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*Our new husbands are here: Households, gender and politics in a West African state from the slave trade to colonial rule*

**(Ohio, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011, 273 pp., photographs, appendices, notes, bibl., index. ISBN: 978-0-8214-1983-0)**

**Emily L Osborn**

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For a very long time in Africa in general and in West Africa in particular, historical accounts of statecraft have been presented as the preserve of males. Emily Lynn Osborn brings a breath of fresh air in her book by showing clearly the roles that both men and women played in the formation and maintenance of the state of Bates. Taking advice presumably from Joan Scott, Osborn uses gender successfully to write the history of Bates, showing how the maleness of elites such as Abdurabamane and the femaleness of individuals such as Maramagbe affected events leading to the formation of the state of Bates.

On the first page of the introductory chapter, Osborn explains the aim of her book as an examination of the relationship of households to statecraft in the Milo River Valley from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century. Throughout the book, Osborn successfully describes how the changing forms of relations and roles of the household and the state of Bates led to different

administrative policies in the Milo River Valley.

Using marriage and motherhood to describe the growing significance of households in state formation up to the mid-eighteenth century, Osborn provides a detailed, illuminating and insightful historical account of the founding of the state of Bates. The nature of the relationship between households and the state allowed women to influence political processes in their roles as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. Osborne's intention at this point is to show the influence of households as centres of political production and reproduction in the formative years of Bates. Osborn then traces the source of the gradual erosion and the ultimate demise of the influence and authority of women on the role of households in state formation.

In Chapter three, Osborn paints a clear picture of the changing mode of the household in relation to state making. She observes that up to the early nineteenth century, the household was perceived as a political resource essential in the making and maintenance of the state of Bates. But from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, warfare replaced the household. In her words, "With warfare and militarization, the household ceased to be the building block of statecraft, but rather an expression of it" (p.75).

In this way, Osborn successfully shows how state formation mechanisms were modified in the mid-nineteenth century. This led to the reformation of Bates into a centralized and organized state with a huge army. The profound contribution to statecraft by the households and the women was made possible by the fact that initially Bates' male elites did not strengthen their polity through warfare and slavery. Instead, they used their households as building blocks for making and maintaining the state. As this scenario changed through warfare and the slave trade, the reliance of Bates' rulers on the household diminished significantly.

The size and strength of the army of the state of Bates became a crucial determining factor. In an era where warfare was used to make and maintain the state instead of peaceful alliances and strategic marriages, the influence of women in state formation was grossly undermined. In addition to showing with outstanding clarity how the role of households changed, Osborn demonstrates ably the changing mechanisms of household making and maintenance.

In part two of the book, she uses her investigation of the relationship of the household and the state to address lacunae in the literature on the colonial state in Africa. For example, Osborn offers an exciting comparative analysis of household and state making approaches used by the African rulers up to the 1890s and those used by the French colonial rulers from the 1890s to the early twentieth century. She laments the fact that the masculinist bureaucratic regime, created by the French rulers, obscured complex relations between women's roles and statecraft. Her focus here is on the separation of the social sphere from the political sphere and the reconstruction of gender roles and politics through the creation of households composed of "autonomous men and dependent women" (p. 177). This new social order rendered women completely irrelevant to politics.

The manner in which Osborne presents the history of the Milo River Valley shows beyond doubt that much still needs to be told about how such historical processes contribute to the making of African history.

*The demographics of empire: The colonial order and the creation of knowledge*

**(Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010, 292 pp., appendices, index. ISBN: 139780821419335)**

**Karl Ittmann, Dennis D Cordell and Gregory H Maddox**

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This book is a useful set of conversations on demography in Africa over the past one hundred and fifty years. One Elder, Dennis D. Cordell, opens the conversations and another Elder, Patrick Manning, closes the exchange of ideas. Cordell locates research on demography in a rich and fascinating historiographical discussion of orthodox African history. He forcefully and systematically takes the discussion of African demography into the fields of postmodernist and postcolonial studies. He reviews his own and other systematic studies of African populations to justify an historical examination of demography. Cordell makes a valid appeal for more studies on the African