

Pentecostal Christianity have all contributed to rising tensions in rural communities such as Agwagune. Young men who find their aspirations thwarted are likely to blame failure at school or on the job market on the malevolent “medicine” of jealous and “backward” traditional elders. They prefer to seek out young politicians and charismatic Christian pastors as patrons, rather than conform to the rituals of solidarity and hierarchy in their rural homes. A violent confrontation between youth and local political leaders in 2006 continues to reverberate as community factions confront each other in the radically changed landscape of contemporary Nigeria. In this context, David Iyam’s nostalgia for an idealized past of meaningful rituals of unity and conformity is understandable, but certainly unrealistic.

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Embodied Engineering: Gendered Labor, Food Security, and Taste in Twentieth-Century Mali. By Laura Ann Twagira. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2021. Pp. 328; 15 b/w photographs, 4 maps. \$80.00 cloth, \$36.95 paper.

Embodied Engineering presents the history of women’s roles in Mali’s Office du Niger through the lens of their role in provisioning food. Conceptualizing women’s work as “embodied engineering” (p. 4), Twagira analyzes women’s activities in agricultural production, cash-earning, and food preparation and their use of domestic technologies in these activities. Drawing on science and technologies studies, she brings to the fore the importance of domestic technologies in sustaining livelihoods and their changes in light of new possibilities. The site of the study is the Office du Niger, a large-scale irrigation project established by the French in 1932. Although not typical of venues for Malian rural life, this project, which transformed the environment and aimed to bring modern technology to agriculture, is a good place to study the relationship between environment, technology, and women’s work.

Twagira draws on archival research, interviews, folklore, and re-interpretations of academic and contemporaneous material to show the challenges to family survival and the agency women used to create sustainable livelihoods. As is common, few sources concentrated directly on women, although the analysis demonstrates that much can often be gleaned from them. The first chapter on the early twentieth century effectively sets the scene before the construction of the Office du Niger in an area environmentally and demographically disrupted by late nineteenth-century wars and colonization. The author’s methodology is somewhat less successful in this chapter, which presents rather general information about Mali and gender roles. However, subsequent chapters provide detailed information about women’s lives during the relevant periods. Even though the abundant Office du Niger reports and archives did not focus on women, they provided substantial information about them. Living research participants could recall their lives as children or young wives in the early Office. These chapters effectively show how women learned

environmental and technical knowledge that allowed them to create material and social lives in a project oriented around men's cash-crop production and male use of new technologies. Women were not conservative but changed technologies and behaviors in both obvious and subtle ways, to meet the challenges they faced in feeding their families. Among other strategies, they took up cash-earning activities to make up for the lack of personal fields and adopted metal cooking pots, which allowed them to cook faster and use less fuel.

While many have already documented the difficulties of life at the Office du Niger throughout its history, this work shows how women's challenges changed over time, from the almost total lack of resources in the early years of the Office, to somewhat better conditions in the 1950s, to the destructive consequences of Modibo Keita's attempts at collectivization. The last chapter on the Sahel droughts of the 1970s and 1980s effectively brings together the impacts of environmental change and humanitarian relief in an irrigated area where water control allowed increased production despite lower rainfall; however, that very characteristic attracted drought refugees to the Office and put pressure on resources. This fine book could have been improved by a conclusion that focused on the relevance of the history of the Office du Niger to other geographic areas and to the literature. For example, what relevance do women's experiences at the Office du Niger have for understanding the changes to women's activities and technology use in other parts of Mali or West Africa? What is the relevance of this study to science and technology studies; how can Malian gender history refine outstanding questions or address debates in this disciplinary area?

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