African Studies Review (2024), **67**: 2, 508–509

BOOK REVIEW

Antonio Alegretti, *Policy and Practice in Rural Tanzania: Grazing, Fishing and Farming at the Local-Global Interface*. Winwick, Cambridgeshire: White Horse Press, 2022. 208pp. Bibliography. Index. $82.04. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-912186-26-6.

This is a rich, well-researched and thought-provoking ethnography of the ways rural Tanzanians relate to markets, as pastoralists, fishermen, and cultivators. Its main message is one that bears and arguably needs repeating: rural people are not hide-bound by "tradition" and not in need of wholesale, technocratic, top-down "modernization"; they do not need to be taught "modern" ways to relate to markets. Rather, rural people have long used their social networks and cultural resources flexibly and creatively in order to seek access to markets on their own terms. The job of planners and experts is to support them, not boss them.

Alegretti collected his data in the course of working on a succession of development projects, thus as a deeply involved observer with whom project participants shared their aspirations and stratagems. It is evident that he learned much from practical interactions. His account starts with a perceptive exploration of the remarkable staying power of "the rural and traditional" versus "urban and modern" dichotomy, in the minds both of "rural" people and of the development experts tasked with making them more "modern." He is determinedly optimistic, writing from the belief that the planners and experts will change their ways if only they realize what skillful and creative actors rural people are in relation to markets.

In fact, the study shows very clearly that rural people overcome a great variety of disadvantages and creatively deploy cultural and material resources in order to enable themselves to seek profits in markets. Alegretti shows that notions of individual entrepreneurship, even if elaborated along lines derived from the neoliberal iteration of development discourse, have roots also in locally valid notions of personal growth and initiative. While they are in tension with collectivist ideas of community and tradition, they are not actively destructive of them, and the entrepreneurial men that the author spent much of his fieldwork time talking to show great skill in negotiating between individual and communal livelihood needs and aims.

In these negotiations, cultural categories described as traditional by their users are revalued and changed by people seeking livelihoods in their relations to markets, but they are also reasserted in the process. In a great variety of ways, rural people maintain and extol supposedly traditional values of solidarity and respect, expressed particularly through the, at times complicatedly hierarchical, sharing of food. An ironic aspect of this process is the tendency, noted in

different places, to ascribe a lack of appreciation for these values to "other people," that is, neighbouring ethnic groups.

Alegretti is explicit that he is seeking to avoid a "too-Foucauldian" approach. In other words, he avoids too-heavy a focus on development intervention as a form of governmentality; a means to expand the reach of state power especially in its more diffuse, subjectifying manifestations. Instead, he makes clear that the powers of developmental institutions are often quite limited, and their unexpected effects do not simply follow one or another logic of state power. His rural people are very much actors rather than acted-upon. This refusal to invoke an arguably over-revered patron saint is welcome. Nevertheless, there were moments in the book when I found myself wishing Alegretti had paid more attention to hierarchy and to the constraints and necessities (some of) his actors face, which after all don't have to be put in Foucauldian terms.

For example, in the discussion of fishing on Lake Victoria: how exactly does the pull of global markets outcompete local consumption needs? What are the uses of money that make selling fish more desirable than feeding one's own family with it? Is it simply the technological superiority of the international fisheries that enables them to outcompete local fishermen for catch? What role, in particular, do political institutions and processes play in disadvantaging the local fisheries? How can we further unpack the global–local dichotomy and the notions of community at play here?

The relative inattention to hierarchies and the disadvantages faced by some is perhaps the most visible in Alegretti's treatment of gender and women. He explicitly acknowledges the importance of attention to gender dynamics, and he offers some very welcome insight into how women negotiate their own needs for market participation on one hand, and the obligations of non-monetized, communal food distribution on the other. The discussion of the fine-grained politics of serving milk to different age groups and of diverting milk towards fermentation and sale at the expense of young men, for instance, is fascinating.

Elsewhere, though, Alegretti describes walking with a male plot owner, Baba Thomas, who praises himself as the driving force behind everything that grows on his plots—while nearby, a woman, not named, is doing the actual planting. The man, like many other men Alegretti has talked to, is cited at length, while the woman's brief comment on her planting technique is one of very few direct quotations from women in a book commendably rich in direct quotations. To be clear, the main issue is not one of representation, but of understanding domestic hierarchies and gendered disadvantages. The economic roles, choices, and constraints of women remain poorly understood while households are not treated fully as hierarchical and economic units. But this is a problem that this book shares with many, many others, and should not distract from its many merits.

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doi:10.1017/asr.2024.18