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Marjorie Keniston McIntosh. *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. xiv + 336 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-35279-8; $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-22054-7.

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Women in Precolonial and Colonial Yorubaland

Marjorie Keniston McIntosh's study of the lives of Yoruba women between 1820 and 1960 is a welcome addition to the literature on gender, power, and culture in West Africa. She challenges the stereotypes that continue to inform popular perceptions of African women as subjugated to male power and authority, and relegated to the realms of marriage, motherhood, and domesticity. McIntosh examines Yoruba women in the precolonial and colonial eras who were involved in other aspects of community life, especially in the economic, religious, and political spheres. She argues that adaptability and syncretism enabled women to increase their influence amid external forces, such as international commercial capitalism, Christianity and Western education, and colonialism. For instance, when women were prevented from holding spiritual positions within mainstream religious organizations, like Christian churches and mosques, they extended their traditional associations into the religious realm or joined independent churches, such as the Aladura Church, which gave them greater authority.

Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change is organized into four parts. The first section is an introduction and a discussion on sources of Yoruba women's history as well as a historiography of the major themes in the work, notably, gender and patriarchy, women and colonialism, and female agency. Part 2 lays out the framework of women's lives. It touches on women in the domestic context, the effects of salvation religions on traditional marriage, and British imperialism. Part 3 focuses on women's economic functions. It considers landowning by women, the types of work women did in the household and public setting, women's contribution to agriculture, and women's adaptation of Western skills into income-generating ventures. The final part describes the other avenues through which Yoruba women participated in their community. It looks at women's roles in religious and cultural activities as well as in public authority. Through the various sections of this work, McIntosh presents a holistic view of the lives of women in southwestern Nigeria who engaged in an array of roles from domestic and long distance traders, handicraft producers, and titled chiefs, to politicians in the 1940s and 1950s. Through this broader investigation of the spheres of female influence, this work expands female identity and enlarges the space for Yoruba women in an era when the government of the Yoruba state during the nineteenth century and the British colonial administration were controlled by men.

One of the most compelling aspects of McIntosh's work is her discussion on gender and patriarchy. She explores the indigenous perceptions of women and men and the impact British patriarchal ideology had on the conception of gender. In the Yoruba context, the concept of gender differed from the Victorian notion of separate spheres for women and men. Men were viewed as strong, rational, economic providers; and women were the weaker, emotive group with their primary responsibilities as wives and homemakers. Yorubaland lacked such gender distinctions with both sexes sharing labor roles outside the domestic setting in commerce, production, and the service industry. For example, the Victorian gender expectation that Christian women would not have income-generating activities was simply ignored by the wife of Samuel Crowther, Yoruba missionary and future bishop, as she persisted in her trade, despite com-

plaints to the Church Missionary Society (an arm of the Anglican Protestant Church of England) by European missionaries around 1860. Nonetheless, McIntosh also notes that though the Yoruba did not have an ideological conception of two genders, they did distinguish between male and female roles at home. Women's gender-specific responsibilities included cooking meals for the family and child rearing while men were responsible for obtaining the family's farm land and maintaining the compound. Clearly, although it was okay for Yoruba women to earn an income, a woman's domestic duties took precedence. In this regard, male dominance was still present in the daily lives of women, even though their cultural ideology did not define them as a separate category or label them as inferior in physical, emotional, or moral terms.

One issue which the author raises that needs further consideration is the nature and extent of female agency and how it changed over time. McIntosh employs a functional measure of women's agency, namely, the ability of Yoruba women to make decisions. However, most of the agency documented is personal agency. Within the household, women decided how domestic responsibilities should be performed and took control over their marriage with the aid of British marriage regulations. In the religious realm, women displayed their authority over ritual as priestesses that served as mediators between the living and their deities. Nevertheless, women's ability to have authority over other people in the public realm was limited. Women's individual choice could not influence traditional or colonial policy to ensure that their recommendations would be implemented by any political authority. As such, Yoruba women never gained top leadership positions in Nigeria's political parties in the 1940s and 1950s despite their socioeconomic autonomy.

Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change is well researched and based on a vast array of sources, such as missionary accounts, records of native courts, British colonial office documents, newspapers, diaries, letters, and financial accounts of Yoruba women as well as oral histories and interviews. The work is nicely written, clearly discussing the author's themes of gender and patriarchy, women and colonialism, and female agency in Yorubaland. It is a welcome addition to texts on gender history in Africa as well as West African history. University instructors may find it appropriate as an assigned text in an undergraduate seminar or graduate colloquium on West African history.

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