

can it also result from strong elite factions asserting themselves and – without this being the autocrat’s intent – transforming the legislature into an arena for elite bargaining?

MICHAELA COLLORD
University of Oxford

Seeing Like a Citizen: decolonization, development, and the making of Kenya, 1945–1980 by KARA MOSKOWITZ.

Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019. Pp. 336. \$80 (hbk) \$34.95 (pbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X20000440

Retracing the making of post-colonial Kenya through the eyes of its nationals, *Seeing Like a Citizen* analyses how and why Kenyan rural populations carved their own space of agency to interact with an increasingly distant, unpredictable and unreliable state. This book is not about politics at the margins, however. It explores the middle ground where ordinary citizens interact with local, regional, national and even international decision makers. Exploring central development issues (access to land, agricultural technology/industry, community development), Kara Moskowitz shows how ‘rural Kenyans contributed to the experimentations of the transitional moments, helping to shape Kenya’s political culture and political economy for years to come’ (231). While Kenya’s historians have shown that economic and political stability were achieved at the expense of development for all, Moskowitz’s approach opens up more complex debates about the nature of the post-colonial state, showing how perspectives from below and from the top interact with one another, and how rural populations’ experience of, and disappointment with, development policies shape their sense of belonging (citizenship) within an unaccountable state. The sense of citizenship appears profoundly varied, and uneven, precisely because it is constructed of highly personalised networks and experiences, which reinforce, in turn, a heightened form of territorial (ethno)politics.

Chapters 1 to 3 explore the intricacies of land settlement policies, as imagined by colonial and then post-colonial governments, and the way rural Kenya searched for the support of state, non-state and international actors. Against arguments about expansive post-colonial bureaucratic states, Moskowitz depicts chaotic, under-staffed and under-funded bureaucracies, whose defects family and personal networks tried to compensate. Yet, personal networks too were uncertain and further ‘engendered insecurities and tension’ (80) within rural communities, while obstructing the making of an inclusive nation. Though the landless and poor were never completely excluded from the state (since most continued to pay tax), land, agricultural and economic policies eventually distinguished between those worthy and those unworthy of state support. At no point does Moskowitz fall into a narrative of victimisation however – on the contrary, she notes that the most marginalised resorted to ‘more localized, less cosmopolitan political imaginaries’ (93) to exert their agency.

Chapters 4 to 6 further define the contours of what appeared to be a ‘state by proxy’ (118). On the one hand, Moskowitz shows how ‘government officials created a new site of state-building *outside* the state’ that never succeeded in providing reliable technical and financial support to the poorest population. On the other hand, she shows the extent to which, in times of crisis such as the 1964–1966 famine,

the government tapped into discourses around hard work, development and aid, to cover its sheer inability to provide basic protections to its citizens. The delegitimisation and distrust that followed forced citizens to carve new spaces for nation-building, debating community development schemes (self-help) and delineating new boundaries of citizenship. Analysing the makings of citizenship and showing that the search for empowerment was not only highly conflicting, violent and often fruitless, Moskowitz points to a central contradiction in the nature of the Kenyan post-colonial state: though it was decentralised, it was nonetheless characterised by 'interventionist institutions by proxy' (117). The last chapter (7) further explores this point, retracing the ways in which rural populations sent delegations to President Kenyatta, who was not only unaware of the intricacies of development politics but took decisions that further fuelled administrative and political chaos at every level of government and administration.

This highly informative book draws on an impressive number of both written and oral primary sources, to tell a history of economic exclusion and political silencing, from the perspective of those too often unseen and unheard. Drawing on archival documents from Kenya, Great Britain and the USA, Moskowitz combines state and non-state documents (excavating citizens' letters to Kenyan and American presidents and the latter's responses), local and global sources (ranging from Kenyan district commissioners' archives to the World Bank) and oral testimonies. Anyone familiar with the Kenya National Archives will have seen the huge files full of numerous letters of complaint addressed by landless or land-insecure citizens to various ministries. Moskowitz shows that though most of these letters remain unanswered, they constitute proof that Kenyan citizens' search for political, economic and social emancipation did not stop at the threshold of inaccessible state institutions. And the interviews (together with original portraits and photographs taken from various archival records) further shape a powerful narrative in which the poorest are no longer invisible and silent.

ANAÏS ANGELO
University of Vienna

A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the rise of the slave trade to the age of revolution by TOBY GREEN

Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pp. 640. \$40 (hbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X20000452

How did the opening of the Atlantic trade affect Africa? This has been a longstanding question in African historiography, certainly going back to the birth of today's scholarship on African history in the 1960s. And within the larger question, how specifically did the trade in slaves shape Africa? Toby Green enters into the long discussion with this extraordinary volume, the product of substantial research in both primary sources and the extensive secondary literature, highlighted with the deploying of some never before used texts from archives. At the same time, he draws on African oral traditions, some of which were published, others gleaned from archives of tradition and some collected directly by him in the field.

Green falls firmly in the camp, following Walter Rodney, Paul Lovejoy and Boubacar Barry, among many others, who maintain that the Atlantic trade was a