



Desiring Queer Motherhood and Mothering Ourselves

Serena O. Dankwa

To cite this article: Serena O. Dankwa (2023): Desiring Queer Motherhood and Mothering Ourselves, Journal of African Cultural Studies, DOI: [10.1080/13696815.2023.2186380](https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2023.2186380)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2023.2186380>



Published online: 20 Apr 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 32



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Desiring Queer Motherhood and Mothering Ourselves

Serena O. Dankwa

Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

This essay is an open-ended, poetic reflection connecting findings from my ethnographic research on same-sex desiring women in southern Ghana with my own journey of becoming a queer mother in Switzerland. It suggests that desires for motherhood cannot be reduced to the wish for procreating or tapping into the power of extending our heteronormative lineages, but reflect feminist desires for loving, growing and connecting across generational divides. It asks to what extent mothering a child and sugar-mothering a younger woman lover can be thought (and lived) alongside each other while connecting us to our own mothers. By documenting the challenges of finding ways into queer motherhood, it hopes to encourage collective ways of “doing” families beyond marriage and childbirth.

KEYWORDS

Queer kinship; reproductive rights; age difference; family; intimacy; auto-ethnography; Ghana; Switzerland

dear unborn
whose gender i do not want to know
i cannot know
the first being i am loving without knowing your gender
you will be reading english by the time you are holding this diary in your hands.
but will you already know how much one can long for a child?
how much one can yearn to open up and nurture and yes, not be alone any longer?
for a long time, i thought i needed to wait for a companion to start this journey.
i questioned myself
what if the wish for you was a submerged wish for companionship with an adult?
until my philosopher friend asked: and what if it is the other way round,
what if the wish for a companion is the submerged wish for a child?¹

This journey towards mothering began to take shape among a circle of educated, queer feminists in Switzerland. We gathered around a philosopher’s kitchen table, prepared food together and actively began to dream up collective forms of mothering and building families. Some coupled, some single, we were all diffusely longing for a child and for families of our own, larger and more inclusive than the ones we had been brought up in. “Making a choice to become, and when to become, a mother is the first act of feminist mothering” (Hendricks and Eyoh 2020, 48) says the African anthology on *Feminist*

Parenting. But how to make this choice in the absence of male lovers? To us, the first act was thus to overcome the heteropatriarchal notion that we, as lesbian and queer women, were not meant to be mothers. That is where the labour of queer-feminist mothering started.

The kitchen-table conversations meandered towards the practicalities of getting pregnant in a country where unmarried women (and the only available marriage then was heterosexual) cannot adopt and have no legal access to technologies of assisted reproduction. In other words, it is illegal for medical personnel in Switzerland to assist unmarried women to conceive. Nevertheless, queer women had always had children with or without male partners. Aware that we were not the first, we began to invite experts: a gynaecologist, a legal scholar, and a lesbian mother who cautioned and encouraged us. We heard advice about the stakes of having a child with a sperm-donating friend. Clearly, the yearning for having a child with a sperm-holding friend is not enough to provide a stable basis for co-parenting. But what is? And how come we, educated women in our thirties, who had been busy deconstructing all that ties women to bodies and motherhood to biology, became hands-on, discussing methods of privately finding donors, calculating cycles, preserving sperm and using a syringe? Admittedly, adoption would have been even more difficult than finding a donor and conceiving ourselves. Still, I wonder to what extent the physical desire to become round/ed as a mother, to accompany a new being from its very inception, wherever its soul hails from, is connected to a wish for nursing our own selves, our own bodily sense of belonging. This is what this essay is about. It is an attempt to think about motherhood between Ghana and Switzerland and beyond the public/private split. Instead, it focuses on mothering as a process and on its potential to facilitate growth and interiority without reproducing dominant, patriarchal orders.

Back at the kitchen table, those who were part of a couple seeking to become parents started the process of looking for sperm-holding men. Others had left the conversations before we began to discuss conception methods. Though my own desire for a child was simmering and fed by the kitchen-table conversations, it remained watery: a thought, a dream, a vision of becoming family and creating belonging, not necessarily tied to giving birth, but tied to the wish of finding a companion. Ultimately, the desire for a child seemed smaller than the urge to find out about the peril of same-sex passion in my father's country, the place of my childhood. I remained single and ventured to southern Ghana.

In Accra, I started looking for women who were in love with women. In the absence of a self-identifying, visible lesbian scene, finding a language to approach women who had a female lover became a priority. It was the beginning of a lengthy learning process. I grappled with the incommensurability of my queer-feminist experiences in Switzerland, where my mixed blackness had placed me at the margins of the then almost exclusively white lesbian scene, and the realities of working-class women in Ghana's urban south, at the margins of a global capitalist world dis/order altogether. Given that most of the women I met did not call themselves queer or lesbian, or anything else that was explicit or recognisable to my ears, it took time to hear them without imposing my own terms and concepts. At first, considering that intimacies and desires do not necessarily make a visible appearance, my hope was to find women couples. What better proof for the existence of female same-sex desire than women being coupled and professing their love for each

other? But the women I met had complicated love lives. Some had just phased out of a same-sex relationship, others maintained several fleeting affairs, with male and female “friends” in different locations, and in the wake of a painful break-up most claimed that they had stopped “doing *supi*” altogether – referring to the practice known as *supi*, the polyvalent term for an intimate female friend, sexual or non-sexual, associated with significant friendships that may be both sisterly and erotic, motherly and passionate (Dankwa 2021, 39–40).

With time I realised that the working-class women who were ready to engage with me and my questions lived and framed their same-sex practices as a tacit way of knowing rather than a fixable term or identity. Much more articulate and consistent than their amorous passions or the use of the word *supi* or other terminologies was their desire to have a child of their own, at least one. Along with that desire came a discourse about hoping to become socially accepted through motherhood, the assumption being that once you established yourself as a mother, you could return to having female lovers, without raising suspicions about your sexual orientation. Certainly, among the working-class women who became my interlocutors, having a child and ideally giving birth to it themselves was largely considered the route to become a mature person and be seen as a useful adult member of society. Everyone I met, no matter if they were single or had “someone”, seemed to desire at least one child, with or without marriage. A child seemed to be the ticket to female adulthood and to same-sex passion without being branded a sexual deviant, without losing your dignity or social integrity in the folds of the charismatic church culture dominating southern Ghana.

Over the course of my research, those women who were particularly savvy and articulate about their knowledge of how to pursue their intimate passions in tacit ways inspired me to take seriously my own desire to mother a child: women were in the know not only regarding the power of the erotic and the ways of inhabiting their desires, but also regarding ways of becoming mothers and raising children while being neither straight nor affluent. And again, it was not adoption but the act of giving birth that seemed to be the surest route to fulfilment. Their reasonings behind the wish to birth “at least one child”, while desiring the love of other women, varied. Some said they felt lonely and their wombs empty. Others wanted to have a child “to be free”, not least from the suspicion of being queer, in order to become a respected member of their lineage and the larger community – while I worried over a loss of freedom that a child could bring to my life in Switzerland.

In Accra, Teley Kwao,² dark-skinned and skinny, with a strikingly deep voice, was often pestered for being childless. In her impoverished neighbourhood, sisters and neighbours accused her of engaging children to run errands for her every now and then – children who were not hers. Relying on her extended family network, she could not shrug it off easily. When we first met, she slept in her brother’s room, while renting out her own room to a sex worker and spending much of her time with Felicia, her close friend and lover. Just like other unmarried women of her age group, Teley claimed to be in her late twenties, thus avoiding crossing the magic line of thirty. But the older she got, the more she spoke about the need to have a child. She hoped that her giving birth would finally reduce the criticism she received for her masculine gender presentation.³ When we last met, her health was bad. She was suffering from the effects of an accident in which she was involved when

walking along the motorway that runs through her neighbourhood. She did not have a child of her own, but she mentioned how she visits the small son of Felicia as often as possible. Although Felicia was married and lived with her husband, Teley had always cared for the boy as if he was her own.

Overcoming the stigma of childlessness and wishing to claim motherhood can lead women into precarious circumstances. In her early thirties, Janet Asante⁴ went for a married man who could have been her father when she decided it was time to have that one child. She met him at the military campus where she worked as an auto-sprayer. He was a medical assistant but also turned out to be a dedicated herbalist. When their relationship became more serious, he agreed to rent a room for her, where he could freely visit her. A room of her own, far from her mother's busy place, was something for which Janet had long craved. Once she was pregnant, she secretly threw away the abortion medicine he had asked her to take. As a father of three adults, he worried that he would not be able to bring up yet another child. But Janet believed that "God will take care" (Dankwa 2021, 140) and kept the pregnancy. Two months after giving birth, she proudly explained to me how strategic she was in going about finding a decent man to father the child that she felt she needed. The man she opted for was unaware of or unconcerned by her ongoing same-sex love life, yet a mature man, with a modern profession, while also knowledgeable about the Ghanaian Akan traditions Janet revered. And, he was a respectful elderly man, whom Janet's mother highly approved of too.

Coming from a matrilineal background, where having at least one female child is imperative to continuing one's hereditary line, Janet knew that giving birth and successfully mothering the child could make her a full person and enhance her respectability more than anything else. And indeed, at the baby's name-giving ceremony, Janet managed to unite a range of intimate relations: the child's father, her mother and a female lover as well as an ex-lover who tailored the wide embroidered *agbala* she wore on that day (Dankwa 2021, 142).

mothering our own desires

stitching together our own stories
growing within the cracks between worlds that do not match
growing through the mismatch and into houses
into housing new lives
mothering
ourselves⁵

Women's stories of mothering while "doing *supi*", and the understanding that both are possible and necessarily so, resonated with me. Their giving birth and living a love life against the grain encouraged my own process of looking for a donor friend and working towards the dream of merging queer community with starting a family. But can we connect practices of mothering children not only with dreams for collective forms of living but also with the desire of (sugar-)mothering a same-sex lover?

Besides questions of how to become a child's mother in the absence of a male partner, mothering was invoked when young women mentioned a lover with a considerable

difference in age or status: a financially supportive or mentoring significant “other” they would often refer to as their sugar mama. I first encountered the term in the parlance of semi-professional women footballers in a medium-size Ghanaian town. The footballers swooned about being intimate with and receiving gifts from women whom they considered their seniors. Often, these “seniors” were industrious market traders. Many of them had children, at least one, and some had a husband, at least formally; and, in Ghanaian English, some were seen as hard-working “big women” (Dankwa 2021, 104). But they were not necessarily much older than their football-playing lovers. Many of them could have been elder sisters rather than mothers. However, as traders who ran their own businesses, they had more symbolic capital than the footballers, who hailed from outside town and relied on the meagre monthly allowance provided by the football club and on the support they received from friends and “mamas”. It seemed like the footballers’ bantering chat about having one or more “rich mamas” or “sugar mothers” served as a way of reducing the difference between themselves and their better-resourced, providing lovers – and so did their bragging about being erotically in charge or “working for love” (Dankwa 2021, 161). However, as attractive sports women who enjoyed at least some liberties regarding their youthful “female masculinity” (see Halberstam 1998) in the football arena, they were not powerless either. Given both Ghana’s fierce anti-gay climate and the misogynist images of greed-driven Ghanaian market women, a break-up that ended on a bitter note could be dangerous for the motherly provider, since her “baby” might blackmail or publicly denounce her as a lesbian.

Africanist research on age-mixed relationships has focused on sugar daddies (Kuate-Defo 2004) and their “provider love” (Hunter 2010), and to a lesser extent on female sex (or romance) tourists and their younger male lovers (Meiu 2009). The diversity of trans-generational intimacies between sugar mothers and their babies, however, has remained unexplored and the powerful status of African motherhood (Oyèwùmí 1997) has not been connected to motherhood as an eroticised metaphor among same-sex lovers. Nevertheless, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, writing about seniority as a principle that transcends chronological age and gender, gives important clues to the significance of age-based differences and hierarchies between women. In the love stories I heard, major power gaps and co-dependencies were usually spoken of by the younger partner. Depending on the level of intimacy and closeness, though, they seemed to reduce the age difference by a few years and invoked the older partner as a caring (senior) sister rather than an overbearing (sugar) mother. Metaphors of senior sisterhood seemed better placed to accommodate affective reciprocities, whereas the mother–child metaphor inevitably invoked power gaps and insurmountable difference.

Mothering within intimate same-sex bonds holds its own promise of care and guidance, servitude and mentorship. If these promises are fulfilled, they allow for mutual respect and the transmission of valuable gifts, as Lydia Sackey conveyed to me. Lydia, a composed, soft-spoken young woman who had grown up in central Accra, was full of praise for the skills and knowledge that Ruby, her first “woman”,⁶ passed on to her while they were lovers. Although Ruby was married, Lydia moved in with Ruby and became her informal apprentice. She supported Ruby in running her catering business and taking care of the household and four daughters, the oldest of whom was not much younger than Lydia herself. The relationship allowed Lydia to mature, by gaining professional, social, as well as erotic skills. By the time they broke up, Lydia herself had started offering such gifts and

transmitting her skills to female lovers of her own age group. Lydia “grew wings”, as she put it, and she started taking issue with the fact that Ruby was a heart-breaking “womaniser”. When Ruby went for one of Lydia’s cousins, Lydia felt devastated. Despite their painful break-up, they managed to keep in touch. Today, several years after Ruby’s death, Lydia is still friends with Ruby’s grown-up daughters.

cruel mothers are still mothers
 they make us wars
 they make us revolution
 they teach us truths
 early
 mothers are humans
 who sometimes give birth to their pain
 instead of children
 (Waheed 2013)

Although Lydia always knew she wanted to have a child, her journey into motherhood was long and rocky. At some point, she got pregnant with a gay friend by making use of assisted reproduction technologies. But she miscarried and their marriage broke up. Recently, she relocated to her mother’s house where she finally gave birth to a healthy baby.

Only one of my interlocutors who could be considered a “sugar mama” allowed me to record her life story: Dina Yiborku,⁷ an energetic, short-haired sports teacher. Although she did not call herself a sugar mother, she diligently nurtured and mothered her younger women lovers. At boarding school, as a girl, Dina herself was attracted to and sought out by senior girls who took care of her in motherly ways. At the time we met, Dina was in her late thirties and provided a lot of “sugar” when falling in love. At times she worried that her generosity might be exploited by juniors who were not “serious” but were just having women lovers “because it’s a fashion”, hence playing around for the sake of playing. Still, she courted young sportswomen who had barely completed high school, especially those she knew had been with a woman already. She felt it was socially and emotionally safer to approach juniors who had some experience but were less knowledgeable than herself with regard to female intimacies. She also assumed that women in their late teens or early twenties were more responsive and more malleable than women of her own age and status.

Dina’s sense of responsibility implied that she covered her lovers’ high school or college fees and continued to do so after breaking up. Such generosity put her in the good graces of a girlfriend’s mother and family. And she needed these good graces, not only to be allowed to spend time with and take out a girlfriend. As a former “tomboy”, driving her own car and celebrating her independence in a small town, Dina needed to be careful and secretive about her intimacies. She travelled a lot and used her mobility and humorous wit and charisma to distract from her non-normative life, as an unmarried and childless high school teacher. Unlike most sugar mothers I heard about, Dina could not hide her desires behind marriage and motherhood. She managed partially to make up for her social vulnerability through her education, her respectability and her generosity – notably towards her sisters’ children. One of her small nephews was so close to her that people assumed he was her own son. Certainly,

taking care of the children of the extended family is another route to becoming respected and attaining the status of motherhood.

No one needs to give birth to become a mother. But it is easier if you do. Not necessarily because you start growing into it during pregnancy, but because no matter how good or bad you do your “job” as a mother, the fact of giving birth seems to make you one. Not only in Ghana, but also in Switzerland and other places where unmarried women do not have legal access to technologies of assisted reproduction, being a womb mother seems to give proof of your involvement in a heterosexual act and your compliance with patriarchal norms. Correspondingly, mothers who do not give birth are under more pressure to prove their motherhood: to the state, to society and to themselves.

If we take the term “sugar motherhood” at face value and regard it indeed as a sort of motherhood, then the “sugar” lies not only in the gifts and support the younger person might receive, but also in the sweetness of attraction and infatuation that adds sugar to the older woman’s life. These older women are often married or divorced and strained by mothering children. Implied in the phrase “sugar motherhood” is the sweet and the sweat and perhaps the bitterness of knowing: there is unsurmountable difference between a sugar mother and her baby. What I learned from Dina is that motherhood is eventually about letting go and ensuring the next generation’s survival, by preparing the grounds for your daughters’ liveable futures.

In her poem “A Litany of Survival”, Audre Lorde describes mothers as seeking:

a now that can breath
futures
like bread in our children’s mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours
(Lorde 1978, 31)

I imagine these children who want to be fed and who drive their mothers to exhaustion not only as biogenetic offspring. It may be a loved one, a friend and junior lover who could become your daughter. If we think of mothering as an act of laying the grounds for new lives and future generations, it is not far-fetched to think of a younger lover who strives to become a (sugar) mother herself one day, as the next generation that needs to be nurtured into queer motherhood.

What unites the experience of mothering a child and mothering a female lover is the generational difference that cannot easily be surmounted – a constant reminder of the fact that “being women together” is not enough (Lorde [1982] 2011, 226), and of the peril of eventually losing one another to another generation. Perhaps it is true what the English language suggests in the word “mother”. M/other is my first other, the first instance of experiencing separation and otherness, but also the first chance of recognising human difference and relating across generational divides as equals (see Lorde [1984] 2007, 115). What is a lie, however, is that we can have one mother only. Just as a mother may have several daughters, daughters have several mothers.

Even in a patriarchal society like the Swiss one, the mother–child unit is hailed to be at the heart of society. What remains unsaid, when the power of motherhood is romanticised in Ghana, Switzerland and elsewhere, is the burden of mothering: the expectation to nurture, the maternal duty to share and the charge of responsibility. However, in the Ghanaian Akan context, motherliness has never precluded a mother’s commercial activities or work obligations outside the home. It is a mother’s obligation to provide for and feed her child beyond nursing and infancy (Clark 1994, 303). Thus, the burden of matriliney is somewhat balanced by the power mothers wield as the custodians of their (matri)-lineages, especially if they manage to become respected as female elders.

Exploring women’s same-sex cultures in Ghana, I came across diverse forms of mothering. Only once I realised how I was seen as a potential (sugar) daughter myself – when fending off the attempts of seduction by a woman who could have been my mother. More often, however, I grappled with qualifying as a potential sugar mother, based on my privileged status as an academic researcher with a return ticket to Europe. I treasured the moments when I became a sister, in the process of immersing myself in the life stories of women with whom I shared a desire for friendship and for queering family, while many other things separated us. Not all of the women approved of my wish to conceive without a male lover, even if conception happened privately and without medical assistance. They worried that, although things might work differently in the global North, I would need the blessing of a man, and thus of society, in order to have a child on my own.

dear love child

we all need stories
you may need more than one
to brace yourself
and lean into the question
where are you from
asked in many different tonalities.
you may opt for the where they want to hear at times
the where containing your color’s origins
–
knowing the places my donor-friend calls home
may provide you with one more answer
besides the intimate texture of your coming into being
the weavings of friendship and self-love
treasured for you⁸

While writing up my research at a university in the USA, I made space for the unborn. I found a way to get my fibroids removed and intensified the search for a suitable friend who could donate and possibly co-parent. Perhaps the loneliness of writing and the estrangement on yet another continent added to this intensification, as well as the “yes we can” excitement that dominated my US experience at the time. I kept thinking of Teley, Janet, Dina, Lydia and other knowing women, wondering how they would look for a donor friend in a place far from home. And I kept asking myself how much connection, how much shared history and how much mutual trust it takes to make the donor choice significant and plausible to myself in the absence of a story of romance. To my

donor friend, a Ghanaian who might have felt as alienated in the USA as I did, giving held the promise of self-growth. Eventually, stories of friendship, connection and relationality eased the way into the practical considerations of self-administered conception. Though it was a choice, or rather a series of decisions taken along the way, conception felt like the serendipitous result of collective dreams and visions.

In the process of becoming pregnant, I reconnected with a childless friend in Switzerland. Previous dreams of co-parenting and building a chosen family – without being lovers but within a larger queer-feminist network – rekindled. She carried grocery bags up the stairs to my small attic flat and accompanied me to that prenatal session, where the other mothers-to-be brought along their men. We started to look for an apartment together, we had long conversations about trust, and in the absence of friendship counselling, we consulted a couples counsellor. Barely two months after she had massaged me through labour we moved in together. But already during a postnatal period of bed rest, when friends and family passed by to prepare us meals and welcome the newborn, our friendship had begun to falter under the weight of “doing” family. After five months of sleep deprivation, the dream of friendship parenting ended. Our bond was not firm enough to weather the acute awareness of a baby’s vulnerability, which brought back buried memories along with our own childhood dependencies. Accepting my mother’s hands-on support and thinking of myself as a single mother by choice helped me absorb the shock of loss and exhaustion.

Ten years later, “my” daughter⁹ has at least two mothers, following a long process of us becoming a queer, interracial family with Sidonie. Although Araba was barely four years old when Sidonie came into my life, it took Araba years to overcome her jealousy as Sidonie became my lover-companion and began to take on “the labor of love that is parenting” (Dieng 2020, 139). The normative power of what a nuclear family looks like did not facilitate the bonding process between the two of them. Not only is this (patchwork) family different regarding our queerness. In Europe, “my” daughter and I are Black, while my companion is white and not taken to be mothering a Black child – unlike a Black male friend, who occasionally took out Araba and was readily assumed to be her father. Doing family is always a process. But in our case, not even the term “family” was given. We gradually adopted it as a shorthand for the everyday intimacies and the criss-crossing bonds spanning among the three of us.

Only recently, same-sex couples have been given the right to marry and co-parent on the condition that their children are conceived through a Swiss sperm bank. I did not use a sperm bank, I did not conceive in Switzerland. I am not married and neither do we inhabit a nuclear family home. Living in a large communal household, while sharing our incomes and living quarters with friends and people on the move whom we consider family too, we first needed to prove to the authorities that we are worthy of being a “rainbow family”. Despite lesbian-led initiatives to include a variety of queerness into what qualifies as a rainbow family, and despite the fading image of the unwomanly, perverted and infertile lesbian that dominated twentieth-century imagination in Europe, there remains a juxtaposition between responsible motherhood and living a queer life outside the confines of (same-sex) marriage. Especially in Switzerland, where femininity was historically tied to wifeness and self-sacrificing motherliness, the desire to mother is regarded with suspicion when it comes alongside other desires. In West Africa, however, where women were not necessarily framed as dependent wives, motherhood may amount to a desired gender of its own (Oyèwùmí 2016).

In the 1950s, on the eve of Ghana's independence, my Twi-speaking grandmother received an award when she gave birth to her tenth child. Thinking of the much-acclaimed power of motherhood on the African continent, as well as the burden that goes along with matrilineality, I wonder about the power that seems to reside in the act of procreating and extending our lineages. Is it really the number of children we birth and may call "ours" – before they leave us? What about the healing powers children bring to their (queer) mothers through their vulnerability? A child's vulnerability may resonate with our own child souls and that which is left behind as we grow into mothers. By housing them, we are mothering ourselves.

Notes

1. Fragments from my diary, unpublished, 2012.
2. All personal names in this text are anonymised.
3. I am referring to Teley as a woman, and so did she, although she did not mind being mistaken for a feminine man. Sadly, I cannot ask her about her gender identifications again. Lacking adequate medical care in the aftermath of an accident she suffered on the highway dividing her neighbourhood, Teley died a premature death.
4. For a more detailed account of Janet Asante's journey into motherhood, see Dankwa (2021, 138–143).
5. By the author, unpublished, 2022. This poem was inspired by Warsan Shire's poem "Bless the House" (2022, 66–67), which compares a woman's body to a house with many rooms.
6. The three quotes in this paragraph are taken from an interview with Lydia Sackey, Accra, 26 June 2007. For a more detailed account of her life story, see Dankwa (2021, 189–201).
7. For a more complete analysis of Dina Yiborku's life story, see Dankwa (2021, 208–216).
8. By the author, unpublished, 2023.
9. Although this child identifies as a girl, I hesitate to speak of her as "my daughter". I would prefer naming our transgenerational bond without gendering her and adding the emotional baggage associated with mother–daughter bonds. The "my" in "my daughter" feels equally ambivalent. "Children are not individual property" nor are they "objects through which we seek to achieve our political goals", Lauretta Ross cautions (2016, xviii).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Clark, Gracia. 1994. *Onions Are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Dankwa, Serena O. 2021. *Knowing Women: Same-Sex Intimacy, Gender and Identity in Postcolonial Ghana*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dieng, Rama Salla. 2020. "A Young Woman's Voice Doesn't Break, It Grows Firmer." In *Feminist Parenting: Perspectives from Africa and Beyond*, edited by Rama Salla Dieng and Andrea O'Reilly. 123–148. Ontario: Demeter Press.
- Halberstam, Judith/Jack. 1998. *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hendricks, Cheryl, and Malaika Eyoh. 2020. "Mothering Malaika: Thoughts on Feminist Mothering." In *Feminist Parenting: Perspectives from Africa and Beyond*, edited by Rama Salla Dieng and Andrea O'Reilly, 47–54. Ontario: Demeter Press.
- Hunter, Mark. 2010. *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Kuate-Defo, Barthelemy. 2004. "Young People's Relationships with Sugar Daddies and Sugar Mummies: What Do We Know and What Do We Need to Know?" *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 8 (2): 13–37.
- Lorde, Audre. 1978. *The Black Unicorn*. New York: Norton.
- Lorde, Audre. [1984] 2007. "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: When Redefining Difference." In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, 114–123. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.
- Lorde, Audre. [1982] 2011. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.
- Meiu, Paul. 2009. "Mombasa Morans': Embodiment, Sexual Morality, and Samburu Men in Kenya." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 43 (1): 106–128.
- Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónkẹ. 1997. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónkẹ. 2016. *What Gender Is Motherhood? Changing Yorùbá Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ross, Laretta J. 2016. "Preface." In *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, edited by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, and Mai'a Williams, xiii–xviii. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
- Shire, Warsan. 2022. *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head: Poems*. New York: Random House.
- Waheed, Nayyirah. 2013. *Salt*. San Bernardino, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.