

**Emily S. Burrill. *States of Marriage: Gender, Justice, and Rights in Colonial Mali*.** Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015. xiv + 239 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00. Cloth. \$32.95. Paper. ISBN: 780-821421451.

“Signaling consent was potentially a way of unmaking the world” (184): This comment, at the conclusion of *States of Marriage*, illustrates the importance of changing marriage laws in colonial Mali. In 1939 the Mandel Decree, which required consent of the man and woman for a marriage to take place and established minimum ages for marriage, was adopted across French colonial Africa with the intention of bringing “civilization” to the colonized peoples of the French Sudan. Emily Burrill’s insightful analysis of marriage, gender justice, and rights in colonial Mali deftly analyzes the ways in which colonial laws on marriage, of which the Mandel Decree was only one, both contributed in essential ways to the colonial state-building project and undermined existing social dynamics, thereby “unmaking the world.”

*States of Marriage* offers important insights into the complexity of women’s rights and the role of the state in colonial and present-day Mali. By means of archival research in Sikasso and Senegal, including previously classified court cases, as well as interviews in the region, Burrill explores the colonial interpretation of African marriages as akin to slavery and French attempts to use legal reforms to control marriage and thereby control colonial subjects. Interestingly, the evidence shows that at least in the earlier years, women were more likely than men to bring cases to the courts and to win rulings in their favor, and thus they were able to use the recently codified marriage laws to their advantage. This situation shifted over time, however, as the colonial state reinforced patriarchy.

Burrill includes female voices extracted from the colonial court records to build a persuasive argument about gender, patriarchy, and the generational dynamics that were at play in the construction of the colonial state. She illustrates, for example, how women as well as men participated in the maintenance of marriage norms while helping to build the patriarchal state. In one case a female neighbor and a co-wife testified that a husband, whose blows had killed his spouse, was only disciplining a troublesome wife. The consequences of challenging the man might have led to ostracization from the community or a jailed husband who could no longer provide for the family. Domestic violence, Burrill says, was “ultimately political in nature and linked to larger sociocultural values,” and she prompts us “to look more closely at the links between brutality directed towards women in their conjugal relationships and families, social and economic strife, challenges to local political authorities, and disputes over state power” (139–40).

Burrill’s analysis of the generational tension that developed in the context of colonial state-building also illustrates the depth of social upheaval triggered by marriage law reforms. For example, the Jacquinet Decree of 1951, another attempt by missionaries and colonial administrators to create a more “civilized” environment for women perceived as subservient, placed

restrictions on bridewealth, authorized the official registration of civil marriage, and required men to register at the time of marriage whether a union was monogamous or polygamous. But like the Mandel Decree, this resulted in “competition between young men, lineage and village elders, canton chief, missionaries, and colonial administrators over African marriages and especially the place of African women in those marriages” (136). Burrill examines how, as young men were conscripted into the military and various state projects, including road and railway construction and irrigation projects, “wealth in men” as laborers shifted to “wealth in women” as elders used marriages to benefit the household and (in the case of the Senufo) matrilineage.

Burrill’s book is a welcome addition to our understanding of gender, justice, human rights, and the colonial state. It is persuasive and well written and is essential reading for scholars interested not only in colonialism and gender but also in law and society. It is perhaps unfortunate only that Burrill does not explore all the nuances of the contemporary struggle over family law reform in Mali. While such a detailed examination might have seemed extraneous to an author who is a historian, the book’s limited discussion of these reforms, which until the recent coup could be considered the dominant legal and social battle in Mali in the last twenty years, strikes this political scientist as a missed opportunity. Burrill refers to family law in her introduction and conclusion, but this subject seems to warrant more in-depth discussion, particularly given the author’s understanding of the importance of marriage to the state. She writes that marriage was “a Trojan horse of gender justice” (184); while so-called legal reforms were meant to bring “civilization” and justice to Mali and to make lives easier, they often caused generational tensions and social turmoil instead. It is this legacy that is evident in the twenty years of conflict over family law reform in Mali today.

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**Abosedé A. George. *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014. x + 301 pp. List of Illustrations. Acknowledgments. Notes. Selected Bibliography. Index. \$80.00 Cloth. \$32.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0821421161.**

A rich scholarship on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Africa covers a broad range of the political, social, economic, and cultural effects of colonialism on African women. However, little has been said about African girls, who were seldom mentioned in colonial reports. *Making Modern Girls*, while acknowledging this problem of scanty archival sources, also offers a rich