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Dismembered Masculinities: Chronicling Transformations Within Asante Matricentric Women's Compounds as a New Approach to Gendered Violence in West African Cultures

Elizabeth Peprah-Asare
Queen's University, Canada

Abstract

While popularized accounts of pre-colonial Asante Ghanaians depict a largely patriarchal society with the exception of the office of Queen Mothers—this is largely a disingenuous androcentric reading of his-story. Through a framework of Matriculture Studies (i.e. matristic, women-centred cultures), Peprah-Asare examines the matriarchal foundations embedded within Asante abusuaŋie (i.e. matrilineage homes) in what she names as “Asante Matricentric Women's Compounds,” as a subversive site which constructed pre-colonial Asante masculinities and femininities in an egalitarian nature. In examining the ways that Asante Matricentric Women's Compounds were centred on women's life cycle events (i.e. girl's puberty rites, pregnancy, visiting marriages, etc.) through an ontology of goddess worship, Peprah-Asare dissects the external processes which informed the colonial encounters between European men and African women and African men and African women. In piecing together the ‘dismembered masculinities’ of pre-colonial Asante through the influence of the historical processes of enslavement and colonization through the application of a culturally-informed conceptual framework that Peprah-Asare ideated named “Sankofa Kukuo” (i.e. “the go back and fetch it cooking pot”), she presents a new approach to understanding gendered violence in this West African culture through an analysis of contemporary forms of Violence Against Women (VAW) in Ghana such as domestic violence (DV) and ‘witchcraft’ accusations and ‘trials by ordeal.’

Keywords: asante gender studies, abusuaŋie, matrilineal cultures, gendered violence, witch hunts