

BOOK REVIEW

Emily Brownell. *Gone to Ground: A History of Environment and Infrastructure in Dar es Salaam*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020. xi+266 pp. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$45.00. Cloth. ISBN: 9780822946113.

Emily Brownell's *Gone to Ground: A History of Environment and Infrastructure in Dar es Salaam* is a poignant demonstration of what a material perspective can lend to historical inquiry. Brownell's book explores the growth of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, amid socialist reform and global anxieties about cities by tracing the lived experiences of the city's residents through the lens of building materials, infrastructure, and fuel throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The book is a history of state planning made intimate, articulating the wealth of historical understanding to be gleaned from the mundane and revealing the everyday, improvisational agency urban dwellers had within larger state policies of disenfranchisement and neglect.

Brownell situates this book within the broader scholarships of colonial and postcolonial Africa, urban space, and environmental history, dynamically disrupting narratives that urban progression is linear. Rather than framing Dar as a failure, she reframes what "urban" looks like in Dar and how it involved complicated fluctuations between rural and urban strategies. Dar residents quite literally "go to ground," resisting colonial and socialist schemes to minimize African presence in cities, as they manipulate marginal and less regulated spaces to feed and shelter themselves through periods of scarcity.

The book is composed of six chapters; the first two provide historical and theoretical background, while the latter four are cleverly framed around different material realities of urban experience in East Africa. Chapter One unravels an ironic history of Dar es Salaam as it morphs from a golden hub of Pan-African resistance in the 1970s only to become marginalized within Nyerere's *ujamaa* vision of African socialism (which valorized rural agriculture as the path to an alternative African modernity). Even in a vacuum of state funding and guidance, people flocked to Dar and shaped the city dramatically through improvisation in the city peripheries. The second chapter addresses how urban belonging was influenced by colonial and postcolonial

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ideas about modernity. Citizens engaged in wage employment were permitted to use permanent house construction materials (i.e., concrete) to build in sanctioned middle-class enclaves, while those building in unplanned areas were forced to utilize impermanent materials. This policy made inevitable state seizure and compensation cheaper, although people in these informal, peripheral settlements had greater freedom to improvise subsistence (urban garden plots, livestock raising) and were ultimately better positioned to deal with the frequent food shortages.

The last four chapters use different material aspects of Dar urbanism—building materials, infrastructure, waste, food stuff, and fuel—to articulate the entanglement between belonging, nation-building, labor, and housing. Brownell explores the symbolism of building materials (concrete as “European soil” and brick as an African tradition) and the nuanced ways in which citizens negotiated global supply and national production through local improvisation. The book moves on to grapple with socialist anxieties about loitering and labor vs. citizen complaints about public transportation, poetically articulating “different temporalities of waiting for the bus, waiting for work, waiting for spare parts, and waiting for a particular future” (92); it elucidates the way people made their lives in the protracted “landscapes of deferral” (112) between state ambitions and reality. Brownell shows that while the state hypocritically sanctioned the pollution that was associated with state-sanctioned economic development and vilified household (and female) waste management, the hilly and prone-to-flooding Dar landscape hid productive possibilities for residents living in the urban margins. Finally, the last chapter explores local and sustainable charcoal production amid global oil crises and rising environmental concerns.

The most eloquent part of Brownell’s book is the way that she embraces the contradictory nature of these developmental realities. In this narrative, urban is rural, local is global, marginalization offers freedom, charcoal is possibility, and failure is fertile. Brownell’s urban residents actively negotiate and manipulate state policy and infrastructure failures, even as they are disenfranchised and neglected, shaping Dar’s urban landscape and history in markedly tangible and profound ways. This book will be of interest to a plethora of disciplines: history, anthropology, material culture studies, environmental history, urban studies, and African and development studies. It will be relevant particularly for those interested in Africa and cities of the Global South, but its lessons have broad implications for thinking about material culture, urban space, (post)colonialism, and globalism in general.

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