

MILLET, RICE, PEANUTS: FUGITIVE FOODSCAPES AND FRENCH COLONIAL RULE IN RURAL SENEGAL

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This paper examines the dialectics of colonial governance in rural Senegal through the intersecting histories of millet, rice, and peanuts. If rice and peanuts are today staples of national cuisine in Senegal and integral parts of the country's culinary identity, this was not always the case. On the eve of colonization, rural societies in northern Senegal relied on millet subsistence farming, and rice and peanuts were ancillary crops. With the advent of colonial occupation, the regional economy was restructured around cash cropping, and peanuts became a primary instrument of economic government. Peanut agriculture was designed to compete with millet, thus severing farmers ties to mechanisms of food self-sufficiency, and fostering dependence on imperial markets. As the French were trying to promote complementariness between different parts of the empire, rice grown in Indochina started to flood Senegalese ports to feed urban laborers and rural populations, create new tastes and needs, while tightening the African countryside's reliance on imperial supply circuits. Using documentary and material archives, I track how transformations in Senegal's colonial agriculture and food economy re-contoured foodscapes in the small province of Siin. Specifically, I am interested in 1) the material work which these different crops performed, 2) how they alternatively assisted, complicated, and obstructed the operations of colonial rule, and 3) how they refashioned social dispositions and subjectivities in Siin's village communities. In this analysis, the African countryside emerges as a 'fugitive foodscape,' a terrain of colonial intervention that also foiled the dreams of colonial control.

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