

BOOK REVIEW

Mariana P. Candido and Adam Jones, ed. *African Women in the Atlantic World: Property, Vulnerability & Mobility, 1660–1880*. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2019. 302 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00. Cloth. ISBN: 9781847012135.

In *African Women in the Atlantic World: Property, Vulnerability & Mobility, 1660–1880*, Mariana P. Candido and Adam Jones have put together a groundbreaking volume assembling twelve contributions (the majority authored by women historians) exploring the history of African women in the Atlantic World. Drawing from papers presented in a three-day workshop held in Dublin in 2017, this edited collection is a welcome addition to the still very scarce, although growing, scholarship in the field. The various chapters of the book focus on the coastal areas of West Africa and West Central Africa, covering the period between the late seventeenth century and the late nineteenth century. In their informative introduction, Candido and Jones provide a concise and useful review of the literature on women in Africa. During the period covered by the book, women constituted the demographic majority in most towns of the coastal regions of West Africa and West Central Africa. In different ways, they coped with problems and took advantage of the opportunities introduced by the rise of Atlantic exchanges.


The twelve contributions draw from a varied array of primary sources including censuses, court records, post-mortem inventories, ecclesiastical records, visual images, and oral interviews. The authors seek to understand how the rise of the Atlantic slave trade, its gradual suppression, the development of the legitimate commerce that replaced it, and eventually the conquest of the African continent that gave origin to European colonization affected African women occupying various social and economic positions. To follow this framework, the book is divided into three thematic parts with four chapters each. “Property,” the first segment, includes chapters by Suzanne Schwarz, Assan Sarr, Esteban A. Salas, and Mariana P. Candido. The second part, “Vulnerability,” is comprised of chapters by Adam Jones, Natalie Everts, Ademide Adelusu-Adeluyi, and Kristin Mann. The third and last part, “Mobility,” contains chapters authored by Colleen E. Kriger, Lorelle Semley, Vanessa S. Oliveira, and Hilary Jones.

In Chapter Four, “Women’s Material World in Nineteenth-Century Benguela,” Mariana P. Candido discusses consumption and trade in Angola. Drawing from more than three hundred nineteenth-century wills and post-mortem inventories housed in the archives of Tribunal da Província de Benguela, Candido examines women as great consumers of goods. These commodities included various kinds of furniture, such as chairs, tables, desks, chests, sofas, benches, seats, and mirrors, as well as artworks, clothing made with several types of fabrics, textiles, and jewelry. Although some of these products were locally produced, through her analysis of post-mortem inventories Candido identifies a taste for imported goods coming from places as distant as Gujarat, Macau, Rio de Janeiro, and Porto. Ultimately, in addition to bringing to light rich primary sources that had not been previously examined, this chapter demonstrates that, contrary to what has been argued in existing scholarly works, African demands for imported commodities went far beyond “alcohol, guns, and textiles.” Indeed, Benguela’s consumers of foreign goods were not limited to elites and local rulers, but also included “urban and rural women” (73). By acquiring, wearing, and displaying these goods, these women sought to belong to a westernized society and to acquire social prestige.

In “Women, Family, and Daily Life in Senegal’s Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Towns,” historian Hilary Jones explores journals, inventories of inheritance settlements, and documents reporting property transactions to discuss individual lives of women of Gorée Island and Saint-Louis in Atlantic Senegal. These women, starting in the seventeenth century, through their unions (*marriage à la mode du pays*) with European and multiracial men, became important social actors in the commercial and cultural exchanges between Africans and Europeans. Jones asks if this kind of relationship can be defined as prostitution and/or if European men exploited African women (enslaved or not) who were members of these coastal households. Here, the sources examined allow the reader to explore the emotional dimensions of these relationships. In one journal, for example, a mixed-race man named Germain Crispin provides details about the birth of his children by his legal wife (who later died) and then by the enslaved woman who worked as caretaker of his children. In addition, visual family archives composed of photographs and paintings also offer alternate views of these intimate ties. To pursue other dimensions of the lives of these women, such as their “habits, tastes, economic interests or friendships” (243), Jones also examined property records, wills, and inventories that describe their possessions. As in Candido’s essay on Benguela, Jones demonstrates that women in Gorée Island and Saint-Louis owned jewelry, furniture, textiles, and real estate, as well as enslaved people. Through the combined examination of these different types of sources, Jones offers the reader a more accurate picture of these women’s social and economic importance, providing a better understanding of their relationships with European and mixed-race men.

Written in accessible language, each chapter of *African Women in the Atlantic World* is based on extensive archival research. Using various

historiographical approaches and methodologies, the twelve essays bring to light different dimensions of the lives of West African and West Central African women as mothers, traders, wives, captives, dependents, and entrepreneurs. The twelve chapters are richly illustrated and supported by maps and tables. They also offer a balanced assessment of the broad African coastal regions examined. Among the very few existing edited books focusing specifically on African women, this outstanding volume will interest professors and both graduate and undergraduate students of African history and African diaspora history. Likewise, *African Women in the Atlantic World* will become a mandatory reading to scholars of different disciplines whose works focus on women in Africa.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends

- Candido, Mariana P. 2015. "Engendering West Central African History: The Role of Urban Women in Benguela in the Nineteenth Century." *History in Africa* 42: 7-36. doi: [10.1017/hia.2015.16](https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2015.16)
- Zeleza, Paul Tiyambe. 2010. "African Diasporas: Toward a Global History." *African Studies Review* 53 (1): 1-19. doi: [10.1353/arw.0.0274](https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.0.0274)