

asbestos throws into question the politics with which we are most familiar' (p. 14). McCulloch thus interrogates the creation and spread of the knowledge of risk, what powerful decision-makers do with that information, and what happens when the problem is not merely an occupational threat but a public health and environmental issue as well. McCulloch's work reveals that concerns about both safe occupational environments and the rights of citizens to safe living spaces were important debates long before the modern environmental movement or the more recent environmental justice movement. Still, writes McCulloch, the knowledge by its very nature was muted: '... it suggested a nexus between work, the environment and cancer for which there were no precedents and no political orthodoxies' (p. 177). Asbestos was first mined in South Africa in 1892 but it took almost forty years before any research was carried out into asbestos, and it took another fifty years—that coincided with the decline of the industry—before the general public was alerted to the hazards of asbestos.

In many ways this book foreshadows the most current global environmental/health debates. It reveals the undeniable role of industry in shaping medical and scientific research, the complacency or outright support of state regulatory agencies in suppressing vital information, and the disproportionate vulnerability of the most disenfranchised peoples and communities. As McCulloch argues, '... knowledge about asbestos has always been political knowledge; it has been a contested area where capital and labour have fought on unequal terms' (p. 92). This can be said of any number of industries posing widespread occupational and environmental health risks. As a result, McCulloch's study would have benefited from theoretical work in the fields of environmental sociology, namely Allen Schnaiberg and Kenneth Gould, and Ulrich Beck's work on ecological politics and risk society. While undertheorised, *Asbestos Blues* is an impressive empirical work linking together fields of study that often, and mistakenly, are viewed as distinct.

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ANDREW BURTON (ed.), *The Urban Experience in Eastern Africa c.1750–2000*. Nairobi: British Institute in Eastern Africa (paperback KSh 1,600, £15.00, US\$24.00, ISBN 1 872566 26 X). 2002, 264 pp.

Burton's edited collection on the urban experience in Eastern Africa is above all a social history recording the appearance and fluctuating fortunes of urban settlements in the region. Spanning two hundred and fifty years of history, the authors probe a number of key questions: who were the early urbanites, why were they living in cities, how did their demographic and social composition change over time, and how have different social groups interacted with one another at different points?

Burton's introductory chapter is panoramic, focusing on where urban settlements first appeared and the locational differences between cities of pre-colonial and colonial origin. Clearly trade and transport networks were vital to the siting of both. The post-colonial spurt in urban growth relates to the removal of colonial constraints on urban migration, and women's growing presence in cities redressing the strong gender imbalance that had characterised the African populations of most cities in the region. While the opening chapter sketches some of the key historical trends, it fails to provide a clear definition of

urbanism. A footnote refers to the problem of defining a town as 'a complicated issue', vaguely mentioning the demographic significance of population size and density, and settlement permanency. Thus, the reader is led to believe that East African towns existed and were historically influential, but there is very little basis for gauging how extensive, how enduring and how influential. The chapters that follow are each intrinsically interesting, sometimes fascinating, but difficult to relate to one another given the variety of historical and spatial contexts, 'urban' subjects and analytical perspectives. Reading this collection, the sceptic may justifiably ask if there really has been an East African urban experience stretching over two and a half centuries of any significance.

The case study material presented in the body of the book provides ample room for doubt. If one adopts Giacomo Macola's definition of urban settlement as densely populated areas where one can find concentrations of transferable wealth, rigid administrative hierarchies and elaborate mechanisms of social control, and adds standard urban definitional criteria such as a relatively stable population living in a permanent location and involved in an elaborate social and technical division of labour, it is evident that East African 'urban' settlements were rarely bona fide. Some of the basic preconditions and features of urban life were missing. Macola's chapter dealing with the Central African royal capitals of Eastern Luanda in the first half of the nineteenth century documents their impressive appearance in an otherwise vast rural landscape. However, he stresses their fragility related to dependence on resources and food supplies from the surrounding rural hinterland as well as the vagaries of maintaining controls over trade routes in the face of rival power nodes. The rise and fall of such urban settlements amidst ruthless slave and ivory trading is graphically described as the 'ephemeral order of prosperity' engulfed by the 'untidiness of poverty'.

Richard Reid further elaborates the role of conflict arguing that war was an integral part of Bugandan and Abyssinian urban formation, influencing the level and type of urban settlements that arose in the late nineteenth century. Many Abyssinian cities during the nineteenth century were founded as defence sites, which supported large armies, placing a heavy and sometimes uncontrollable strain on urban stability and the productive base of the city and the surrounding agrarian population. The capital of Buganda lacked permanence, moving with successive royal reigns until the nineteenth century. Nearby Jinja was primarily a garrison town on the Bugandan frontier representing Bugandan territorial aspirations over the source of the Nile and beyond.

Besides the maintenance of physical security, minimum thresholds of economic activity and labour specialisation are requisite. Peter Waweru examines 'frontier urbanisation' in Kenya's desolate Samburu District, arguing that successive urban colonial administrative centres flopped as viable towns because of the area's lack of a flourishing market economy. By contrast nineteenth-century Zanzibar town under the Omani sultanate, as described by Abdul Sheriff, appears to have had more stability and more prosperity, at least for the merchants that dominated the city's economy up until the beginning of the British colonial period. James Giblin demonstrates how African entrepreneurs in Makambako in central Tanzania struggle with moral censure from fellow townspeople who view their profit pursuits as antithetical to the values of kin cooperation and barter exchange based on need.

Political order is pivotal. Burton reveals the equivocation of the British colonial state in relation to governance of the urban African population of Dar es Salaam, given that Africans were deemed to be rural dwellers, and hence 'away from home' in the urban areas. Neither direct nor indirect rule seemed to work in municipal government. Dave Hyde's chapter on the Nairobi General

Strike of 1950 similarly draws attention to weakness of colonial organisational structures and political control over the city's African population.

Minimum health and housing standards are also essential requirements. Milcah Amolo Achola considers the colonial policies towards urban health in Nairobi. The extremely low density housing of European settlers tended to occupy the higher healthy plateau areas whereas non-Africans were crowded into the more mosquito-infested lowlands, where fevers and poor health became a way of life. To add insult to injury Africans were blamed for bad sanitation and health practices that were believed to be the basis of their poorer health. David Anderson's chapter reinforces this picture of poor African living conditions in his analysis of the colonial government's housing policy in Nairobi. Municipal government funds were lavished on creating an impressive capital city while wantonly and often corruptly overlooking the housing needs of the expanding working class. Nairobi's now infamous shanty slums have their origin in these policies.

Above all, the lack of stability of the African urban population has been a major constraint and a main defining feature of what might be called East Africa's historically equivocal urbanisation. Tsuneo Yoshikuni examines Harare and the strength of pre-colonial agrarian-based traditions and identities that gave Shona culture an anti-urban character reinforced by the colonial government through its bachelor wage migration system. Shimelis Bonsa traces the gradual build-up of Kistane (Gurage) migration to Addis Ababa, demonstrating how it took a number of generations before its seasonal and circular migratory pattern gave way to permanent urban settlement.

Finally the last section of the book, highlighting Nairobi, reflects many of the above listed constraints to urban life. John Lonsdale points to the intrusion of rural politics, gender and generational divides into the fabric of Nairobi town life suggesting that it is no accident that rural political economy dominates urban social themes in East African literature to the present. The two chapters by Bodil Frederiksen and E. S. Atieno Odhiambo echo this, demonstrating how the impermanence of male residence in Nairobi and the near outlawing of women from urban areas during the colonial period pervades urban gender relations and stereotypes to this day.

Overall, this is a pleasing book with many intriguing black and white photos and maps interspersed in the text. The editor has done an excellent job in assembling a wide-ranging set of detailed empirical case studies that are extremely thought-provoking and well worth a read. However, the rather ephemeral history of East African towns combined with the book's absence of a framework for comparative analysis may leave some readers wondering: *when* is a settlement a town? Conflating the urbanisation process and urban outcomes can create considerable confusion.

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ROSALIND SHAW, *Memories of the Slave Trade: ritual and the historical imagination in Sierra Leone*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press (hard covers US\$52.00, £36.50, ISBN 0 226 75131 7; paperback US\$21.00, £15.00, ISBN 0 226 75132 5). 2002, 312 pp.

While Africanist anthropology and history are deeply indebted to each other, from time to time the two disciplines diverge over questions of methodology.