

have provided a more comprehensive long-term perspective if it had included references to such publications.

That said, Styles' pleasant writing style and her focus on encounters between different actors make this book a rich ethnography. Although written from the vantage point of environmental anthropology, the book also contributes to current anthropological inquiry into future-making and into the (self-)understanding of elites. By showing the place of floriculture within individual and collective dreams and aspirations, Styles provides a deeper understanding of local experiences of global economic processes and of associated environmental change. The book furthermore offers insights into floriculture's place in contemporary Kenya. It goes a long way towards unravelling Naivasha's complexity and provides a deeper understanding of this highly contested place.

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**The Women Went Radical: petition writing and the colonial state in southwestern Nigeria, 1900–1953** by MUTIAT TITILOPE OLADEJO

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Historians have employed a host of documentary sources to examine the colonial history of Africa, yet few have used petitions for such examination. As a result, an important primary source has been left underutilised. Unfortunately, the voices of female colonial subjects have all too often suffered the same fate. Mutiat Titilope Oladejo's work fills an important gap by using petitions to locate the activism of women in colonial politics. She demonstrates the powerful agency that petition writing gave Yoruba women of south-western Nigeria. Situated in the context of male-dominated colonial institutions and structures, she argues convincingly that Yoruba 'women went radical' to challenge colonial anomalies and contribute to nation building in Nigeria. She explores the changes induced by colonial rule which created the political and socio-cultural settings for women to write petitions that aimed to advance developmental concerns in colonial society and, ultimately, contribute to political emancipation.

*The Women Went Radical* is anchored on three main themes: marriage/family, business and socio-cultural issues. Chapter 1 sets out the primary argument of the book as well as the impact of colonial rule on Yoruba women. Chapter 2 discusses the intersection of gender, politics and petitions. Here, the author explains the 'mutually inclusive' and complementary relationship between men and women in which 'some women had power and were politically motivated to enforce authority in pre-colonial Yoruba societies' (25). The author also outlines how the advent of Western literacy, the English legal system and letter writing facilitated the emergence of petition writing in Yorubaland. Chapter 3 sets out the linkages between marriage, divorce and property rights petitions within colonial urban economies. The problems of gender bias and commodification of women are evident in this chapter. The author reveals that 'petitions regarding various aspects of urban economies express the disadvantage of being a woman in the changing trends in the period of internal self rule' (76). Chapters 4 and 5 discuss petition writing as an instrument for collective action in Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta and Ijebu – important colonial

cities. As the author rightly maintains, the collective activities of women in confronting public issues in the colonial era through petition writing was reflective of the traditional Yoruba philosophy of cooperation, consultation and discussion (37).

These chapters demonstrate how prominent elite female subjects persuasively used petitions to offer policy frameworks for issues related to colonial governance, welfare, education, girl-child reformation, markets and commercial activities, street hawking and taxation amongst other things. The proliferation of women's associations and trade unions enabled the success of collective petitions. Petitions thus became a factor in influencing, resisting, negotiating and counteracting colonial policies. The concluding chapter makes the case that there has been change and continuity in the post-independence political and societal activism of Yoruba women. This chapter also calls for greater gender equity and inclusion in Nigeria.

Despite this book's significant contribution to colonial history, it has some shortcomings. Without a doubt, petitions allow readers to hear the voices of elite and non-elite colonial subjects who would otherwise remain silent. However, Oladejo's work seems to focus overwhelmingly on the voices of elite female subjects. This presents a dissonance with the author's stated argument that 'petition writing ... is "politics from the grassroots"' (3). Instead of examining these grassroots, her study focuses primarily on petitions by women who attained some level of elevated social class and/or elite status. According to the author, 'most women analysed in this book were apparently heroic personalities who spearheaded and mobilized other women' (15). They included Miniya Jojola, Efunroya Tinubu, Alimotu Pelewura and the famous activist, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti amongst others. While their voices are significant, they do not adequately reflect the lived experiences of ordinary female subjects. At its best, her account illuminates the 'basic life information' (15) and experiences of these heroic personalities. But her study conspicuously overlooks the many 'grassroot experiences and petitions' by ordinary female subjects who held no positions of leadership. In discussing marriage and divorce petitions in Chapter 3, for example, rather than rely on petitions by royal (ex-)wives, the book would have benefitted immensely from engagement with the many petitions by non-elite wives.

Despite its imperfections, *The Women Went Radical* adds a powerful and much-needed dimension to African history and gender studies through its use of previously overlooked sources. By engaging women's petitions, Oladejo successfully shifts the narrative to neglected heroines of the colonial past and convincingly challenges dominant institutionalised gender ideologies that overwhelmingly view women as passive and powerless. This is, in fact, the kind of scholarly visibility that these women deserve.

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**Making Identity on the Swahili Coast: urban life, community, and belonging in Bagamoyo** by STEVEN FABIAN.

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With *Making Identity*, Steven Fabian is the first to seriously consider the history of Bagamoyo for a generation. Bagamoyo was the largest urban space on present-day