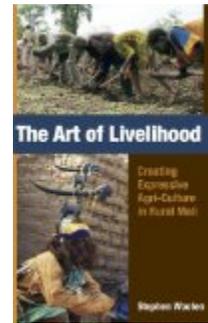


Stephen Wooten. *The Art of Livelihood: Creating Expressive Agri-Culture in Rural Mali*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2009. xxiii + 182 pp. \$30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-59460-731-8.

Reviewed by Pascal James Imperato (SUNY Downstate Medical Center)

Published on H-AfrArts (June, 2010)

Commissioned by Jean M. Borgatti



Farming on the Mande Plateau in Mali

This superbly researched and unique volume explores the intimate relationships between the agriculture-based economy and social and cultural traditions of a group of Mande villages in central Mali. Although these villages are only twenty kilometers from Bamako, Mali's capital, their location high up in rugged terrain that is difficult to access has significantly distanced them from some of the influences of the largest metropole in the country.

Stephen Wooten, who is a faculty member in the Departments of International Studies and Anthropology at the University of Oregon, conducted extensive field work in this area during several stays in Mali between 1992 and 2008. In this volume, he frames his in-depth exploration of Mande agrarian traditions within the contexts of continuity and change as modulated by two indigenous social constructs, *badenya* (mother-childness) and *fadenya* (father-childness). *Badenya*, which signifies people born of the same mother, fosters stability, constancy, and community action. *Fadenya*, which unifies people through parentage from the same father, but not necessarily from the same mother, promotes competition, individuality, creativity, and change. Wooten uses the example of the village of Niamakoroni to demonstrate the importance of *badenya* to village cohesion, harmony, and community building. Yet *fadenya* is always there, propelling change even in agricultural communities where farming is very much a *badenya* affair.

The roots of the differences in these principles relate to the fact that succession to power and assets is a

uniquely male process in which the oldest male member of the oldest generation inherits primacy over all others, including the sons of the last patriarch. This process creates serious tensions among some who perceive themselves as possibly disenfranchised from future successes by the traditional rules of an oligarchic gerontocracy. In addition, half brothers (usually the same father but different mothers), common in this polygamous society, more often tend toward rivalry than brothers born of the same parents. Such rivalries arise from affiliation with different matri-segments and a desire for future leadership. Many young Mande men have, in recent decades, resolved this dilemma by out-migration to the cash economies of the cities, the West African coast, Europe, and more recently, the United States. Wooten discusses *fadenya* in the context of a tension that leads to creativity in different domains, which results in change and which provides rewards and satisfactions to the initiators.

The penultimate chapter of the book examines the sculpted wooden *tyi wara* (*ciwara*) antelope headdresses, their use in agricultural celebrations, and their connection to *badenya* through continuity with previous practices and to *fadenya* through creative change. This analytic perspective of *tyi wara* is unique, and makes a very important new contribution to our knowledge of this tradition. The author provides a comprehensive review of past field research on this tradition, and based on performances in three different villages, examines the interaction of *badenya* and *fadenya* not only in the dance per-

formances but also in the sculptures themselves.

The Art of Livelihood provides a new and unique perspective on Mande farmers, contextualized in two soci-

ological constructs that play an important role in both maintaining continuity and engendering change. Meticulous in its scholarship, and textured with insightful analyses, it is a pleasure to read.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-afrarts>

Citation: Pascal James Imperato. Review of Wooten, Stephen, *The Art of Livelihood: Creating Expressive Agri-Culture in Rural Mali*. H-AfrArts, H-Net Reviews. June, 2010.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=30588>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.