
Article

Rethinking Decoloniality, Sexuality and Feminist Epistemology in African History

Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo

Becker-Friedman Institute for Economics, University of Chicago, USA, Okonkwo1@uchicago.edu; Department of History and International Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, uche.okonkwo@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper revisits the trajectory of African history pedagogy in Nigeria, foregrounding the indispensable contributions of women and challenging the colonial-epistemic privileging that has long marginalized their roles. Building on Kenneth Onwuka Dike's leadership at the Ibadan School of History, which advanced the principle that absence of written records does not entail absence of history, this study critiques the persistent underrepresentation of women in canonical Nigerian histories and in major national narratives such as Obaro Ikime's edited volume. While scholars like Bolanle Awe, Nwando Achebe, and Ikpe have illuminated the viability of African women's history, persistent overemphasis on sensationalized or narrowly defined "public spaces" can misrepresent and essentialize women's experiences. This paper argues for a redesigned African Women's History curriculum that interrogates patrilineal norms while situating women's achievements within broader social, economic, and political contexts – encompassing sexuality, divorce, access to credit, education, and the public sphere. By revisiting renowned heroines – Queen Amina, Omu Okwei of Ossomari, Omu Nwakogba of Onitsha, Ahebi Ugabe, among others – this reorientation aims to foster strong epistemological debates about gender, patriarchy, and knowledge production. The proposed curricular framework seeks to balance rigorous historical reconstruction with critical theoretical guidance, enabling students to recognize women's agency, negotiate multiple forms of knowledge, and participate in inclusive, plural histories. In doing so, the study contributes to a more comprehensive and reflexive pedagogical praxis that reimagines African history as a dynamic, contested, and historically situated discipline.

Keywords: African women's history, Nigeria, Curriculum redesign, Gender, Patriarchy, Queen Amina

Introduction

Since the 1970's, the idea of African women's history gradually began to take shape.¹ This was after a long period of patriarchal dominance of the histories of societies. Following the liberal education that arose in the 1960's, women used the skills acquired from such knowledge and turned it into feminist inquiry.² Before this period, traditional history was designed to promote male dominance and chauvinism. It is on record that up till the 1980's, African historiography did not adopt women or gender as categories of historical analysis.³ In 1980, an important book in the teaching of Nigerian History was edited by Obaro Ikime, titled *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, on behalf of the Historical Society of Nigeria, with no chapter allocated for women's history or contribution to the growth of the society.⁴ Beyond the shores of Nigeria, Paul Zelesa listed that Afigbo's *Modern History of Africa* (1986), Tidy and Leaning *A History of Africa* (1981) had no mention of women in their indices, while UNESCO General History of Africa Volumes 1-8(1981-1998) had few cursory mentions on women.⁵



Except for the few cases of women as Queen mothers in the evolution of many societies, traditional history largely neglected women. Laurel Richardson and Verta Taylor argued that:

Why patriarchalism arose in the first place is difficult to determine, and social scientists have long understood that it is common for groups to propagate beliefs that aggrandize themselves, and it is equally common for the subordinated group to accept the dominant group's definition as natural and inevitable.⁶

It was under these circumstances that Korieh noted: "There is a need to capture the silent voice in history, which includes those of women, which is at the heart of social history".⁷ The earliest attempt to study African women's history, especially Igbo women, by European ethnographers like Sylvia Leith Ross, would have been written by alien barometers.⁸ Afigbo, in his book titled *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, had raised similar concerns, insisting that

European scholars came to Africa, apparently determined to work on Igbo society, but before they completed the first round of their field work, would 'hop' across the border to more respectful people like Igala and Kalabari. Igbo historians, on their part, have until recently done little to make good this lapse either because of their scheme of priorities⁹

With the rise of African women's history, indigenous scholars, especially women writers, as we shall be examining, appeared to be so apologetic and as well uses any single achievement in any African kingdom or clan group to showcase women's prowess in the past. It appears that the major interest is to equate women with men. Works of Felicia Ekejiuba, Nina Mba and Bolanle Awe¹⁰ seem to focus on the women's display of power in the pre-colonial and colonial histories of Nigeria. In any case, women's history from the African perspective must insist on not appearing apologetic in its commitment to reconstruct the past. The power of pre-colonial and colonial women in Nigeria and elsewhere, such as Moremi of Ife, Omu Okwei of Ossomari, Ahebi Ugbabe, Baba of Karo(A Woman of Muslim Hausa) and Cleopatra of Egypt, should ordinarily and in a moral sense not make the list of successful women ideally. Unfortunately, no serious effort has been made to study the status of these women at home. Even up to this point, subsequent generations of women historians and anthropologists such as Nwanedo Achebe, Bolanle Awe and Nina Mba have engaged in the overglorification of the prowess of selected women in pre-colonial societies, instead of scrutinizing and presenting women's challenges properly. The segment of this paper that deals with the romanticisation of Africa will address this challenge. It is important to note that there are attempts to reconstruct the African past in such a manner to reflect gender friendliness. For example, the place of women in traditional warfare, like Dahomey, Egba, Benin, Igala, and even Olaudah Equiano narratives published in 1786, had all recorded the success of women's participation in warfare. For example, J.F Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith had informed us:

The Dahomian troops left the capital at the end of February 1851, in the middle of the dry season. They were commanded by the *gaou*(general)

Akati and comprised some 10,000 male warriors and about 6,000 of the famous Amazons.¹¹

There is the success story of Queen Amina of Katsina and her territorial conquest of the 15th century. Apart from the conquest of Nupe, kano and Katsina, she is reputed to have turned the tables against the Jukun people, reducing them to tributary status.¹² Indeed, there was a gender dimension in terms of leadership positions in Kanem Bornu during the reign of Mai Idris Alooma. Provisions were made for the Magira, or Queen's mother, who had great influence in the state, as well as the King's official elder state Megra and as well as Gumusu, the first wife of the King.¹³ The rulers of Kanem Bornu were the *Mais*, but following the arrival of the Islamic Saifawa dynasty in the 12th century, the political institutions were arranged to include the Mai, his wives, Gumusi, his official mother or sister, who were referred to as the Magira or Magaram.¹⁴ So powerful was the King's mother that Mai Biri(1151-76) was imprisoned by the Magira of that era.¹⁵ The origin of the Hausa is built on the Bayajida legend, who killed the snake that was a menace to the people of Daura. For his bravery, he later married the Queen of Daura, and they produced the eponymous Hausa, namely the Hausa Bakwai, the Baram and Hausa, Katsina, Zaria, and Kano. Rano and Gobir.¹⁶ Trimingham noted that the mother of the personified Hausa town is said to be Deggra, once a powerful Kanuri-Berber and the Bayajidda legend, which is geared towards the substitution of patrilineal for matrilineal succession, was later introduced.¹⁷ The position of Trimingham is certainly not correct; a critical look at Hausaland before the arrival of Bayajida suggests that Hausaland in pre-history was matriarchal. Scholars such as Ikpe express a similar opinion. She maintained that Daura society is likely to be a matriarchal society until Bayajida arrived with his parochial ideology that surrendered power to the men.¹⁸ Furthermore, Ikpe gave a conceptual analysis of the actual event that took place as follows:

The legend of Daura and Bayajida could be interpreted differently. The city-state of Daura was threatened by the invading Bayajida, who had a large militarised following. Instead of allowing her kingdom to be captured by war and misery, she apparently did not want to lose her kingdom totally to a foreigner, so she contrived a way of being part of it.¹⁹

In addition, Zaria, one of the kingdoms of the Hausa states, was founded by Bakwa Turunku(1506-1509), probably a woman who gave birth to Queen Amina. This suggests that, until external infiltrations, women may have been in charge of many African kingdoms, especially in Nigeria. Queen Amina is reputed to have made wars with many states of the Sudan, namely the people of Katsina, Kano, Kwararafa and Nupe that tribute of about forty eunuchs and ten thousand kolas for her 34 years of reign.²⁰ There are other women in her category, which include Bazao Turunku of Zaria, Madam Tinubu of Lagos and Mrs Ransome Kuti of Egbaland, who demonstrated great prowess in liberating their people.²¹ It is on record that women played an active role in the Yoruba wars of the 19th century.²² Elsewhere, the present writer has shown that women played an active role in the leadership of their various societies in prehistory. However, with the rise of patriarchy, some of the positions once occupied by

women, such as Queen mothers and others, were subdued by subsequent patriarchal regimes.²³

Among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria, women in pre-colonial societies demonstrated bravery. An Igbo ex-slave, Olaudah Equiano, used his Essaka village to buttress women's prowess:

Even our women are warriors and march boldly out to fight along with the men; our whole district is a kind of militia: on a certain signal given, such as the firing of a gun at night, they all rise in arms and rush upon their enemy.²⁴

Scholars have recently expanded this claim, showing women's prowess against the over-specified norms of their non-engagement in warfare.²⁵ However, it is not a generalized claim that among the Igbo-speaking people, women were engaged in pre-colonial warfare. However, it existed in isolationist cases. Nevertheless, the focus of African women's history in the 21st century should not be to paint pictures of positive women's prowess in traditional societies alone. While writing the successes recorded by women, emphasis needs to be placed on the failures of the women as well. Of course, the view that colonialism disrupted the traditional system of production,²⁶ should be revisited through analytical and in-depth history research. This is because the account of gender relations in pre-colonial Africa, relying on early accounts of ex-slaves and prominent individuals like Olaudah Equiano mentioned earlier, suggests that the position of women was not in a state of Eldorado either.²⁷ The true position of women in African cultural belief must be the basis of writing women's history in contemporary times.

The Concept of African Women's History

The conceptualization of what constitutes African women's history is significant, especially to enhance teaching, research and to sustain the production of knowledge. In the 21st century, it is still appalling to note that scholars focusing on women's history seem not to be taken too seriously, even by colleagues in academia. The reason for this total neglect remains to the present writer enigmatic. It is on this notion that we contest that the focus of women's history is yet to be understood. It is on this ground that Oyeronke admits that gender is historical, a process, and often context and culturally bound. She insists that whereas sex is given because an individual is born either a male or female, gender is ascribed through a process of socialization."²⁸

At present, women are in the majority in African women's history. In Nigerian universities, only women are allocated courses to teach women's history, even when some of them do not possess the requisite knowledge about the pedagogy of teaching women's history. This ought not to be so. Like the writer of this paper, men can also possess feminist consciousness because many women historians do not see the need for women's history as a relevant enterprise. It is important to note that the development of keen scholarly study is a matter of interest. For instance, non-Nigerians like Michael Crowder and Elizabeth Ischei, just to mention a few, have written the history of Nigeria. Nigerian historians

are sectional in their research, like A. E Afigbo focusing on Igbo History, Obaro Ikime on the Niger Delta, Okon Uya on the Oron people, Biobaku on the Yoruba and Jacob Egharevba on Benin History, just to mention a few examples.

Women's history has shifted ground to gender studies. Of course, while studying about women, there is also no exclusion in understanding the role of men. Unfortunately, most feminists minded scholars are biased. Historians can and ought to study how societies have prescribed sex roles and measure the position of women in one class against another. Joan Wallach Scott wrote about using "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis" that:

This usage of gender, in other words, refers only to those areas, both structural and ideological, involving relations between the sexes. Because, on the face of it, war, diplomacy and high politics have not been explicitly about those relationships, gender seems not to apply and so continues to be irrelevant to the thinking of historians concerned with the issue of politics and power.²⁹

It must be clearly understood that women's history should not be seen as social History per se. This is because if public history can be treated independently, then women's or gender history deserves to be autonomous from any branch of History. C.J Korieh pointed out that even in the study of social and economic history, especially social classes such as peasants, urban craftsmen, casual labourers, women are usually nowhere to be found, or they receive only cursory mention.³⁰ Even in relevant reading texts on the history of many societies in Africa, women's contributions are treated with utmost neglect. Thus, Korieh notes further that:

The history of women demands an immediate awareness of a multitude of forces, institutions and activities which elude analysis at the level of official political institutions, mainstream intellectual movements or economic overview; rather, the world of informal networks, popular culture and the basic forces of production.³¹

The activities of women in pre-colonial and colonial times have been exaggerated. Such over-exaggeration was designed to fill certain vacuums of women's backwardness. In the colonial period, women's leadership, like that of Margaret Ekpo, in spite of her commitment, was still sounding apologetic in her women's emancipation struggle. On 22nd September 1954, she made a statement to the ceremonial president of Nigeria during a visit to the Eastern House of Assembly as follows:

Mr. President, not only did the present N.C.N.C Government think of giving a women a seat as a special member to represent the interests of women in the eastern region but Mr. President, there was a motion to come which I was to support but unfortunately time did not permit but I am taking this opportunity to render my sincere appreciation and of our women of Eastern Nigeria and the women of Nigeria to the leader of this government for the introduction of universal adult suffrage.³²

In any case, a position of special member during this period of this statement was not enough, just as the universal adult suffrage of the 1950's, which came first in the Eastern Nigeria region, shouldn't have been that applauded. The African women's region shouldn't have been that applauded. African women's history should go beyond utilizing any singular achievements of the womenfolk as a basis for celebrating scholarship. The appointment of women into key political positions cannot complement the vacuum created by the parochial state structure in accommodating women into electoral positions. Nevertheless, African women's history has an obligation in the 21st century to interpret issues on widowhood practices, clitoridectomy, prostitution, marginalization, and should, to a justifiable extent, apportion blame objectively in those areas where women constitute architects of their backwardness. The negative impact of Western ideology vis-à-vis colonial rule affected women's roles and participation both in the positive and negative dimension as we shall be examining.

Methodological Questions in the Teaching and Research on African Women and Sexuality in History

There is a methodological problem in terms of dealing with issues in African women's history. In the reconstruction of the African pre-colonial past, a lot of constraints in methodology seem to be a problem. African women's history, as Gloria Chuku points out, suffers setbacks from the reluctance of some respondents to grant interviews, and in most cases at the archives, there has been unavailability of pre-20th-century materials because of improper filing.³³ It is also found that women are invisible in most African societies. Hence, in most cases, as reported by field researchers, many people (most especially women) were skeptical about the purpose of the interviews.³⁴ Nevertheless, a typical example of the Aba women's war of 1929 has demonstrated the ideological misconceptions of gender relations in Africa. Thus, scholars working on African women's history are constrained by a lot of factors, basically because this field of study is yet to be inculcated fully into the fabric of African historiography. The foundation of constitution-making in Nigeria, beginning from the 1922 Clifford Constitution, was laid on the ideology of patriarchy and excessive parochialism. A typical example is the disfranchisement of women in the electoral process of that era because it was stipulated in the constitution that only male adults with an income of £200 per annum and a residence in Calabar or Lagos could stand for election. The emphasis here is that the genesis of Nigeria's constitution-making was bourgeoisie oriented and female gender unfriendly. How many women would have qualified to vote?

There is a need to understand two basic points. First is the need to study basic ethnographies and changes orchestrated by colonialism and globalization. Second, is to re-emphasize that women's history cuts across political, economic and social histories. For example, the wives of war veterans, their pains and joys as a result of their husbands' persistent absence from home on national duties, is an area of research waiting for its researchers. The persistent picture that colonialism destroyed family values, marriages and degraded women may not be true in every circumstance. Colonialism created room for women's

choices in marriage, even though the patriarchal bond was threatened by colonial rule.³⁵

African women's history/Studies must be empirically driven. It should not be a challenge in the intellectual sphere against the men by women academics. This is because African female writers are fond of this bias. For example, Flora Nwapa in her fictional history works presents irresponsible lovers and husbands as immoral exploiters existing in the shadow of the women.³⁶ This could stem from the attitudes of male historians who largely ignored women because they were in charge of the history curriculum in schools in their earliest times.³⁷

Romanticization of African Women's History

There exist deliberate attempt towards the glorification of the African women's past in the quest to write women's history. Ikpe, writing on *African Women's Image in History and International Studies*, noted as follows:

Also, in trying to portray African society as more egalitarian gender wise than European societies, women's traditional statuses, offices, and institutions have been elevated to parallel power status with that of men. This has been done to prove the egalitarianism of pre-colonial African societies, which were later disturbed by colonialism, which supposedly introduced patriarchal domination into Africa. Though women performed important roles in pre-colonial African societies, their statuses were still, by and large, subordinated to those of men. Patriarchy and Patriarchal dominations were present in most pre-colonial African societies and were not products of colonialism. However, colonialism introduced new aspects of domination as much as it opened new chances for women's empowerment.³⁸

The tendencies to isolate single women's achievement and overblow it have always been there in feminist and gender studies scholarship. This development has its origin in colonial times, especially the writings of European ethnographers. For M.F. Smith's work on Baba of Karo an Hausa Muslim Woman is one of them. The book provides insight into the gender relations and the traditional humane living of the Hausa people over time. However, Baba Karo was just a woman of strong erotic desire whose only pedigree was to marry four times between the following years: 1904-1907; 1907-1922; 1922-1943 and 1922-1948, including marrying one of her cousins.³⁹ Yet, Baba of Karo occupies eminence in the teaching and account of successful women in Nigerian / African history. What we witness in African History are cases of over exaggeration of women's places. Meek rightly observed that: "apart from Amina and the Queen of Daura, we read of no other queens in Hausa history, but there is plenty of evidence that in Bornu and other cultural Sudanese states, female relations of the king exercised a controlling influence in state affairs".⁴⁰

The story of Inkpi, a princess of Igala is only emphasizing on how she killed herself to save her people from the invading Jukun. Her sexual exploits with the Jukun Prince, which led to the handing over of the Jukun symbol of authority,

are mildly treated and probably a sign of her bravery as well.⁴¹ The exalted Moremi in Yoruba legendary history is the worst of all the accounts of heroines in African women's history. She is often described as allowing herself to be captured by Igbo forest dwellers, who often cover themselves to raid Ile-Ife after she consulted the goddess of *Esinminrim*. Indeed, she was said to have discovered their secret of wearing Ekan grass and bamboo, which was set on fire the next time the Igbo invaded Ile-Ife. She was said to have sacrificed her only son, Oluorogbo.⁴² Surprisingly, academics in Nigerian universities teach this aspect of adumbrated histories to students of all categories. The story of Inkpi is that she committed suicide because her romance with the Jukun Prince became a matter of public concern, while that of Moremi is a typical example of marital infidelity. Moremi eloped with her Igbo lover, with whom she had been having secret love affairs that gave rise to the birth of Oluorogbo. When she had a misunderstanding with her Igbo lover, she returned home to her husband probably a weak man. As it were, the only way to assure the husband of her fidelity was the annihilation of Oluorogbo, a product of that conjugal mischievousness with her Igbo lovers. Moremi's heroine, to say the least, is just doctored history.

In the history of female merchants in 20th century Igboland in southeastern Nigeria, Omu Okwei of Ossomari occupies eminence. Her engagements with the European firms, such as the Niger Company and trade in palm oil, gun powder, gin, tobacco and other goods, made her so rich with fat bank accounts. Over the years, this woman's figure has occupied space in the teaching and research of African women's history. Unfortunately, Omu Okwei was a sex sugar mummy in the modern-day sense of it. She was in a constant habit of giving out her young, beautiful maids as mistresses or wives to bank managers, interpreters, shopkeepers, clerks and influential businessmen and company managers. A golden rule existed that all maids and mistresses returned to Omu Okwei whenever her foreign associates left Onitsha, and property acquired by the maids was reverted to Omu Okwei, as maids and slaves do not own properties under traditional law.⁴³ This development was contested in court by Uyanwa, one of her domestic slaves/maids, whom she connected to Mr. J Gascoyne of the United African Company at Onitsha. Uyanwa refused to return the property of Mr Gascoyne, which she acquired, citing the Domestic Act Slavery of 1906 and her right to inherit her husband's property.⁴⁴ Surprisingly, Uyanwa lost the case. How can such a morally bankrupt, loquacious shylock business woman and an addicted promiscuous exponent occupy a space as a heroine just because we are in a haste to teach African women history?

The list is endless. Nwando Achebe's *Female King in Colonial Nigeria*, which depicts Ahebi Ugbabe of Enugu Ezike as a heroine, is yet another example of the shortcomings associated with our conception and ideology of teaching African women's history. She glorified Ahebi for being one of the female Warrant Chiefs in predominately patriarchal environment. On what basis do we categorize a renowned Onitsha prostitute⁴⁵ as a heroine? The idea behind this critique is not built on any sexist mindset; after all, successful African women in the past have been accounted for in this paper.

Conclusion

This study has foregrounded the imperative to decolonise African women's history by re-centering the lived experiences, agency, and knowledge of women across time, space, and social contexts in Nigeria and the broader West African horizon. The central claim is straightforward but consequential: decolonising African women's history is not simply about adding women into existing narratives; it is about reconfiguring the epistemic framework that undergirds historical inquiry, pedagogy, and public memory. Our analysis has shown that current curricula and canonical histories tend to privilege select, often spectacular, events and actors while marginalizing everyday practices, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and trans-local networks through which women have long negotiated power, resources, and status. This privileging reinforces patriarchal assumptions and undermines the plural, dynamic, and contested nature of African historical experience.

A core contribution of this work is its explicitly methodological and curricular turn. Drawing on decolonial and feminist epistemologies, we argue for a pluralistic evidentiary base and a pedagogy that treats sources as partial, situated, and interpretive rather than definitive. This means valuing oral histories, court records, market ledgers, mission archives, material culture, women's autobiographies, griot and community memory practice, and digital archives—even when these sources present difficult, contradictory, or fragmentary pictures. It also requires reflexive inquiry into how knowledge is produced, by whom, and for what purposes. By foregrounding intersectionality—encompassing class, age, religion, sexuality, disability, and regional variation—we resist one-size-fits-all narratives and instead illuminate diverse pathways through which African women have shaped economies, polities, and cultures.

The proposed curricular redesign translates these theoretical commitments into concrete classroom practices. A redesigned African women's history curriculum would move beyond episodic biographies to an integrative framework that foregrounds:

- Governance, diplomacy, and political culture as practiced by women at local, regional, and diasporic scales.
- Economic agency, including credit access, property relations, labor networks, and entrepreneurial strategies.
- Education, knowledge production, literacy practices, and custodianship of memory and tradition.
- Family, sexuality, legal norms, and social institutions as sites of negotiation rather than mere constraints.
- Religion, ritual, and public life, and their mediation of gender norms and public authority.
- The legacies and legibility of colonial encounter, anti-colonial resistance, and postcolonial state formation on gendered life.

In this framework, learning is inquiry-driven and source-aware. Students would engage with a repertoire of materials: primary texts (letters, court records,

travelogues, colonial reports), oral histories and community archives, material culture (textiles, artifacts, land and property records), and contemporary scholarship that critiques patriarchal historiography. Assessments would emphasize critical interpretation, historiographic reflexivity, and the construction of evidence-based narratives that situate individual figures like Queen Amina, Omu Okwei, Omu Nwakogba, Ahebi Ugabe, and others within broader economic and social networks. Importantly, the curriculum would model ethical engagement with communities, ensuring consent, respect for living subjects or living memory communities, and transparency about source limitations and biases.

The implications of this shift are wide-ranging. Epistemically, we move toward histories that destabilize fixed binaries of public vs. private, power vs. domesticity, and tradition vs. modernity. Politically, more nuanced histories of women's public and private lives can inform policy debates about gender equality, resource distribution, and inclusive development. Culturally, plural, situated histories contribute to national and regional identities that recognize varied experiences of modernity and continuity. Pedagogically, the revised approach promises enhanced critical thinking, empirical literacy, and an ethic of historical accountability among students—skills essential for active citizenship in diverse, globalized contexts.

Yet the path to such a reform is not without challenges. Resource constraints, archival gaps, political sensitivities around gender and religious norms, and the risk of essentializing women's experiences are real concerns. Mitigation requires concerted collaboration: partnerships with community organizations and local archives; investment in open-access resources and translation projects; faculty development in feminist and decolonial methodologies; and careful curriculum design that foregrounds heterogeneity and regional specificity. Open-access publishing, community memory projects, and digitization efforts can widen access and can help bridge disparities in resource availability. Additionally, engaging with policy-makers, teacher-education programs, and civil society groups will be essential to translate scholarly insights into practice.

Looking ahead, several concrete directions emerge as priorities. First, develop modular, adaptable curricula that can be tailored to Nigerian contexts and to broader West African and regional settings. Second, expand access to primary and secondary sources through open repositories, translations, and collaborative digitization efforts, ensuring materials are intelligible to students with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Third, foster ethical research-practice partnerships with communities to co-create curricular materials and field experiences that respect memory custodianship and local norms. Fourth, establish robust assessment frameworks that capture not only knowledge gains but also shifts in critical thinking, source literacy, and students' sense of historical agency. Fifth, model and promote interdisciplinary collaboration—bridging history with gender studies, development studies, sociology, anthropology, and political science—to sustain a holistic understanding of women's histories in Africa.

In sum, 21st-century African women's history must be reimagined as a dynamic, contested, and historically situated discipline that foregrounds agency, plural

knowledge forms, and ethical engagements with memory communities. By aligning decolonial inquiry with feminist epistemology and with development-oriented policy discourse, scholars can produce curricula and public discourses that challenge patriarchal norms while contributing to just and inclusive futures. This reorientation is not merely an intellectual exercise; it is a political and educational project with tangible implications for how history teaches, what it legitimates, and how it can empower women across Africa to participate fully in shaping their societies.

Endnotes

1. Eno Ikpe, "Feminism, Gender Studies and Historical Interpretation" in Eno Blankson Ikpe ed. *Women and Power in Africa in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, Lagos, Fragrance Communication Ltd, 2009, 18
2. Patricia Stamp, *Technology, Gender and Power in Africa*, Ottawa, International Development Research Centre, 1989, 11
3. Eno Ikpe, ' Images of African Women in History and International Studies' in J.P Dada and Armstrong Matiu Adejo ed. *Issues in History and International Studies: Essays in Honour of Professor David Sarah Momoh Koroma*, Markudi, Aboki Publishers 2007, 356
4. Obaro Ikime ed. *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan, Heinemann Publishers, 1980
5. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Gender Biases in African Historiography" in Chima J. Korieh ed. *African Women: A Reader*, USA, University Readers, 2009, 13
6. Laurel Richardson and Verta Taylor, *Feminist Frontiers 111*, Newyork, McGraw-Hill Inc., 1993,129
7. Chima J. Korieh, "Voices From Within and Without: Sources, Methods and Problems in the Recovery of the Agrarian History of the Igbo(South Eastern Nigeria)", *History in Africa*, 2006, 2
8. Sylvia Leith Ross, *African Women: A Study of Ibo of Nigeria*,
9. Adiele Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, Ibadan, University Press Ltd,1981, 2-3
10. See Awe Bolanle, Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective, Lagos: Sankore/Bookcraft, 1992; Nina MBA, Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern-Nigeria, 1900-1965, Berkeley University of California, 1982 and F. I. Ekejiuba, "Omukwu Okwei, The Merchant Queen of Ossomari", *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, 3,4, 1986
11. J.F Ade-Ajai and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century*, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press Ltd, 1971, 37
12. Adiele Afigbo, "Women in Nigerian History" in Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh ed. *Shaping Our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture and Social Change*, Trenton, Africa World Press, 2011
13. C.C Ifemesia, 'States of Central Sudan' in J.F Ade Ajai and Ian Espie ed. *A Thousand Years of West African History*, Nairobi, Thomas and Sons, 1965, 85
14. John E Lavers, 'Kanem and Bornu Under Three Dynasties: Some Aspects of Change and Development C.700-1900 AD' in J.F Ade Ajai and Bashir Ikara ed. *Evolution of Political Culture in Nigeria*,1985, 20
15. Ifemesia, 'States of Central Sudan' 74,87
16. Mahdi Adamu, *Hausa Factor in West African History*, Zaria, Ahmadu Bello University Press,1978, 2

17. J. Spencer Trimingham, *History of Islam in West Africa*, London, Oxford University Press, 192, 126
18. Eno Blankson Ikpe, 'The Role of Women in National Development' in Akinde Osuntokun and Ayodeji Olukoju ed *Nigerian Peoples and Cultures*, Ibadan, Davidson Press, 1997, 247
19. Ikpe, 'The Role of Women in National Development' 247
20. Ifemesia, 'States of Central Sudan' 102-103
21. Monday Effiong Noah, ' The Role, Status and Influence of Women in Traditional Times: The Example of Ibibio of Southeastern Nigeria', *Nigerian Magazine October-December*, 1985, 25
22. Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*, Berkeley, University of California, Berkeley Institute of International Studies, 1982, 9
23. Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo, 'Women and the Formation of States in West African History' in P.U Omeje and U.U Okonkwo ed. *New Perspectives on West African History*, Enugu, Madonna University Press, 2013, 173
24. Olaudah Equiano, 'The Early Travels of Olaudah Equiano' in Philip. D Curtins (ed). *Africa Remembered*, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968, p. 77.
25. See **Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo** (2021). "The Gender Question and the Involvement of Women in Pre-Colonial Igbo Warfare in Equiano's Interesting Narratives. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(5), 116-127. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss5/8>
26. Maria Rojas, Women in Colonial Nigeria, <http://postcolonialweb.org/Nigeria/colonwom.html> accessed 10/10/2022
27. Olaudah Equiano, The Early Travels of Olaudah Equiano, p.71 (issues on adultery). See also Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo, Gender Discourse in Oludah Equiano Essaka Village, Lagos Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies vol.4 2006 pp. 108-128
28. Oyeronke Olademo, *Gender in Yoruba Oral Traditions*, Lagos, Concept Publications Ltd, 2009, 11
29. Joan Wallach Scott, Gender As A Useful Category of Historical Analysis, in Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton (ed.) *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, London: Routledge, 2007, 64.
30. C.J. Korieh, Igbo Women of Eastern Nigeria from 1800 to 1929: An Historical Overview, MA Thesis, University of Bergen, 1994, 3
31. Korieh, Igbo Women of Eastern Nigeria from 1800 to 1929' 5
32. NAE(National Archives Enugu) Margaret Ekpo, Eastern House of Assembly Debates, Third session 15th to 24th September 1954, 391.
33. Gloria Chuku, Recovering The Voices and Life Histories of Igbo Women: Sources and Methodological Considerations, Paper Presented at the Atlantic Crossings: Women's Voices, Women's Stories From The Caribbean and the Nigerian Hinterland workshop, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, May 18-20. 2001, p. 6.
34. Chuku, Recovering the Voices and Life Histories of Igbo Women. 3
35. Gloria Chukukere, 'Female Roles in West Africa' in Gloria Chukukere ed *Introductory Readings in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Onitsha, University Press Company, 1988, 191
36. Yemi I. Mojala, 'The Works of Flora Nwapa' in Henerietta C. Otokunefor and Obiageli C.Nwodo ed. *Nigerian Female Writers*, Lagos, Malthouse Press, 1989, 20

37. Nina Mba, 'The Restoration of Humanity to the Humanities: The Role of Humanities in Creating A Gender Free National Consciousness in Nigeria', in A.E Eruvbetin and Nina Mba ed. *The Humanities and National Development in Nigeria*, Lagos, Nelson Publishers Ltd, 1991, 55
38. Eno Ikpe, ' Images of African Women in History and International Studies'378
39. M.F Smith, *Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa*, London, Faber and Faber, 1949
40. Bolanle Awe, 'Saviours of their Societies" Bolanle Awe ed., *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective*, Ibadan, Bookcraft, 2001, 5
41. C.K Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria: An Ethnographic Account of the Northern Provinces*, London, Frank Cass and Co Ltd, 1971, 90
42. Awe, 'Saviours of their Societies' 7
43. Felicia Ifeoma Ekejiuba, ' Omu Okwei of Ossomari' in Bolanle Awe, *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective*, Ibadan, Bookcraft, 2001, 5
44. Felicia Ekejiuba, 'Omú Okwei, the Merchant Queen of Ossomari: A Biographical Sketch' in Chima J. Korieh ed. *African Women: A Reader*, USA, University Readers, 2009, 265
45. Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria, Ahebi Ugbabe*, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2011

Works Cited

Achebe, Nwando. *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria, Ahebi Ugbabe*. Indiana University Press, 2011.

Awe, Bolanle, editor. *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective*. Bookcraft, 2001, 5.

Awe, Bolanle. *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*. Sankore/Bookcraft, 1992.

Bolanle Awe. "Saviours of their Societies." *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective*, edited by Bolanle Awe, Bookcraft, 2001, 5.

Curtins, Philip D., editor. *Africa Remembered*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1968, p. 77.

Dada, J. P., and Armstrong Matiu Adejo, editors. *Issues in History and International Studies: Essays in Honour of Professor David Sarah Momoh Koroma*. Aboki Publishers, 2007, 356.

Ekejiuba, Felicia. "Omú Okwei, the Merchant Queen of Ossomari: A Biographical Sketch." *African Women: A Reader*, edited by Chima J. Korieh, University Readers, 2009, 265.

Ekijeuba, Felicia Ifeoma. "Omú Okwei of Ossomari." *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective*, edited by Bolanle Awe, Bookcraft, 2001, 5.

Ekijeuba, Felicia. "Omú Okwei, the Merchant Queen of Ossomari: A Biographical Sketch." *African Women: A Reader*, edited by Chima J. Korieh, University Readers, 2009, 265.

Equiano, Olaudah. *The Early Travels of Olaudah Equiano*. Edited by Philip Curtin, *Africa Remembered*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1968, pp. 71, 77.

Equiano, Olaudah. The Interesting Narratives of Olaudah Equiano. See also Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo, "The Gender Question and the Involvement of Women in Pre-Colonial Igbo Warfare in Equiano's Interesting Narratives." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 22, no. 5, 2021, pp. 116-127. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss5/8>.

Ifemesia, C. C. "States of Central Sudan." *A Thousand Years of West African History*, edited by J. F. Ade Ajayi and Ian Espie, Thomas and Sons, 1965, 85.

Ikpe, Eno Blankson. "The Role of Women in National Development." *Nigerian Peoples and Cultures*, edited by Akinde Osuntokun and Ayodeji Olukoju, Davidson Press, 1997, p. 247.

Ikpe, Eno. "Images of African Women in History and International Studies." *Issues in History and International Studies: Essays in Honour of Professor David Sarah Momoh Koroma*, edited by J. P. Dada and Armstrong Matiu Adejo, Aboki Publishers, 2007, 356.

Ikpe, Eno. "Images of African Women in History and International Studies." *Women and Power in Africa in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, edited by Eno Blankson Ikpe, Fragrance Communication Ltd, 2009, 18.

Lavers, John E. "Kanem and Bornu Under Three Dynasties: Some Aspects of Change and Development C.700-1900 AD." *Evolution of Political Culture in Nigeria*, edited by J. F. Ade Ajayi and Bashir Ikara, Ibadan University Press, 1985, 20.

Leith-Ross, Sylvia. *African Women: A Study of Ibo of Nigeria*. [Year and publisher missing].

Mba, Nina Emma. *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*. Berkeley, University of California, Berkeley Institute of International Studies, 1982.

Mba, Nina. "The Restoration of Humanity to the Humanities: The Role of Humanities in Creating A Gender Free National Consciousness in Nigeria." *The Humanities and National Development in Nigeria*, edited by A. E. Eruvbetin and Nina Mba, Nelson Publishers Ltd, 1991, 55.

Mba, Nina. *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*. Berkeley, University of California, Berkeley Institute of International Studies, 1982, 9.

Okonkwo, Uche U. "The Gender Question and the Involvement of Women in Pre-Colonial Igbo Warfare in Equiano's Interesting Narratives." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2021, 22(5), 116-127. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss5/8>.

Okonkwo, Uche Uwaezuoke. "Women and the Formation of States in West African History." *New Perspectives on West African History*, edited by P. U. Omeje and U. U. Okonkwo, Madonna University Press, 2013, 173.

Olaudah Equiano. "The Early Travels of Olaudah Equiano." In *The Early Travels of Olaudah Equiano*, p. 71 (adultery notes). See also Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo. Gender Discourse in Olaudah Equiano Essays. *Lagos Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2006, pp. 108-128.

Omukwe, Omukwe. "Omukwe, the Merchant Queen of Ossomari." *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1986, 3-4.

Richardson, Laurel, and Verta Taylor. Feminist Frontiers 111. McGraw-Hill, 1993, 129.

Scott, Joan Wallach. "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, edited by Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton, Routledge, 2007, 64.

Yebini, J.F. Ade-Ajayi, and Robert Smith. *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century*. Ibadan University Press Ltd, 1971, 37.