

oral tradition as that of the brother of Sundiata who was barred from kingship because of violence against his sister. He is often considered the ancestral figure for hunters' cults. Somehow, his name is here transposed to that of Aboubakri, the lost and legendary sailor. No explanation for the discrepancy is given; no awareness is shown of the innovation in naming. Other silences may reflect distaste for polemics; nevertheless doubts raised by other scholars about Marcel Griaule's description of Dogon mythology deserve acknowledgement. The author's acceptance of the claims about the Dogon understanding of the Sirius constellation requires justification, as does the use of a book about the lost continent of Mu (p. 267).

The book also shows a lack of awareness of the available transcribed material from the Mande oral tradition: the Soninke texts collected by Oudiary Dantioko on Wagadu; the multiple versions of the epic of Sunjata and other Mande histories; and, for a more recent figure, the magisterial three-volume study of Samory Touré by Yves Person, based on interviews with hundreds of informants.

The uncritical acceptance of claims advanced in the name of Malinke tradition, without consideration of available evidence or concern for consistency, in the end produces a book that reflects the current tenets about the oral tradition as encountered in Bamako, without enough consideration of the narrative's past. In any case the book will need to be broadened and updated: one source not considered in the volume is the Mande historiography of the Guinean Sulemana Kante, who invented the N'ko alphabet and authored numerous works of history whose influence is only now emerging.

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PRIMARY SOURCES OUT OF CONTEXT

African Women: A Historical Panorama.

By Patricia W. Romero.

Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2014. Pp. xii + 359. \$68.95, hardback (ISBN 978-1-55876-575-7); \$26.95, paperback (ISBN 978-1-55876-576-4).

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Key Words: Sources, teaching texts, women.

As Patricia W. Romero explains in the acknowledgements, her impetus for writing this book was to compile case studies that personalize the experiences of African women for students in her African women's history course (p. ix). The result is a chronological sampling of African women from precolonial times to the present, and from a wide range of countries south of the Sahara.

The chapters draw from a range of primary source documents: oral traditions; reports; and letters by European travelers, traders, colonial officials, and missionaries; as well as excerpts of biographies and novels written by well-known African authors. These sources vividly illustrate both the horrifying and heroic experiences of African women, but without sufficient context or analysis necessary for the average reader to fully comprehend them.

For example, in Chapter Four, 'Transitioning', Patricia W. Romero draws attention to women caught in the turmoil that often resulted from the clash between African political and religious leaders and colonial rulers and Christian missionaries. One case study is the Xhosa Cattle Killing of 1857 and the role of the prophetess, Nongqawuse, in it. Romero includes excerpts of the Nongqawuse narrative without providing enough information on Xhosa social structure (kinship, descent and inheritance, social stratification, and gender roles), the political and economic system (control of cattle by chiefs and subchiefs, peasants' access to crops, and land alienation), or Xhosa religious beliefs (role of ancestor spirits, healers and rainmakers, and notions of purity and impurity) for the reader to understand the conflict between Xhosa peasants, their chiefs, white settlers, colonial officials, and Christian missionaries. Without this context, the reader is unable to discern the role of women in Xhosa society in the 1850s, or why a teenage girl – Nongqawuse – was able to compel people to kill cattle and abandon their fields. Romero's answer is that Xhosa 'traditional beliefs' in ancestral spirits led to their downfall (p. 87). Rather than illuminating the ways African women have used their authority as healers, diviners, prophetesses, or in other roles to confront patriarchy, colonialism, and/or missionary intervention, Romero's conclusion is disappointing, given the corpus of scholarship that effectively illuminates how African women have gained access to power, enhanced their autonomy, and improved their lives within the male-dominated spheres that constrained them.

Generally speaking, Romero provides little evaluation of her source documents save for commenting on the skewed viewpoints of some of the European authors on whose writing she draws. Such uneven scrutiny and lack of proper introduction to some of the primary documents she cites are obstacles to assigning this text to students. The gap between what European visitors, colonizers, and missionaries have to say about what African women think and do, and the likely motivations of the African women in question is far too wide for the average student to span. Teachers should also be forewarned of the graphic nature of the passages that detail sexual violence against girls and women (gang rape, torture) in Chapter Eight so that students can be prepared for them.

In the absence of any synthesis at the end of each chapter, one cannot identify the mechanisms (customary and/or statutory laws, mode of production, marriage practices, gender roles, colonial intervention, and war) that have constrained women or provided them with room to maneuver in each cultural and historical setting. The research on female support systems that have promoted collective agency among women in Africa – formal self-help groups and labor organizations as well as informal resource and work-sharing networks – is not included here. Romero could have made better use of Luise White's study of female prostitutes in Nairobi, for example, or mentioned the role of the women's activist group, Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, in President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Nobel Peace Prize. Yes, African women have been subjected to extreme poverty, violence, and injustice, and yes, some outstanding individuals have triumphed over their trauma. These experiences should be recognized and the victories celebrated, as Romero does in this book. Yet fully understanding how social, religious, economic, and political structures created by men and women in Africa undermine as well as serve women in their respective societies would require a deeper exploration of the panorama of African women's experiences.

Romero's final statement, 'Traditions and customs do not give way easily' (p. 316) reiterates the theme running throughout the book, that generations of African women have been scarred by the regressive tendencies of their predecessors. This line of reasoning obscures the shifting ideas, strategies, and adaptations African men and women have made to improve women's livelihoods over time. Contemporary college students reading this text will need to challenge Romero's underlying assumptions about the stagnancy of gender in Africa.

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SAFE AND SECURE

Africanizing Democracies 1980–Present.

By Alicia C. Decker and Andrea L. Arrington.

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Key Words: Democracy, governance, social movements.

Alicia C. Decker and Andrea L. Arrington's *Africanizing Democracies: 1980–Present* opens with a discussion of Sudanese businessman Mo Ibrahim's 2007 creation of the Mo Ibrahim Prize, a significant prize awarded to democratically elected African heads of states who have recently and willingly left office. For Decker and Arrington, the need for such an award hints at one of the central questions underpinning the past thirty to forty years of African political history. 'Why', they ask, 'must there be a prize for African leaders who fulfill what *should be* the mandate of every leader in every state of the world?' (p. viii) As Decker and Arrington vividly illustrate in their book, the answers to such a question are not easily forthcoming. Rather, they require an analysis of intersecting political, social, and economic interests, values, actors and expectations. These include institutions and authorities ranging from local and national political parties and interest groups; to the continent's various governmental infrastructures; to the World Bank, IMF, and United Nations. As a result, through chapters on politics, economics, health and healing, women, gender, and sexuality, and security, *Africanizing Democracies* offers a short and engaging survey of the promise and tensions of the thirty-plus-year push for a particular form of African democracy.

In structuring their book, Decker and Arrington by and large organize their chapters around a number of prominent case studies designed to highlight the push and pull effects of the continent's various democratization efforts. In their opening chapter, for instance, Decker and Arrington frame their discussions of African politics around more narrow analyses of Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement in Kenya; the end of South African Apartheid; Ellen Sirleaf Johnson's 2005 election to the Liberian presidency and, more broadly, high-ranking women in African leadership positions; and the Arab Spring. Similarly, their chapter on women, gender, and sexuality explores topics including the African Charter on Women's Rights, academic feminism, female circumcision, and