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- . “The White Woman’s Burden: African Women in Western Feminist Discourse.” In *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*, edited by Oyeronke Oyewumi, 25–44. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2003.
- Pala, Achola O. “Definitions of Women and Development: An Africa Perspective.” In *African Gender Studies: A Reader*, edited by Oyeronke Oyewumi, 169–206. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Stoeltje, Beverly J. “Asante Queen Mothers: A Study in Female Authority.” In *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, edited by Flora E. S. Kaplan, vol. 810. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1997.

- Thornton, John K. "Elite Women in the Kingdom of Kongo: Historical Perspective on Women's Political Power." *The Journal of African History* 47 (2006): 437–60.
- Uchendu, Egodi. "Women, Power, and Political Institution in Igboland." In *Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005.
- Uchendu, Patrick K. *The Role of Nigerian Women in Politics: Past and Present*. Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1993.
- Watkins, Valetia. "Womanism and Black Feminism: Issues in the Manipulation of African Historiography." In *African World History Project—Preliminary Challenge*, edited by Jacob H. Carruthers and Leon C. Harris. Los Angeles: Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, 1997.
- Zezeza, Paul T. "Gender Biases in African Historiography." In *African Gender Studies: A Reader*, edited by O. Oyewumi, 207–32. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Notes

¹ Paul T. Zezeza, "Gender Biases in African Historiography," in *African Gender Studies: A Reader*, ed. Oyeronke Oyewumi, 207–32 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

² Joseph E. Harris, *Africans and Their History* (2nd rev. ed) (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 9.

³ Harris, *Africans and Their History*, 8.

⁴ Emmanuel C. Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of Race in Kant's Anthropology," in *Post-Colonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel C. Eze (Cambridge, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).

⁵ Eze, "The Color of Reason," 267.

⁶ Basil Davidson, *Africa: The Story of a Continent, Program 1—Different but Equal* (Documentary, 1984).

⁷ Molefi K. Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 21.

⁸ Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, 31.

⁹ Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, 40.

¹⁰ Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, 42.

¹¹ Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*.

¹² Molefi K. Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), 10.

¹³ Nah Dove, "Defining African Womanist Theory," in *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, ed. Ama Mazama (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2003), 180.

¹⁴ Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, 44.

¹⁵ Valthia Watkins, "Womanism and Black Feminism: Issues in the Manipulation of African Historiography," in *African World History Project—Preliminary Challenge*, ed. Jacob H. Carruthers and Leon C. Harris (Los Angeles: Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, 1997).

¹⁶ Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (Troy, MI: Bedford, 1993).

¹⁷ Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism*.

¹⁸ Oyeronke Oyewumi, "The White Woman's Burden: African Women in Western Feminist Discourse," in *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*, ed. Oyeronke Oyewumi, 25–44 (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2003), 2.

¹⁹ Oyewumi, "The White Woman's Burden."

²⁰ Achola O. Pala, "Definitions of Women and Development: An Africa Perspective," in *African Gender Studies: A Reader*, ed. Oyeronke Oyewumi, 169–206 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 299.

²¹ Pala, "Definitions of Women and Development," 299.

²² Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, 41.

²³ Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, 43.

²⁴ Maulana Karenga, "Afrocentricity and Multicultural Education: Concept, Challenge, and Contribution," in *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, ed. Ama Mazama (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2003).

²⁵ Ama Mazama, ed., *The Afrocentric Paradigm* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2003), 4.

²⁶ Mazama, *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, 3.

²⁷ Nah Dove, "Defining a Mother-Centered Matrix to Analyze the Status of Women," *Journal of Black Studies* 33 (2002): 6.

²⁸ Ifi Amadiame, *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion & Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 114.

²⁹ Tarikhu Farrar, "Matriarchy, and the Question of Female Political Authority in Precolonial West African Monarchy," *Journal of Black Studies* 27 (1997): 579–97.

³⁰ Oyewumi Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

³¹ Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*.

³² Karenga, "Afrocentricity and Multicultural Education."

³³ Egodi Uchendu, "Women, Power, and Political Institution in Igboland," in *Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005), 203.

³⁴ Tiamoyo T. Karenga, *The Office of the Divine Wife of Amen in the 25th and 26th Dynasties: A Study of Women and Power in Ancient Egypt* (Long Beach: California State University, 2007), 19.

³⁵ Anna J. Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Xenia, OH: Aldine Printing House, 1892), 134.

³⁶ Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism*; Marimba Ani, *Yurugu: An African Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1994).

- ³⁷ Tolagbe Ogunleye, "Women in Ancient West Africa," in *Women's Roles in Ancient Civilization: A Reference Guide*, ed. Bella Vivante, 188–215 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 193.
- ³⁸ Adiele Afigbo, "Women in Nigerian History," in *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, eds. Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2010), 20.
- ³⁹ Afigbo, "Women in Nigerian History."
- ⁴⁰ Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*.
- ⁴¹ Sandra T. Barnes, "Gender and the Politics of Support and Protection in Precolonial West Africa," in *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, ed. Flora E. S. Kaplan, vol. 810 (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1997), 4.
- ⁴² Edna G. Bay, "The Kpojito or 'Queen Mother' of Precolonial Dahomey: Towards an Institutional History," in *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, ed. Flora E. S. Kaplan, vol. 810 (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1997), 27.
- ⁴³ Bay, "The Kpojito or 'Queen Mother' of Precolonial Dahomey," 27.
- ⁴⁴ Biodun Adediran and Olukoya Ogen, "Women, Ritual, and Politics of Pre-colonial Yorubaland," in *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, eds. Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2010), 145.
- ⁴⁵ Adediran and Ogen, "Women, Ritual, and Politics of Pre-colonial Yorubaland," 151.
- ⁴⁶ Ihuoma Abaraonye, "Gender Relations in Ibibio Traditional Organizations," in *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture, and Social Change*, eds. Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2010), 167.
- ⁴⁷ Abaraonye, "Gender Relations in Ibibio Traditional Organizations," 167.
- ⁴⁸ Abaraonye, "Gender Relations in Ibibio Traditional Organizations," 168.
- ⁴⁹ Abaraonye, "Gender Relations in Ibibio Traditional Organizations," 168.
- ⁵⁰ Beverly J. Stoeltje, "Asante Queen Mothers: A Study in Female Authority," in *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, ed. Flora E. S. Kaplan, vol. 810 (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1997), 43.
- ⁵¹ Stoeltje, "Asante Queen Mothers," 59.
- ⁵² Flora E. S. Kaplan, "Iyoba, the Queen Mother of Benin: Images and Ambiguity in Gender and Sex Roles in Court Art," in *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, ed. Flora E. S. Kaplan, vol. 810 (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1997).
- ⁵³ Kaplan, "Iyoba, the Queen Mother of Benin," 77.
- ⁵⁴ Kaplan, "Iyoba, the Queen Mother of Benin," 100.
- ⁵⁵ Kaplan, "Iyoba, the Queen Mother of Benin," 100.
- ⁵⁶ Annie M. D. Lebeuf, "The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies," in *Women of Tropical Africa*, ed. Denise Paulame (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 99.

⁵⁷ Lebeuf, "The Role of Women," 97.

⁵⁸ Lebeuf, "The Role of Women," 100.

⁵⁹ Lebeuf, "The Role of Women," 100.

⁶⁰ John K. Thornton, "Elite Women in the Kingdom of Kongo: Historical Perspective on Women's Political Power," *The Journal of African History* 47 (2006): 437–60.

⁶¹ Farar, "Matriarchy, and the Question of Female Political Authority," 582.

⁶² Farar, "Matriarchy, and the Question of Female Political Authority," 583.

⁶³ Asante, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, 40.