Grossman argues that threats of state interference motivate strong group leaders to invest in pro-trade policies – particularly when members are not in direct competition with each other – so that the leaders can mobilise members if the state tries to interfere. In the absence of state threats, strong leaders use their power to extort traders and embezzle market funds. Competition between traders, as well as weak leaders, can also lead to poor private governance and poorly functioning markets. Grossman concludes that private governance works best in the shadow of the state – under enough threat of interference to motivate strong leaders to build governance institutions but not so much interference that the government crushes or takes over market institutions.

The book supports the argument with a rich array of original surveys, maps, administrative data, observations, and interviews with traders in Lagos. Informal work and institutions are notoriously difficult to quantify because they exist by definition outside of regulatory agencies that collect regular data and labour statistics. Grossman addressed this challenge by building a sampling frame of markets from the Lagos Waste Management Authority, mapping out every market in the city and taking a census of 52,830 shops. Grossman then randomly selected shops from this frame and surveyed 1179 traders in face-to-face interviews with a team of enumerators. She conducted three waves of surveys in 2015, 2016 and 2018, with 834 traders participating in all three waves. This trove of data gives Grossman unprecedented quantitative data on the economic and political decisions of an important group of microenterprises over time. Grossman uses these data to prove her points as well as anticipate objections and alternative explanations. She illustrates the numbers with interviews, stories and observations across the market landscape in Lagos.

Grossman asserts that her account of private governance institutions in Lagos marketplaces uncovers a channel for trade and development that does not require a benevolent or efficient government or even the rule of law. Instead, she argues, all a government needs to do to spur efficient private institutions is to threaten to intervene in business people's affairs. She convincingly demonstrates that when predatory politicians work against traders' interests, they unintentionally trigger private policies and mobilisation that benefits traders. This book should be on the reading list of scholars working on property rights, development, governance, informality, African politics and urban politics.

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Understanding Modern Nigeria: ethnicity, democracy, and development by TOYIN FALOLA

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In six thematic parts, *Understanding Modern Nigeria* by Toyin Falola provides a comprehensive analysis of the complex nature of Nigerian politics and society with a focus on ethnicity, democracy and development. Nigeria is an oil-rich country but despite its colossal oil wealth, the state continues to operate in a failure mode as bad governance, poverty, corruption, political violence, insurgency, banditry, and

ethnic and religious conflicts have become the conspicuous features of the country. Nigerians had hoped that the country's return to democratic rule in 1999 would bring about dividends of democracy but these hopes have been dashed.

Falola traces Nigeria's present predicament partly to its 'complex history with colonialism' (7). Nigeria, a former colony of Britain, is a conglomeration of an 'estimated 350 to 400 ethnic groups' (9) brought together by imperialism. Using the system of divide-and-rule, the colonialists sowed the seed of future crises by pitting one ethnic group against the other. For Falola, Nigeria's problems are symptoms of a lack of unity among the multiple groups in the country. The Nigerian project is about advancing ethnic, religious and regional interests. In Nigeria, these primordial identities determine who gets what and when, and politicians have continued to exploit them 'for legitimacy and self-aggrandizement' (21) and for 'divisive and destructive goals' (604).

Falola further argues that another source of Nigeria's woes is its practice of federalism. Nigeria is a federation of 36 states and 774 local governments but the Federation operates as a unitary state. Following a careful comparative analysis of federalism, the book posits that while the USA, for example, practices a 'bottom-up' model of federalism, Nigeria practices a 'top-down' model, which is a 'bad type of federalism' (143). Falola is not the first to observe this as other scholars of Nigerian politics have criticised the over-centralised character of Nigerian federalism. In Nigeria resources are concentrated in the centre, making it excessively powerful as evidenced in the overloaded exclusive legislative list. This has consequently contributed to the zero-sum politics, corruption and ethnic favouritism that dominate the politics of the multinational state. One defect of the federal system is that the distribution of political and economic resources and the sharing formula do not 'reflect the principles of segmented autonomy' (151). Moreover, the disproportionate concentration of political and economic powers in the centre weakens the states. Likewise, the local government performs poorly in terms of service delivery because it is 'subservient to the state governments, reducing its ability to serve constituents' (512).

The author usefully points out Nigeria's bad governance and poor management of the oil economy as critical to understanding the gravitation of the state into rentierism. Being a rentier state, Nigeria relies heavily on oil rents and without oil, 'the state would collapse' (285) but corruption continues to erode the gains from the oil economy. In Nigeria, according to him, 'corruption is endemic' (278) and attempts to rid the country of it have not been successful due to the ineffectiveness of the anticorruption agencies.

The marginalisation of minority groups such as women, youth, people with disabilities, and others who reside in the 'other space' (409) is often overlooked, but Falola is able to demonstrate this as a crucial factor militating against Nigeria's development. For example, he rightly argues that Nigerian youths have become 'vulnerable and easily recruited for insurgent' and other criminal activities because of their exclusion from legitimate political activities (471). The gerontocratic nature of the Nigerian political space is one of the causes of this exclusion.

Falola posits that if the Nigerian state is to attain any decent level of development, the people must cultivate a sense of oneness, the political system must stop 'undermining ethnic minorities' (608) and the youth must be 'given a sense of belonging' (614). Government policies must be directed towards investing in this population segment. In addition, the federal system must be reformed in such a fashion that

power is allocated to the sub-national governments. Similarly, Nigeria must embrace a culture of meritocracy but the constitution 'must expunge its "federal character" clauses' (622). In addition to political restructuring, Nigeria also needs economic restructuring where the excessive reliance on oil is reduced. The economy needs diversifying in such a way that the agricultural sector is accorded some importance, as it was before the discovery of oil.

The book is well researched, superbly structured and written in a very simple language. However, some of the chapter introductions are rather long and this affects the flow of the discussion. In Chapter 4, for example, 18 pages (74–91) are devoted to the introduction. Similarly, Chapter 10 has 21 pages (243–263) of introduction. Some editorial issues were also observed in the book such as 'not only is the executive list overloaded' (149), while 'executive' there should be 'exclusive'. Except for those minor concerns, *Understanding Modern Nigeria* surely presents a critical analysis of the inherent contradictions in post-colonial Nigeria and will make an interesting read for experts on Nigeria and non-experts alike.

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Embodied Engineering: gendered labor, food security, and taste in twentieth century Mali by LAURA ANN TWAGIRA
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Laura Ann Twagira is a scholar interested in the ways technology was historically employed in Sahelian ecologies. An Africanist with a women's history background, Twagira's research reflects an understanding of provisioning as a combination of the subtle workings of market and environmental forces, and the innate aspects of food's sensual experiences. Approaching this work via the field of the history of technology, Twagira elucidates the embodied technical knowledge Malian women deployed in moments of political and ecological crisis to provide for their families.

Women's employment of low technology implements and their reengineering of the infrastructure of the Office du Niger – a massive 20th century French mechanized agricultural development project – resulted in a common food system in an environment initially characterised by scarcity. Twagira argues that as technology was gendered male and conceptualised in grand terms (the Office du Niger and its machines), the pedestrian use of technology (women's implements) and how it undergirded all other productivity, was overlooked. What follows is a decade-by-decade analysis of women's use of technology, drawing on colonial and postcolonial archival materials, myths, oral histories, fieldwork, anthropological studies, historical travel narratives and botanical histories.

In the Introduction, Twagira successfully illuminates the historical Malian relationship between gendered roles and food processing technology and explores how those roles mapped onto the gendered meanings attached to food production. Twagira then examines the emergence of the Office and what it was meant to do for both the French Empire and local Malians, and how it failed to live up to expectations.