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Review of Afe Adogame et al. (eds.), *African Traditions in the Study of Religion, Diaspora and Gendered Societies. Essays in Honour of Jacob Kehinde Olupona (Vitality of Indigenous Religions Series)*, Farnham: Ashgate 2013, xiv + 192 pp., ISBN 978-1-4094-4614-9

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The editors of this volume set themselves a formidable task by attempting to bring together perspectives on the Africanisation of the study of religion on the continent, African religion(s) in the diaspora, and the role of gender in religion in Africa in a single volume. The purpose is to contribute to the Africanisation of the study of religion in Africa. While there seems to be a strong West African focus in the essays in the volume – only 3 out of the 16 contributors do not have a personal or academic connection with Nigeria –, the perspectives offered are diverse enough to appeal to an audience interested in other parts of the continent as well.

Understanding Africa as a subject and not as a mere object of academic research has also always been at the heart of the work of Jacob Kehinde Olupona, to whom this volume is dedicated. Olupona's efforts to undermine patriarchal structures in the study of religion by promoting and encouraging female scholars are also renowned; nevertheless, the 'eloquent silence of women haunts the discipline' (p. 1) to this day. Especially the second part of the volume seeks to remedy this; while the first part of the volume focusses on the interface of religion and society, including discussions of approaches to peacemaking in Africa (Lucas Nandih Shamala) and the potential role of ancestral veneration for national integration in Nigeria (Jacob Kehinde Ayantayo), the second part comprises essays about African religion(s) beyond the African shores, as well as the interface of religion, youth and gender.

Mojúbàolú Okome and Elisha Renne set out to discuss the narratives of power and marginalisation in Aládurà churches in Nigeria and the US. Aládurà churches are becoming increasingly relevant for African diaspora communities in the USA. Okome and Renne go back to the origins of Aládurà churches in Nigeria, namely Yorùbá religion, which, despite the appearance of gender

egalitarianism, was mainly dominated by male figures of authority. The authors argue that the predominance of men was transported over into early Aládurà churches, even if women held more position of power than in mainline churches. What follows, is a thorough and enlightening historical analysis of the role of women in leadership roles in Nigerian Aládurà churches, touching on women as founders and prophetesses of these churches and the ambiguous attitude towards women, between fear and reverence. Aládurà churches with their synthesis of Yorùbá and Christian spirituality, the chapter highlights, have historically put in place significant prohibitions for women. On the other hand, the authors indicate the role of women in the production of Christian music and the political influence of Aládurà women in Nigerian politics. It is unfortunate that the comparative element of the paper is restricted to a short discussion in the conclusion, pointing out briefly that Aládurà churches in the USA see even less women in leadership roles. A more in-depth discussion of why this is the case would have greatly benefited the paper.

Ezra Chitando sees 'an opportunity for Africanisation' in the studies of religion and masculinities in Africa. Despite the ongoing dominance of male scholars in the study of religion and gender in Africa, the discipline, Chitando feels, has by and large eclipsed men. He argues that religions have a considerable potential for the transformation of masculinity that is long overdue in the face of pressing issues like domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. Chitando calls for African scholars to draw on the redemptive values of religions to challenge hegemonic masculinities on the continent. Their contributions, he urges in his conclusion, need to lead to an active engagement in societies and not remain in the academic sphere alone.

Bolaji Bateye's paper revisits the notion of purity for women in Yorùbá religious tradition. She links the equation of women and earth with the concept of cleanliness as a way of ensuring the well-being of the cosmos. Apart from the domains of house and home, rituals of cleansing, celibacy, and abstaining from taboos are closely connected with the virtues of women. Bateye points out the issue this presents in times of HIV/AIDS; because of the stigma of those living with the disease, purity becomes a health matter as much as a spiritual matter. Ensuring purity becomes in a very real sense a matter of preserving the integrity of the creation, she concludes.

The critical engagement with the societal influence of Christian women's organisations in Nigeria is at the heart of Dorcas Akintunde's contribution. She describes the remarkable efforts of Christian women's organisations in the areas of education, leading others by example to care for the sick and elderly and counselling as well prophesying and house-to-house evangelism, which makes them, in Akintunde's words, the 'backbone of the church in Africa' (p. 165). There is much more, however, she feels, that can and must be done. Akintunde encourages engagement with societal issues specifically concerning women; the practice of bride prices, widowhood rituals, and women's reproductive rights and sexual health need to be addressed by Christian women's organisations, she concludes, in order for them to continue to be relevant for women in the country.

Oluwakemi Adesina, finally, contributes a discussion about Muslim women under shar'iah in Nigeria's Northern states. The examples of two women charged with *zina*, adultery, in shar'iah courts take the reader straight into a comparative analysis of the socio-economic and political situation of Muslim women in North and South Nigeria. Adesina argues that what is seen as adultery, which is

punishable by death, is frequently committed out of sheer economic pressure or would elsewhere be considered an act of rape. Restriction of access to education and participation is more widely spread among Northern Muslim women than their sisters in the South, who can more easily participate in private, public, and religious life. A lack of knowledge in South-West Nigerian Muslim women about the way shar'iah secludes and restricts Muslim women in the North, as well as the fact that shar'iah is seen not as a religious but rather a cultural phenomenon contribute to the silence of Muslim women in the South on *zina* trials affecting their Muslim sisters.

The strength and indisputable value of this volume lies in its presentation of the study of religion(s) in Africa by Africans, in a successful attempt to question and challenge the long-standing dominance of non-Africans in the studies of religious life on the continent. The book showcases the broad variety of African religious scholarship in an academic context, with contributions by esteemed African scholars on the interfaces of religion, societies, whether in Africa or in the diaspora, and gender. The contributions on gender highlight the socio-political and economic positions and societal influence of women in their religious contexts as well the need for a transformation of masculinity making use of the redemptive value of religions. What the reader can take away from this volume are impressions of a growing awareness in the African academic community of the intertwined nature of religion and gender in the African context, and the call for scholars to actively engage with society to tackle issues such as gender inequality and HIV/AIDS, not *in spite of* but *in cooperation with* the religions on the continent.