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Social & Behavioral Sciences
History, Geography & Area Studies - Africa

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Twagira, Laura Ann. **Embodied engineering: gendered labor, food security, and taste in twentieth-century Mali.** Ohio University, 2021. 326p bibl index ISBN 9780821424414, \$80.00; ISBN 9780821424681 pbk, \$36.95; ISBN 9780821447338 ebook, contact publisher for price.

The intriguing title of this important study includes the term *engineering*, often associated with men and the construction of engines, buildings, and, in the case of rural Mali, irrigation canals and ploughs. However, *engineer* derives from the Middle Latin, *ingeniare*, which means “to devise, design” and captures how Twagira (Wesleyan Univ.) conceives of rural women’s bodily work in the production and preparation of food—as “embodied engineering.” However, French colonial officials—some of whom were agricultural engineers who established the Office du Niger in 1932 to build irrigation canals and establish cotton and rice farms—largely ignored women’s participation in agriculture and food preparation. Male Malian farmers worked on Office farms, and both men and women continued to grow local preferred foods—millet and tomatoes—and to fish, at times in the very canals built for irrigation. Women who later worked with the Office also devised new domestic technologies, such as using more efficient metal pots for cooking. By focusing on gender ideology, food technologies, and development initiatives, Twagira encourages readers to consider the “lived material bodies” of women in 20th-century rural Mali.

--E. P. Renne, *emerita*, University of Michigan

Summing Up: Recommended. General readers, advanced undergraduates through faculty, and professionals.