

BOOK REVIEWS

AFRICA - GENERAL

Carl Death. *The Green State in Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. vii + 366 pp. Acknowledgments. List of Abbreviations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$45.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-0300215830.

Definitions of what constitutes a green state vary among political and modernization theorists. In *The Green State in Africa*, Carl Death frames the green state as “one in which the governance of environmental issues has become central and is closely linked to core imperatives of survival, maintenance of domestic order, generation of finance, capital accumulation, and political legitimization” (10). Few Africanists engaging in scholarship outside of the realms of political science and international relations are familiar with the notion of a green state. Among the political scientists and international relations specialists who have participated in the emerging debates on green states, perhaps even fewer consider Africa as relevant to their studies. Death accomplishes a notable feat in this work by bringing these two fields of study together.

Although much of the book centers on the debates on green states taking place in the areas of political theory and international relations, Death organizes it in a way that Africanists as well as non-specialists will find accessible, engaging, and informative. His first chapter outlines the existing literature on states and global environmental politics. In addition to describing how scholars have engaged in a discourse on green states, he makes the case that previous scholarship not only reduces ecological governance in Africa to a bland homogenous generality but often also leaves African states out of the discussion altogether based on “a shared assumption... that there is little of interest taking place in the developing world with regard to environmental governance and state transformation” (29). He argues that nothing could be further from the truth and casts ecological modernization theories as “ill-suited to understanding and explaining the state in Africa” (44). This recognition helps him build the scaffolding for a new theoretical framework, which he outlines in the second chapter. Drawing inspiration from Foucault’s work on governmentality, Death posits that Africans’ practices of ecological governance

involve responses to environmental issues and challenges as diverse as the continent's populations.

Envisioning how African states engage in empirically identifiable micro-practices allows readers to see how Death's theory plays out on the ground in four subsequent chapters, each devoted to an important theme that sets African green states apart from others around the world. Namely, they address how Africans produce green land and territories; create new populations, including "green citizens"; develop new environmental markets; and engage in processes of cooperation and conflict that work to produce exemplary leaders alongside environmental laggards. Although different in scope, each chapter defines green states in Africa as contentious, highly differentiated, and heterogeneous. And while each chapter portrays "how certain types of people, citizens, populations, and subjectivities are variously constructed as problems or solutions, as good or bad," the political struggles that lie at the center of how green states respond to ecological challenges often lead to "environmental innovations and reforms" rarely recognized on a broader global landscape (112). The important contribution, which Death returns to in his final chapter, is a recognition of how Africans play active roles in initiating positive and revolutionary environmental changes.

Writing a book that crosses disciplinary boundaries represents a difficult task for any scholar. Nevertheless, Death's engagement with a broad base of literature, ranging from studies of an environmental African past to emerging political theories on green states, promises wide appeal. Africanists from a variety of disciplines will find this study useful for their research and pedagogy. People from wider-ranging scholarly circles outside of political science and international relations could certainly offer a list of publications that Death might have added to his bibliography, but his willingness to engage in and connect debates across disciplines should not be overlooked. Africanist humanities specialists may likewise find the theoretical underpinnings of the study a bit cumbersome at times, but the empirical scope of his thematic chapters makes an otherwise complex topic more easily comprehensible.

As a result, Death's study addresses notable gaps in the field of international relations while simultaneously offering a model for Africanists seeking to understand better how their colleagues can, and perhaps should, engage and learn from each other methodologically. Historians, anthropologists, and literature and film researchers, among others, will learn as much as if not more than the political scientists and international relations scholars more familiar with the dialogue on green states.

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