

Politics and the Urban Frontier: transformation and divergence in late urbanizing East Africa by TOM GOODFELLOW

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This important and ambitious book draws on the author's research in the cities of Addis Ababa, Kampala and Kigali over ten years. It breaks new ground for African studies, offering the first book-length comparative analysis of three East African cities through an interdisciplinary approach that draws on African studies, urban studies, development studies, human geography and sociology. The aim of the book is to show how, on this 'urban frontier' – the last major world region to urbanise – urban and developmental dynamics are structured by global, national and local histories and political economies. To do so it lays out an original and compelling analytical framework that builds on contemporary debates in African politics, urban studies and development studies that will be of great interest to readers looking for more political economic treatments of Africa's contemporary urban condition. Diversity across the region is key. The book does not aim to outline a monolithic regional urban experience, but rather seeks to explore why these three cities have fared differently in terms of urban planning, property, street trade and urban politics. This book will resonate beyond the East African region.

Goodfellow's ambition in this book is to nudge current research on urban Africa towards an account of the causal factors that can explain the similarities and differences among cities. Starting from a commitment to critical realism and an attention to scale, in the first two chapters Goodfellow builds an analytical framework that spans the factors that drive urbanisation in East Africa but which tend to operate on different scales. This allows Goodfellow to hold together global capitalism and regional urbanisation, both of which tend to produce similarities across Addis Ababa, Kampala and Kigali, while also paying attention to the more localised differences in how infrastructure and politics operate in the three cities. This leads him to develop a fourfold framework that takes into account the distribution of associational power, the pursuit of social legitimacy, the modalities of political informality and the legacies and practices of infrastructural reach. These first two chapters require the reader to pay close attention to the components of the book's analytical framework. The reward for doing so comes when it is applied to the comparative discussion of the three cities. Chapters three and four provide the global, regional and local contextual and historical material on land, territory and economy that paves the way for chapters five to eight which focus on Goodfellow's original research. These deal with urban visions and infrastructure, urban property, markets and street traders and urban politics respectively. Each chapter is comparatively organised across all three cities, which works as an effective mechanism for demonstrating the explanatory power of the analytical framework. Chapter nine reflects on politics on the East African urban frontier.

The chapter on property demonstrates particularly well the book's empirical and analytical strengths, showing how the global and regional context of what Goodfellow calls 'late urbanisation' – under-investment in urban infrastructure, rapid urban population growth and the recent relative over-investment in urban real estate – intersects with politics to generate quite different 'propertyscapes' in each city. Goodfellow contrasts the Ethiopian government's investment in mass

housing in Addis Ababa with the high-end ‘skeleton’ skyscrapers of Kigali and the ‘scramble for property’ in Kampala. These differences are explained with reference to the national distributions of power, strategies of urban legitimacy and extent of political informality in each city. The analysis does raise the question of the extent to which there is an overarching logic to the use of land and property in African cities, particularly among the urban majority. Nevertheless, Goodfellow’s analysis of high-end and large-scale property development offers the most sustained comparative treatment yet of the politics of land and property in urban Africa. This book is a landmark contribution to our understanding of the political economic dynamics shaping African cities.

CLAIRE MERCER

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We are not Starving: the struggle for food sovereignty in Ghana by JOEVA SEAN ROCK

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We are not Starving is a very easy-to-read and compelling ethnographic account of the controversies, contradictions and politics encompassing genetically modified organism (GMO) introduction and related policies such as the Plant Breeders Bill in Ghana. In the book, Rock discusses these political tensions within the frame of the contentious legacies of colonialism and state-making; multinational corporations and donors who are shaping the goal and discourse on biotechnology, patents and agricultural development; and the agency of local actors who are challenging the ‘benevolent’ donor-driven narratives and unsustainable GMO projects – many of which have failed anyways. Although I find the book’s title about food sovereignty not quite an adequate representation of its content, it is understandable since Ghana’s local food sovereignty movement has been instrumental in shaping the GMO debates.

The book shows how the persistent donor and state depiction of African and, for that matter, Ghanaian farmers, their food and culture as backward has been a common feature of slavery, colonialism and neoliberalism, thus highlighting the continuities of these eras. A significant theme in the book is external actors’ strategies to influence the policy environment for GMOs in Ghana. Here, Rock emphasises the communicative practices of pro-GMO brokers and boosters purposefully established by multinationals/donors and often housed in scientific institutions to promote the passage of biotechnology laws in the name of development. Amid the contestations and public doubts, activists hammer on these corporations’ commercial and private sector interests. Building on examples of contextually inappropriate and externally driven crop variety trials (rice) that failed, Rock extends the discussion on global power relations to patents and the anxiety of Ghanaian scientific researchers whose lack of resources affects their independence and extent of influence in biotechnology projects of which they are considered as partners with multinational corporations.

‘Our stomachs are being Colonised’ – a chapter heading in the book embodies the critique of civil society activism on the subject, notably from the Food Sovereignty Ghana, Ghana Association of Food Producers and the broader Food Sovereignty Platform. Without romanticising traditional farming, it reveals the