

pointed as little of the text appears autobiographical. Despite possessing a few similarities to his main character, the author's life and that of Dhava remain quite disparate in several regards (for example, Pillay spent most of his life living abroad while Dhava never even contemplates leaving his native South Africa). The work should be seen as what it is, a strong novel that captures the energies of music, love, heartbreak and the absurdities of life under 1950s apartheid.



**Catherine M. Cole, Takyiwaa Manuh, and
Stephan F. Miescher, Eds.**

Africa After Gender?

Indiana University Press, 2007

328 + vi pages

\$70.00

Reviewed by Saheed Aderinto

The tension between scholars based in Africa and their counterparts based in North America and Europe constitutes one of the major themes in the discourse on African women and gender studies. Africa-based scholars tend to criticize their Western counterparts for misinterpreting African women's experience by imposing a Western gaze on African history and culture. Academic gatherings such as the 1992 Women in Africa and the African Diaspora Conference (WAAD), serve as the battleground of ideological warfare, which sometimes reflects in such contestation as who (based on race and sexuality) should be allowed to participate in discourse on gender in Africa. While this ideological differential has helped to generate knowledge about women and gender, it has also paved the way for mutual distrust and hampered collaboration among scholars.

Instead of treading the vociferous path of polarized identity politics that has characterized discourse on gender in Africa, the editors and eighteen contributors to this volume believe that collaboration between scholars of gender studies living and working in Africa and their North American and European counterparts is crucial for promoting healthy academic interaction and flow of information. In other words, identity and location of production of knowledge should not represent a sort of binary opposition but friends and partners in progress. The lineup of contributors and editors, which includes scholars from West, Southern and East Africa, Europe and North America, validates this lofty mission. What is more, the editors and contributors are of mixed sexualities and in different stages of their careers—

from apprentice scholars (graduate students) to veterans (full professors). If we go by the diversity of the contributors and their areas of specialization and the pertinence of the questions posed and answered, this collection of essays on gender in Africa is arguably the best. While complementing other popular reading such as Andrea Cornwall's *Readings in Gender in Africa* (2005) and Oyeronke Oyewumi's *African Gender Studies* (2005) among others, *Africa After Gender?* clearly charts a new path in African gender studies in its engagement with the seemingly intractable debate associated with location and production of knowledge.

The book is divided into four sections. Section One "Volatile Genders and New African Women," which contains four chapters, is structured around three major focal points: the politics of feminist projects in South Africa; sexuality and human right issues in Uganda and Kenya; and the interconnectivity between identity and production of knowledge in Nigeria and Cameroon. Gay W. Seidman in her essay, "Institutional Dilemmas," explicates the dispute arising from the definition of feminist agenda and program, how women's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) should relate with the state, and how feminists should deal with the prevailing economic and social structures, concerns, and hierarchies. Sylvia Tamale gives us her personal reflection of the crises that followed her public defense of the rights of homosexuals in Uganda. In her chapter, Lynn M. Thomas argues that the worries over schoolgirl pregnancies in Meru, Kenya should be located within the framework of a long and elaborate history of generational and gendered struggle over wealth, health, and power. Nwando Achebe and Bridget Teboh tell us what their multiple identities as Igbo and Moghamo, women, Africans and, lastly, Nigerian and Cameroonian respectively—mean to them, and how they affect the way they write their peoples' histories. The two scholars believe in the common bonds of culture and tradition that make African people who they are, in contrast to colonial constructions of nation states, which tended to divide people of Africa along artificial national boundaries. Achebe's identity oscillates between that of an insider and outsider—her village of origin is in southern Igboland, but she conducts research among people of northern Igboland; Teboh, though, seems to be an insider through and through—doing fieldwork among her ethnic group.

Achebe and Teboh's chapter closes the first section and leads us to section two: "Activism and Public Space." The four chapters in this section examine the role of women as political and literary giants, representations of women in popular culture, and the development and activities of women's organization. Susan Z. Andrade wants us to appreciate women's role in political protest from what one could call "physical" and "literary/intellectual" angles. She establishes a difference between "writing women"—mid-

dle class-educated women who wrote novels—and “rioting women”—plebeian and peasant women who engaged in gender-marked rebellion and uprising.” Adrienne MacLain looks at the female and male characters in Yoruba popular theatre within the socio-economic and political landscape. Takyiwaa Manuh takes us through the process of institutionalization of gender in Ghana, placing emphasis on how gender workers produce theories in their everyday confrontation with social and economic realities. What Hussaina J. Abdullah does for Nigeria is similar to Manuh’s accomplishment. Abdullah, however, does not take us through the process of institutionalization of gender in Nigeria, but goes straight to a survey of some new women’s organizations in Nigeria since 1990s.

Paula A. Ebron opens the penultimate section, “Gender Enactments, Gendered Perceptions,” with a chapter on performative acts. She argues that Western feminist studies and West African studies of gender share a critique of binary figuring of male and female. Eileen Boris’s theoretical essay explores the impact gender as a category of analysis had on African studies. Nana Wilson-Tagoé focuses on the narratives of Ama Ata Aidoo and Yvonne Vera whose works examine the intersection of culture and history in the light of women’s quest for agency. Eileen Julien uses the works of Mariama Ba and Wole Soyinka, which are based on “women as signifiers of the past and anchor of the present period,” to bring out the intersection of gender and national identity.

The last section, “Masculinity, Misogyny, and Seniority” dwells on themes relating to the social and cultural construction of masculinity, the representation of women and gender in popular plays, and theoretical exposition on “Africa after gender.” Lisa A. Lindsay, a leading scholar of Yoruba masculinity and gender studies, creates a discourse on the emergence of male breadwinner ideals among wage earners in Yorubaland of southwestern Nigeria. Relying mainly on archival research and life histories, Stephan F. Miescher argues that although men and women may become elders in Akan societies, they are expected to act differently. He fleshes out this contention looking at the practices of elderhood among members of a mission church in southern Ghana since the nineteenth century. How Ghana’s popular plays depict women and gender and the contradictions between the two is the main focus of Catherine M. Cole’s chapter, “Give Her a Slap to Warm Her Up.” It is intriguing to see the cultural perception and representation of “domestic violence.” She achieved this goal by examining how three well-known iconic figures in Ghana’s popular culture—the schoolgirl, the orphan, and the widow—mirror the changing paradigm of gender over half a century. This book ends with a chapter on theory, epistemology, past and future of gender studies in Africa. Helen Nabasuta Mugambi who authors this chapter raises a lot of questions about the concept of “gender” and “after,” positing that “although the meanings of these la-

bels appear to be obvious, they cannot be taken for granted in an assessment of gender as a useful analytical category.”

A Yoruba proverb: “*A ki i dara ka ma ku si ibi kan*” (No matter how good one is, there is always a dose of imperfection—all good things have limitations) best explains the strength and weakness of this work. Evidently, out of a total number of sixteen chapters, the data used in writing eleven chapters are derived (in part or in whole) from Nigeria and Ghana. South Africa, Uganda, and Kenya get one chapter each. Gambia receives a brief attention in chapter nine. The remainder appear more general, especially chapters ten and sixteen that have some fine theoretical exposition. The editors would have done better soliciting essays from other parts of the continent. This criticism does not undermine the importance of this book as an excellent and timely reading on women and gender in Africa. The book should be on the shelves of college libraries. Africanists in diverse fields and different stages of their careers and others interested in women and gender studies in general.



Marshall C. Eakin

The History of Latin America: Collision of Cultures

Palgrave Macmillan, 2007

436 pages

\$19.95

Reviewed by Marina Potoplyak

Marshall C. Eakin’s narrative history of Latin America spans five centuries from the “Columbian moment” to the present, and focuses on the collision of three distinct cultures and peoples—Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans. This confluence of people and cultures is the basis for both the strife and contention of the region, as well as its unity and remarkable diversity. In each of the four parts of the book, Eakin explores the themes of political culture, economic development, social and economic inequities, spirituality, and the search for identity as they are manifested during given historical periods. Without downplaying the violence brought about by the initial encounter of Europeans and Native Americans, the centuries of colonial rule, transatlantic slave trade, which brought millions of Africans into Latin America, and Western-style modernization, Eakin focuses on the regional patterns of resistance and survival of the indigenous and racially mixed population as a testimony of the region’s enormous cultural and political potential.

Part One starts with the description of the region’s geography and the history of European, Native American, and