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# Review of Rice: Global Networks and New Histories, ed. by Francesca Bray, Peter A. Coclanis, Edda L. Fields-Black, and Dagmar Schäfer

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planting would increase water and moderate climate. By the 1930s and 1940s, it became apparent that these exotic trees were becoming invasive, they possibly used more water than native vegetation, and they encouraged more intense fires. A series of sectoral conflicts and events – notably the 1935 Empire Forestry Conference – prompted government officials and researchers to establish long-term research stations at Jonkershoek, outside of Stellenbosch. During the second half of the twentieth century researchers working for the forestry department and other research institutions used significant effort to understand the ecological dynamics of fire and trace the effects of exotic tree planting on hydrological regimes, in order to determine how and where to plant exotic trees. This research was implemented into an effective fire and invasive species management framework that was put in place from the late 1960s to the late 1980s before the decline of the apartheid government.

Pooley's study goes on to consider the socioeconomic drivers of fire while also investigating contemporary politics of fires in Cape Peninsula. His work uncovers continuities and changes from the period of white rule to the current multiracial democracy. His book provides excellent analysis, but he is cautious about offering any single conclusion about how to live with fire. He rightly emphasizes that fire has been part of the Cape for millions of years, and humans and fires have and will continue to interact together. We may need to look back on aspects of older policies – something Frederick Kruger and I have also argued – in order to improve existing conservation policies regarding fire, forestry, and invasive species in South Africa.

Readers leave the book wanting to know more about the history of fire in South Africa. Is the Cape example representative of wider trends in southern Africa, a fire prone region of the world? Pooley offers some tentative thoughts, but he also leaves the field open to further investigation. Pooley's work offers the new starting point for scholars studying fire, forestry, and invasive species in South Africa. It will become a standard reference for scientists working on fire in Mediterranean climates. Environmental historians will also point to it as a model study integrating science and environmental history.

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## RICE ACROSS CONTINENTS

*Rice: Global Networks and New Histories.*

Edited by Francesca Bray, Peter A. Coclanis, Edda L. Fields-Black, and Dagmar Schäfer.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. xxiv + 421. No price given, hardback (ISBN 978-1-107-04439-5).

doi:10.1017/S0021853717000251

**Key Words:** Rice, Africa, agriculture, environment, globalization.

The old continental and disciplinary demarcations of area studies have faded so much that an Africanist history journal can ask a Latin Americanist geographer to review a book about the emergence of global networks related to a crop mainly associated with Asia. The volume certainly counts as a multidisciplinary effort, the product of a 2011 workshop

on 'New Histories of Rice' that involved historians, plant geneticists, anthropologists, and linguists who variously specialize in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Those authors situate their research within diverse literatures: economic history, the history of science and technology, historical linguistics, development studies, crop biology, cultural geography and anthropology, area studies, and others. Some authors therefore focus on documentary sources but others on genes, languages, material culture items, and landscapes. Even a first scan through the resulting 15 chapters reveals one result: an eclectic mix of historic illustrations from archives interspersed with diagrams of phylogenetic relationships, choropleth maps, and graphs of rice production.

The editors somewhat limit the diversity of approaches by concentrating on the last five centuries, even though people domesticated rice some 10,000 years ago, because only during the colonial period did global networks become established through that link, for example, West Africa and the Americas. Moreover, although the chapters range across Asia, Africa, and the Americas, they mainly focus on West Africa, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the US South. Transoceanic connections also feature prominently in some chapters, especially between the Rice Coast of West Africa and North America.

To further tame the diversity of the contributions, the editors organize the 15 substantive chapters into 3 sections. The first treats the tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity, whether the relationship between the global hybrid varieties of the Green Revolution and thousands of local landraces, capital-intensive versus labor-intensive agriculture, or interactions between the standardization of production technologies and diverse consumer preferences. The second section emphasizes the environmental dimensions of rice cropping such as its role in mitigating the impact of drought on subsistence, methods of water control, diffusion of rice varieties, and diseases that afflict farming communities. The final section deals with social relations from slavery to households.

The result is an impressive collection of varied perspectives on the way we understand the emergence of rice as a global agricultural commodity, the staple for billions of people, and central to the identity of many cultures. Many of the chapters report fascinating new findings. For example, Hayden Smith provides a much-needed history of the establishment of inland rice plantations in colonial South Carolina, complementing the more thoroughly studied history of tidewater plantations. Walter Hawthorne stresses just how different the cultural meaning of work would have been in the eighteenth century among free laborers in the rice fields of Guinea-Bissau versus enslaved laborers on Brazilian rice plantations. And Edda Fields-Black explicates the use of historical linguistics in the reconstruction of geographic patterns of precolonial rice cropping across part of West Africa.

Combining such diverse chapters into something more than the sum of the parts remains somewhat beyond the scope of the volume. Francesca Bray provides a partial sketch of the global history of rice in the introduction, 'Global Networks and New Histories of Rice', which precedes the 15 chapters. Yet no conclusion follows those contributions to draw them together and demonstrate how each fits into shared 'global networks' or how the 'new histories' fit into a revisionary global narrative. Instead, each chapter remains an impressive, significant contribution to a regional literature, some even to a transregional, Atlantic history. Yet they do not merge into a global history of how rice, its producers, and its consumers were involved in the emergence of colonial and (post)colonial networks that span the world.

The volume nonetheless provides a solid foundation for such a project, theoretically, as well as substantively and methodologically. As Bray suggests, seemingly disparate ideas that have been central to particular regional and disciplinary literatures might provide the basis for a more global understanding of rice. For example, research that critiques the use of the model of agricultural involution to explain the contrast between the histories of Asian and European industrialization aligns with a broad intellectual movement to revise Eurocentric history. Similarly, research that demonstrates the creative involvement of West Africans in establishing rice plantations in the Americas similarly counters Eurocentric history. One object of global research that can bridge regional literatures, therefore, might be the Eurocentric history that became such a prominent cultural feature of the global social/natural networks that emerged to connect colonial Balinese farmsteads, Senegalese villages, and South Carolina slave plantations. Each place and its peoples engaged those networks through quite different means and modes of rice production, but only addressing all of them together, in relation to one another, will result in a more complete, less biased global history. And, as this volume makes clear, Africans will attain a prominent place in that history.

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## ANGOLA'S PAST

*A Short History of Modern Angola.*

By David Birmingham.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xvi + 159. \$29.95, hardback (ISBN 9780190271305).

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**Key Words:** Angola, Central Africa, colonialism, governance, national, postcolonial.

David Birmingham, eminent retired chair of modern history at the University of Kent and formerly on the staff at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, was among the first-generation creators of the modern historical study of Africa and has long mastered the art of the engagingly incisive short history. In this book, he returns to the land of his original research on *Trade and Conquest in Angola* (1966), after making insightful excursions for more than a half century into all of central Africa from the Iron Age to the Cold War, modern southern Africa, Portugal, the entire early Atlantic, Nkrumah's Ghana, Switzerland, and Canterbury before the Normans. This *Short History of Modern Angola* now constitutes the starting point for anyone, academic or otherwise, who wishes to be guided expertly through the labyrinthine events of Angola's thirty-year civil war (1975–2002) and to glimpse the excesses of the ruling kleptocrats of one of the world's recent petro-powers.

The parts of western Central Africa that became Angola (and beyond) have been distorted since the early 1600s through wave after wave of commodity exports. By the time Birmingham picks up the story around 1800, the region had been consumed by the