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BOOK REVIEW

Historical Dictionary of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Kathleen Sheldon. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005. 403 pp.

Country-specific, historical dictionaries abound in the field of African studies; yet reviewers of even recent editions of these dictionaries have highlighted the paucity of entries on women (see, for example, Gardinier 2001 and Reynolds 2001). To fill this void, Scarecrow Press has recently launched a new series on women in the world. Kathleen Sheldon's *Historical Dictionary of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa* is the first in this series, and it is an excellent first step toward filling this scholarly lacuna.

The volume consists of a chronology of African women's history, a brief (13-page) introductory essay that traces broad developments in African women's history, 276 pages of dictionary entries, and an extensive (115-page) bibliography. The dictionary entries are wide-ranging. Sheldon covers prominent female politicians, activists, writers, artists, and historical and religious figures; historical and contemporary women's organizations; and more general topical entries (e.g. missions, nationalism, structural adjustment programs, and shari'a law) that emphasize how these topics have affected women in Africa and/or how women have participated in these movements and processes. The bibliography begins with a brief—but quite interesting and useful—essay on the evolution of scholarship on women in Africa. Most of the sources included in the bibliography are in English and have been published since 1975. The first part of the bibliography is organized chronologically; the second part is organized around specific topics. The last section of the bibliography provides lists of journals, films, and websites. Dictionary entries on contemporary organizations also generally include the organization's website.

Country specialists will undoubtedly find that Sheldon has excluded some prominent women and organizations. In the case of Cameroon, for example, Yaou Aissatou, Françoise Foning, the *Association Camerounaise des Femmes Juristes* (ACAFEJ), and the *Association de Lutte contre les Violences faites aux Femmes* (ALVF) are omitted. Also, the depth of coverage varies quite significantly across countries. South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya have a significant number of entries (75, 52, and 31 respectively), while Rwanda (6 entries), the Democratic Republic of Congo (1 entry) and many others are covered far more superficially. Yet, these shortcomings are by no means fatal. A project of this breadth will inevitably contain omissions, and the unevenness of country coverage largely reflects the state of scholarship on African women. Unfortunately, there is relatively little written (especially in English) on African women in certain African states. Those teaching and doing research on African women and women and politics more generally will find Sheldon's book a useful resource. It serves the dual purpose of providing concise information on a broad range of topics and offering a thorough list of sources to assist those seeking in-depth knowledge on particular individuals, organizations, and issues.

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References

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