

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.

The first chapter of the book utilises myth and oral history to delineate the normative food culture and the gendered roles within it from 1880 to 1920. The social hierarchy of the household, the social significance of the 'sauce' or soup, the normative culture of hospitality, and women's role in production are explicated here.

The second chapter details the relationship between the creation of the Office and food scarcity. From 1920 to 1944, farmers struggled to grow enough millet to sustain themselves due to the focus on cash crop production (cotton and rice). The dearth of millet – the preferred food – resulted in its importation. Harsh working and living conditions discouraged the presence of women, intensifying scarcity.

Chapter 3 details women's increased participation in the market economy. Even though families were encouraged to move to the Office, food scarcity issues continued, aggravated by restrictions on gardening and hunting. Cash crop production resulted in greater reliance on markets for sustenance. This in turn contributed new and different sauce ingredients (tomatoes), and canals led to the introduction of fish as a staple in the local diet.

Chapter 4 describes the specifics of how women utilised technology. Not only did they adopt metal implements to ease their labours, but they also benefited from the colonial gendered labour scheme which assisted them with traditional female chores such as fetching firewood. The need to purchase more food at market compelled women to reinvent the traditional *toh* (millet dumpling). Rice gradually replaced millet and the cooking of *toh* in metal pots changed its texture.

The fifth chapter discusses the devastating effects of the droughts of the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, and their effects on the bodily safety of women who were responsible for feeding their families. Women deployed technology in the form of cloth, disguising themselves as expectant mothers. In this manner, women were able to smuggle food to their families and to maintain the tradition of hospitality so historically essential in this climate.

It is in Chapter 4 that Twagira makes her most convincing argument. The period from the 1940s to the 1960s was a defining moment when women adopted low tech implements to speed up traditional chores, freeing up time to work in operations such as winnowing rice. The rice they received as payment was taken to market and sold for sauce ingredients. In this manner, the author convincingly demonstrates that women's technological adoptions sustained Office operations, which remained consistently unprofitable.

This book lays the groundwork for understanding the intersection of local women's social roles and technological change and would be ideal for an academic audience, particularly an undergraduate seminar. Through their ingenuity and adaptability, women ensured that they met their social obligations to provision their families by, among other things, changing the taste and texture of the food their families ate. A deeper analysis of how the changes in embodied techniques of food preparation contributed to the identities of Office residents would help the reader further understand the deeper implications for change in the local cultural history. The texture of the staple starch being so integral to social identity, this significant change in its composition could do with more exploration.

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