The fields of women and gender studies have come of age in African studies. There is ample evidence to vouch for their maturity - African and Africanists are increasingly using gender analysis as a framework for the study of the culture and history of Africans. In the use of gender analysis they have drawn from several modes and frameworks of inquiry including life histories, oral sources, and oral history to capture the activities of women and men. The fourteen contributors to the book under review analyse the process through which men have stigmatised some women in Africa as ‘wicked’ and ‘wayward’. They use a wide range of paradigms in the social and human sciences to capture power relations in African communities. The contributors to the volume under review explore the nature of women’s alleged transgressions and effects of their actions on social relations. Consequently, they provide us with tools for analysing the paradox the so-called wicked women have grappled with in their day-to-day experiences. They also explain how ‘wicked’ women have translated their predicaments into sites for debate over the reconstitution of gender relations, social practices, cultural norms and political-economic institutions in Africa (p. 2). Thus, the text is about how women in Africa have responded to the received notions of gender relations - how they have resisted patriarchal control and domination. The fourteen contributors to the text argue that African women have struggled to determine their own destinies and gender spaces in their communities. In fact, the vexing question they attempt to grapple with is how women have sought to rid their societies of oppressive and patronising systems by taking advantage of available opportunities to them. Cognisant of this fact, the authors postulate that women have been and still continue with the struggles to influence the process of marriage, mechanisms of economic autonomy and increase their financial and material opportunities in societies. Women have variously challenged masculinity and its oppressive patriarchal forms in the realm of political power, seeking ways to inculcate notions of just moral authority and responsibility in society. The authors argue in the various chapters of the volume that to achieve their objectives women have pursued their agenda individually as well as through interest groups. More importantly, they proceed to demonstrate that women have used existing systems of social redress such as legal processes, commercial market trade, rituals and dances to seek justice - explicitly or implicitly. Working from the premise that to understand the meaning of being a ‘woman’, one must also understand the meaning of being a ‘man’, the authors interrogate cultural and social relations of power between men and women. They argue that different forces in society have historically worked in collaboration to institutionalise male power. For
instance, colonial male administrators and male elders connived to assert and maintain patriarchal authority over women and young men. Male elders accomplished this by constructing, reifying and reinforcing ‘customary law’ and ‘traditional authority’ across the continent (p.3). In spite of efforts by men to dominate them, women have constantly struggled to circumvent patriarchal authority. Acknowledging that African and Western notions of manliness have been instrumental in reconstructing masculinity in Africa, the authors illuminate the ways individual African communities have negotiated gender. The authors draw considerably from life histories, oral histories, legal cases, material culture, artifacts, rituals, performance, earlier ethnographical accounts of travelers, missionary, and other written sources as supporting evidence. For instance, in her chapter on ‘My Daughter Belongs to Government’, Dorothy L. Hodgson uses life histories and court cases to demonstrate how one woman named Aloya defied her father to marry a man of her choice as opposed to being forced into an arranged marriage in the Maasai community. Conversely, Andrea C. Cornwall effectively uses women’s life histories and Yoruba oral traditions to explain the changes that have taken place in gender relations in Ado-Odo since pre-colonial times. She asserts that ‘wayward women and useless men populate discourses on the present, but are completely absent from narratives about the past’ (p.68). Cornwall analyses the narratives she collected to debunk the notion of merrie golden days in Yoruba country where women were supposedly subservient to male authority. She engages contemporary talk that women have turned their backs on old lifestyles, hence lost their ways. While rejecting the assumption that women have lost their ways, Cornwall draws on oral as well as archival evidence to argue that historical dynamics have been readily involved in the making of gender relations in Africa. By this she argues that women were only described as wicked or wayward as long as they challenged the existing order power relations that oppressed them.

Alongside the so-called ‘wayward’ or ‘wicked’ women were also ‘useless men’: a discourse that was developed by women to describe men who did not live up to notions of masculine breadwinning. Richard A. Schroeder’s ‘Gone to their Second Husband’, Gracia Clark’s ‘Gender and profiteering’, and Sheryl A. McCurdy’s ‘Urban Threats’, use material culture, ritual and performance to demonstrate how women sought material autonomy and negotiated their independence in society.

Schroeder argues that Gambian women transformed women’s communal gardens into formidable income generating ventures for themselves, effectively replacing the male peanut crop as the source of cash income in many areas (p.85). This development impacted the fulcrum of power in the family, allowing women to catch the attention of men and negotiate gender relations. For instance, men who had been economically marginalised increasingly spent a great deal of time in the spatial confines of the family or in its immediate vicinity - in other words men began to attend to domestic chores that were ordinarily considered anathema for them in heterosexual masculine expectations. These chores included fetching bath water and preparing meals for themselves (pp.87-88). Because a growing number of women challenged masculine authority, men became bitter and re-invented discourses that demeaned powerful women in society - for instance, they referred to the occupation women engaged in such as gardening or market trading as ‘second husbands’. On the other hand, using colonial reports and missionary accounts McCurdy explores how slave women exploited their sexuality to negotiate gender relations in the Manyema society that appeared to exploit them. She asserts that ‘wealthy traders and waungwana in Ujiji kept some female Menyema as concubines, forced other female slaves to work as domestic servants and fieldhands, and made other women, girls and boys march east in caravans’ (p.214). As
concubines. Manyema women attached themselves to men and exchanged domestic and sexual services for food and clothes (ibid.). Clark provides the reader with more evidence about how material culture impacted the lives of Ghanaian men and women. When market women acquired wealth and autonomy in their lives, they became the target of attack as the ones responsible for the soaring food prices and sabotaging the economy (p.294). Men characterised such women as witches of some kind, obviously acquiring the label of ‘wicked’ and ‘wayward’ women. How, then, do the authors problematise the ‘wicked’ women? They argue that wickedness is produced on a terrain that appears to accommodate multiple dimensions. These dimensions include; agency and structure, discourse and practice as well as the process through which culture and the political economy are mediated. In other words, we can describe wickedness as a discourse that masculine power uses to control and oppress women. The authors claim that masculine power does this by stigmatising the actions of some women, either by normative or conventional procedures, designating them as unacceptable and abominable. On the other hand, ‘wickedness’ may also refer to a manifestation of feminine power in cases where women purposefully and effectively challenge political, social, or cultural constraints on their behavior (p.6). Cast in the twin concept of ‘wickedness’, the authors have analysed distinct domains and strategies of the phenomenon. The text is divided into four sections. These are Contesting Conjugality; Confronting Authority; Taking Space/Making Space; and Negotiating Difference. The authors also argue those women who had their own earnings were compelled to struggle with their husbands to retain control over their incomes. Women constantly negotiated and renegotiated their labour time and their household financial obligations in order to retain access on the available economic resources such as livestock, land, agricultural inputs, water, and fuel. In fact, they would adopt various tactics ranging from hiding their earnings from their husbands to providing their husbands money as way of winning favors. While some men also tried to sabotage their wives businesses others tried to cooperate with them as ways of re-inventing their masculinity.

What are some lessons the reader gets from this volume? That we can use other tropes such as wicked and wayward women to inquire into the economic and social lives of both men and women. That women were not docile even though they have been portrayed as victims of male oppression - they constantly struggled against subordination and marginalisation. What this volume fails to provide is the discourse used by women to counter the label of waywardness and wickedness - the term ‘useless’ men is not adequately problematised to provide us with insights into the psychology of men. One question preoccupying the mind is how women perceived manhood. The authors simply assert that females perceived males as architects and custodians of the moral order in their communities. Is it possible that women also constructed their own discourses about men who derided women as wicked and wayward? In short, the authors do not provide the reader with a discourse from the perspective of women - what the reader sees is what men say about women and not vice versa.


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This book is about the national question, defined by Lenin as ‘the right of nations to self-determination…’. It is about a subject matter and indeed a problem that transcends all human societies regardless of race, geographical location, or stage of socio-economic development. For example, Canada, an ostensibly developed country, has not successfully done away with the national question. Nor have the Russians been able to manage the Chechen crisis with commendable ease. The barbaric civil war in the former Yugoslavian federation, Sri Lanka, and the uneasy calm in the Fiji Islands among the indigenes and emigrants citizens of Indian descent are equally a reminder of the import of the national question. Furthermore, the national question is at the root of the brutal conflict in Sudan, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, and Burundi to name a few countries in Africa. Consequently, the book deals with a topical and burning issue that is likely to pre-occupy humankind in the 21st century.

These preliminary remarks notwithstanding, the book focuses on the national question in Nigeria that scholars like Nnoli, Egwu, Osaghae, Mustapha among others have sought to address through the prism of ethnicity. It is therefore undeniable that the book marks a significant leap from the study of the crises underlying political development in emergent nation-states like Nigeria from the standpoint of ethnicity to a much broader framework that encapsulates the role of critical factors like class, elite formation/interest, including economic factors.

The book incorporates eleven chapters that can be sub-divided into three broad areas. The first consists of the chapters by Abubakar Momoh on the one hand and Benson Osadolor on the other. These chapters provide the conceptual and historical overview of the national question. The other contributions by Mark Anikpo, Cyril Obi, Yima Sen, Ibrahim Baba Gana, Said Adejumobi, Angela Idem, and Wale Adebanwi may be viewed as cases studies because they deal with specific aspects of the national question in Nigeria. The concluding chapter by Eghosa Osaghae in which the author seeks to outline a federal solution to the national question could be designated as the third section of the book.

The book is holistic while its contributions are informative and analytical. Besides, the work provides a refreshing assurance that home-based scholars can fill the gap created by the dearth of perceptive books on political change in Nigeria. Because of this, the work constitutes an important addition to the list of books on Nigerian studies for readership within and outside Africa.

Be that as it may, it is unfortunate that such a well printed book that contains seminal articles is replete with a wide range of editorial errors, a few of which could be spotted in the following pages: 99 - Niger Delta; 120, 2nd line of paragraph 2 - “to” missing; 121 last line of paragraph 2 - comma to replace full stop; 129 2nd paragraph line 3, comma to replace full stop; 133 – incomplete sentence; 134 – persistence (“p” should be in small letter); 133; 146 line 29 – incomplete sentence; 156 2nd paragraph line 7 - section two instead Chapter 2; 159 2nd paragraph line 3 – colon; 175 line 2 – 1998 instead 998; etc. Furthermore, the write-up on conceptual issues in the contribution by Obi should have come before the discussion on the role of oil in the minority question.

In concluding, the author hopes that the editors will take care of the foregoing and other errors in the second printing of this extremely important book.
Drawing on the rational choice model, this book explores the manner in which managerial authority is delimited, but assumes that access to relevant information is imperfect; rationality is ‘bounded’. David Marsden argues that the modern firm is dependent on two great innovations, limited liability and the open-ended employment contract. The latter allows management flexibility regarding work assignments and provides a platform for investing in skills. However, there are limits to managerial authority in this regard. Invariably there is some clash with worker needs for protection. Moreover, whilst the employment contract is between individual firms and their employees, Marsden suggests that the solutions adopted by different firms and sets of workers are interdependent. As one form of employment relationship becomes common, it is in the interests of other firms and workers to move over to this model. This interlinkage between firms, and the support and stability provided by inter-firm institutions, means that the employment relationship forms part of a broader employment system. In addition, the effectiveness of contracts may be enhanced by collectivism, through combinations of employers and/or employees. Finally, any employment relationship model is likely to impact on a wide range of broader human resource management policies. Based on these assumptions, Marsden outlines his ‘theory of employment systems’, an institutional theory of HRM and labour markets, stressing the interdependence of firm-based practices.

After outlining the above assumptions in Chapter 1, Marsden next explores the limits to managerial authority - limits that make the employment relationship worthwhile to workers. He argues that there are four principal transaction rules limiting managerial authority over work assignments: those governing work posts (regulated by job description), job territory (task allocated by tools, materials and types of operation), competence ranking (stabilising task allocations) and qualifications. These rules provide some flexibility, but are sufficiently robust to underpin the employment contract. In other words, firms are entitled to have some expectations as to the amount and quality of labour power provided by those it hires, but these are circumscribed by the rules.

These themes are further developed in Chapter 3, where the author traces the emergence of such rules from an uncoordinated and decentralised system. This occurs owing to the fact that the two alternative methods for running the employment contract, extreme flexibility or ever more detailed job descriptions, are extremely unstable. Overly detailed descriptions become unwieldy, and obviate any of the room for manoeuvre that makes the employment contract worthwhile to both parties. On the other hand, extreme flexibility places a large burden on relations of trust. Consequently, most firms adopt a compromise position, allowing room for both specificity and diffuseness, deploying a framework of basic rules to provide stability. These rules may be created by firms and employees, or be assisted by labour market institutions and/or government intervention.

In chapter 4, the author looks at ‘classification rules and the consolidation of employment systems’. Here his argument is that job classification systems (dealing with job contents) also
impact on the demarcation of job boundaries. Job classification systems seek to make job contents clearer to both management and employees. However, invariably, the emphasis on certain attributes (such as skill) means that others are downplayed. Under certain circumstances, job classification systems may encompass an entire sector or national labour market; this provides a shared language readily intelligible to both employers and employees. This may be through formal sectoral classification agreements (e.g. France) or familiarity and convention (e.g. Britain). This underscores the point that transaction rules - whilst fully capable of diffusion on their own merits - are likely to be promoted through labour market institutions and the state.

The above chapters constitute Part I of this volume, which sketches out the basic elements of the ‘theory of employment systems’. Part II provides additional supporting evidence and ‘personnel management implications’. Chapter 6 gives some evidence of the societal diversity of employment systems. It seeks to demonstrate that the distribution of transaction rules within different countries mirrors that of the classification systems. This is done by assessing whether countries take a production or training approach to work allocation, and whether rules are task or function centred. He concludes that employment transaction rules ‘provide the key to understanding societal differences in the employment relationship’.

Further substance to the idea that firms are embedded within particular social and institutional contexts is provided in the following three chapters, which apply the theory of employment systems to three key functional areas of HRM. Chapter 6 deals with performance appraisal systems. The utility of predetermined performance evaluation criteria is greatly enhanced if it is shared between firms and organizations. In addition, wider transaction rules impact on the choice of such criteria. At the core of the managerial prerogative is performance management, yet it is limited by the prevailing transaction rules regulating the allocation of work.

Chapter 7 looks at pay and incentives. Although there is inevitable competition, this is transmitted through job classification systems. Stable co-operation depends on predetermined categories of labour and related price rules. Moreover, they provide the necessary information for the competitive process to function. Chapter 8 looks at skills and labour market structures. Marsden argues that the four basic transaction rules govern labour market structures and vice versa. However, the initial impulse is provided by whether firms use production or training approaches to work allocation. This is followed by a look at how the rules of employment systems extend to secondary labour markets, yet may prove relatively fragile in a low-trust environment.

Part III consists of a single chapter, the conclusion. Marsden begins with a caveat. Owing to reasons of space, method and evidence, the role of law and state training systems has been excluded. He argues that by excluding these factors it is possible to identify the basic rules governing labour markets, legal differences notwithstanding - an especially important task given the global trend to deregulating labour law. In any event, he argues that an emphasis on the law implies that it is somehow external to, and independent of, the free choices made by both employers and employees. In practice, Marsden suggests, employment systems constitute the basic institutional framework through which the employment contract is acted out in such a manner as to protect either party from opportunism by the other; even in an individualistic employment relationship there are strong pressures to conform to basic norms.

The value of this somewhat opaque account cannot be disputed. It provides an interesting alternative perspective on the role and importance of institutional regulation, starting at the level of the employment contract. However, there are a number of important limitations. Firstly, the author uses the term ‘rule’ far too loosely. At times it appears to denote not just transaction rules,
but a plethora of other norms, in a manner that can be bewildering to the reader. Secondly, there could have been room for an exciting synergy between the author’s own insights and business systems theory. Strangely, the author does not even refer to what has already become one the principal frameworks for analysing national variations in employment practices. Thirdly, the author glosses over the fundamentally unequal nature of the employment relationship. Workers may be impelled to enter or continue a ‘weak rule’ relationship in circumstances other than their choosing. The transaction costs imposed by protest either through ‘voice’ or ‘exit’ may be simply too great.


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Anyone who has ever observed the studio recording process of a popular music album will be very aware of the tedium involved in standing around while take after take is recorded: instrument after instrument, vocal after vocal, over and over until the producer is satisfied with the sounds captured on the mixing desk. The mixing itself is also a tedious process, as each component part of the music is played back again and again, involving numerous processes of technical fiddling, to be added to other similarly tweaked takes. The entire process culminates in the final sound. For anyone other than the technically minded this is a laborious and painstaking process. Louise Meintjes’s Sound of Africa! takes the reader into the heart of the studio and effectively captures the tedium of the recording process, page by page. This is not to say that the book is boring. It is an interesting ethnomusicological text filled with valuable debates. It would have been equally effective had she summarised her constant ‘takes’ and perhaps preserved the fuller versions in appendage form, allowing the reader to access the punchier discussion and arguments more readily in a less tortuous manner.

However, the strengths of the book should not be lost in the stylistic manner in which it is presented. It is commonly accepted that the notion of ‘authenticity’ is problematic in all areas of culture, and music is no exception. The value of Sound of Africa! is not so much that the overall argument is new but in the intricate way in which the author goes about deconstructing the notion of an ‘authentic popular music album’. She focuses in meticulous detail on the recording process of Isigqi Sesimanje’s 1992 album entitled Lomculo Unzima (This music is heavy/weighty/potent). The album was intended as an authentically Zulu product for both the local (South African) and, to a lesser extent, overseas (world music) market, and involved the construction of an ‘authentically’ Zulu sound. Meintjes very successfully chronicles the meaning-making process involved in the production of the album by exploring all aspects of the recording procedure. She demonstrates the multifaceted ways in which the idea of ‘Zuluness’ is negotiated and constructed by those involved in the production of the final product. The way she does this (repetition apart) is fascinating. By sitting in on the recording sessions she ‘eavesdrops’ on the music making process, and captures the quarrels, the joking and the experimentation integral to any recording
process. Through this exploration Meintjes provides invaluable insights into the complex multi-stranded process of constructing authenticity in the recording process. Specifically, she underscores the extent to which multiple versions of Zuluness are reproduced and mediated in the recording and packaging of the Isigqi Sesimanje album. This ranges from the use of the ngoma drum, the actual timbre of the drum, the poetics and narratives of the lyrics and the Mahlathini-style growling vocals to the Zulu costumes worn by the musicians in the album cover photographs and the performance of Zulu dancing in the group’s concerts.

Sociologists will be pleased that Meintjes’s analysis is not restricted to the studio. Influenced by Bakhtin’s dialogism, she works outward from the musical gestures within performed utterance to an analysis of their significance for the socio-political world. She entwines her narrative of the recording process with the socio-political context of South African and global society. For example, she provides a historical context for mbaqanga (although not in sufficient depth for my liking), explores the tensions of Inkatha-induced political-ethnic conflict of the time of recording (1991-1992) and considers the conflicting demands of the local and global ‘world music’ markets. In the process she stumbles across and interrogates various interesting contradictions, like the attempt by producer West Nkosi to construct an ‘authentic’ Zulu sound by approximating the sound and feel of 1970s mbaqanga albums, setting aside the technological and historical specificities of that particular constructed sonic moment. The numerous interesting insights and arguments presented in Sound of Africa! make it a worthwhile reference for ethnomusicologists and sociologists with an interest in debates about authenticity in popular music. However, it is probably best suited as a text to be ordered for university libraries. Only ethnomusicologists with a specific interest in the technological side of debates about the creation of musical authenticity ought to consider purchasing a personal copy of this book.