

both showcases how family history illuminates the social history of Ghana and celebrates the achievements of a distinctive and yet in many ways exemplary family.

Insa Nolte

University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

Email: m.i.nolte@bham.ac.uk

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Ifi Amadiume, *African Possibilities: A Matriarchitarian Perspective for Social Justice*. London: Zed Books (hb £20 – 978 1 3503 3380 2). 2024, 248 pp.

Ifi Amadiume's *African Possibilities: A Matriarchitarian Perspective for Social Justice* emerges as a critical text that interrogates the multifaceted dimensions of African societies, culture and identities. Published in 2024, this work continues Amadiume's trajectory of scholarly inquiry into African gender, literature and spirituality, building upon her earlier influential works such as *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (1987) and *Re-Inventing Africa* (1997). In *African Possibilities*, Amadiume is concerned with the structural power of women in social and political processes. She delves into the epistemological and cultural transformations necessitated by Africa's colonial and postcolonial experiences, emphasizing the potential for African societies to reclaim women's traditional leadership structures through the application of relational matriarchal models.

The book is structured into three interconnected themes – 'Voicing', 'Alternatives' and 'Possibilities' – each addressing different aspects of African societies, particularly in Nigeria, South Africa and Senegal. Amadiume begins by contextualizing the historical disruptions caused by colonialism, which dismantled indigenous knowledge systems and social structures. She uses data from the 2022 World Economic Forum to highlight gender disparities in African economic, health, educational, labour and pay indexes, emphasizing the global nature of the gender gap. Her critique of the colonial imposition of rigid gender binaries and patriarchal structures sets the stage for exploring gender, culture, family and kinship relations in Africa.

A central feature of *African Possibilities* is the re-evaluation of gender roles in pre-colonial African societies, where gender was more fluid and egalitarian. Amadiume's overarching thesis argues for the recognition of a plurality of paradigms, which, in expanding social dynamism, makes room for a fluidity of cultural thought and a tolerance for difference. In her meditation on the merit of varied feminist thought, she introduces 'matriarchitarianism', a broad theory of the movement towards relational matriarchy and systemic gender complementarity.

Matriarchitarianism focuses on the dialectic of both the collective and the individual woman, while creating a language for the longstanding culture of matriarchy. It challenges patriarchal discourses and advocates for an egalitarian reconfiguration of society and state power. Amadiume explains further:

A matriarchitarian perspective presents comparative alternative possibilities of resistance, as I argue that resistance is not just in breaking away or the self-voyaging of discovery, but in the *messages* that are pronounced via that journey. (p. xvi)

Several chapters discuss alternative approaches to defining marriage and the family unit from an African perspective. The concept of gender complementarity is pivotal, suggesting that men and women have different but complementary roles that enhance societal well-being. Amadiume extends this discussion to include African queer and trans discourses, where gender and womanhood take on multiple meanings, contesting oppressive gender dichotomies.

Amadiume's exploration of African spirituality is also compelling. She asserts that aspects of spirituality such as witchcraft and ritual are fundamental tenets of African gender identity that were undermined by colonial and postcolonial forces. In Chapter 6, she applies a matriarchal theory to African Islam, highlighting women's organizational and network structures in village and city communities. Through interviews with Mama Asta, a matriarch in Senegal, Amadiume outlines spiritual matriarchy and the role of love and compassion in community formation.

Writing is another significant theme, with Amadiume affirming that African women's literary works provide alternative possibilities for addressing social and national issues. She suggests that African literature, produced in the context of struggle, is inherently political. By referencing writers such as Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Flora Nwapa and Alice Walker, Amadiume shows how oppressed people can take responsibility for African futures by reforming, reinventing and redefining cultural themes (p. 196). In surpassing reality with imagination, literature can create new paths for cultural and historical development, redirecting African people towards transformed social awareness in the struggle for human rights.

Amadiume employs a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach, integrating history, anthropology, sociology, political science, African womanism and feminist theory. Her methodology is critical and reflective, using qualitative research such as interviews, participant observation and data analysis. The book also employs a decolonial analytical framework, challenging Eurocentric paradigms and advocating for an African-centred perspective. This comprehensive approach constructs a nuanced narrative that is empathetic to the experiences of African and Afrodiasporic peoples.

African Possibilities is not without its limitations. The dense academic language and theoretical complexity may pose a barrier to readers who are not well versed in post-colonial and feminist theories. While the book in its composite form is a new addition to feminist libraries, many of the chapters are updated versions of Amadiume's late 1990s and early 2000s essays.

African Possibilities is a significant contribution to African studies, feminist theory and postcolonial scholarship. Amadiume's incisive analysis and advocacy for relational matriarchy and gender justice offer a powerful vision for the future of African societies. The book's intersectional approach and decolonial framework make it essential for activists, scholars and writers interested in African identities and in the ongoing struggles for social and cultural emancipation of Black women and

communities. Its depth and breadth make it a valuable resource for anyone committed to understanding and advancing the possibilities of African feminisms in the contemporary world.

Melaine Ferdinand-King

Department of Africana Studies, Brown University, Providence RI, USA

Email: melaine_ferdinand@brown.edu

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Elizabeth W. Williams, *Primitive Normativity: Race, Sexuality, and Temporality in Colonial Kenya*. Durham NC: Duke University Press (hb US\$102.95 – 978 1 4780 2071 4; pb US \$26.95 – 978 1 4780 2549 8). 2004, 256 pp.

It is a testament to the extent to which histories of colonialism have been shaped by the turn to the intimate that almost all general histories now include at least some discussion of sexuality and gender. Scholars of settler-colonial Africa are now well familiar with the recursive panics around ‘black peril’, the closeness of state surveillance into settlers’ domestic lives, and the constant, fretful attention that was paid to the perceived problems of interracial sex and the decline of poor or ‘degenerate’ colonial Europeans. Amidst this body of work, Elizabeth Williams offers something entirely new. By analysing colonial discourses towards African sexuality in colonial Kenya – framed under the rubric of what she terms ‘primitive normativity’ – Williams reveals the centrality of sex in the making of race. That sounds straightforward; it isn’t. Scholars, Williams suggests, have tended to either assume or overstate the degree to which Africans were perceived as hypersexual. Throughout the colonial period in Kenya, colonial discourses tended towards a very different emphasis. Ideas about African sexuality, Williams argues, ‘were tied to a temporality, to an evolutionary narrative that placed African peoples in a prior moment in time’. African sexuality was ‘normative’ in its temporality – in the extent to which it was deemed consistent with the ‘evolutionary stage of “primitive” people’ – but also because it supposedly lacked all those ‘deviant’ sexual practices (prostitution, rape, homosexuality) that were associated with the disruptive presence of colonial Europeans. Sexual deviance was a ‘product of civilization’; African sexualities were backward *and* normative. That insight enables a profound rethinking of colonial ideologies: to assume a binary logic whereby whites were deemed moral, ‘civilized’ and self-controlled while Africans were condemned as lascivious, predatory and disorderly is far too simplistic. Only by plotting sexuality, race and temporality *together* can we appreciate the instability and complexity of colonial ideologies and the significance of sexuality therein.

Williams develops her argument over the course of five substantive chapters. The first charts the intellectual background to primitive normativity. This is especially valuable and well done: Williams traces shifting currents of thought in anthropology and psychoanalysis through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then examines how sexuality figures in Jomo Kenyatta’s 1938 ethnography *Facing Mount Kenya*. This is a well-studied text already, but Williams shows – as she does throughout the book – what is hiding in plain sight: the centrality of sex and sexuality to debates