

## BOOK REVIEW

Kara Moskowitz. *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945–1980*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019. xvii + 322 pages. Illustrations. Acknowledgments. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$36.95. Paper. ISBN: 9780821423967.

The title of Kara Moskowitz's book, *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945–1980*, sets out a bold objective: to “see” not like a state, as in James Scott's groundbreaking study (*Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* [original publication in 1998; Yale 2020]), but rather like “a citizen.” This deceptively simple inversion requires a shift not only in perspective but moreover in the very actors motivating the recent revisionist histories of decolonization and development. Moskowitz sees the Kenyan state in its formative years from the perspective of ordinary Kenyans in the western district of Uasin Gishu. As development projects were “often internationally financed, state-led, and locally implemented” (5), Moskowitz adeptly weaves the actors at these multiple scales and their diverging pressures, priorities, and perspectives, from international organizations such as the World Bank and NGOs to Kenyan politicians and local technocrats. Moskowitz's gaze, however, remains firmly fixed on the “breadth of rural Kenyan experiences” (22): the hopes, desires, and labor of peasants, women, and squatters who become the “main targets of developmental interventions” (4) and the victims of its attendant corruption, mismanagement, and disaffections. These “ordinary” farmers, beautifully captured in a set of photographic portraits, flexed their “political acumen” as they petitioned presidents, innovated moral economies, and reinterpreted agricultural programs and land laws to gain political leverage and hold the state accountable to its new citizens.

The book contains seven chapters organized around a series of development projects that bridge the colonial/postcolonial divide. Chapters One through Three focus on the central axis around which Kenyan histories of development revolve: land, and its intersections with evolving notions of ethnicity, class, and gender. Constrained by the legacies of settler colonialism and fierce land competition among African polities, Moskowitz examines the Million Acre Scheme, agricultural initiatives for industrial production, and land resettlement programs. Poor planning, haphazard execution, and competing interests left many local communities lacking basic infrastructure and subject to the whims of an unpredictable state. Spotlighting three land settlements—Lumakanda, Sosiani, and Mautuma—allows Moskowitz to identify the varied stakes of such projects for local constituencies and the contestations they engendered. Chapter Three turns to the landless, women, and squatters who often lacked access to patronage

networks and more cosmopolitan avenues for social mobility as they navigated the complex landscape of land ownership and political exclusions that denied their participation as full citizens. Moskowitz demonstrates particular sensitivity to the interconnections among African women's familial desires, obligations, and land insecurities: as Nandi mother and peasant farmer Eunice Birir lamented, "where were my children and I going again?" (107).


Chapters Four and Five turn to agricultural projects that imposed cooperative models, extended colonial practices of state-controlled crop marketing, and exemplified inadequate state responses to drought and famine. These decentralized development projects led to the emergence of a bustling black market, particularly for maize. The maize crisis of 1964–66 brought these issues into sharp focus, as patronage networks and failures in state programs led to deep dissatisfaction and feelings of abandonment.

Finally, Chapters Six and Seven expand to development projects beyond land. Chapter Six interrogates the Kenyan state's promotion of *harambee*: communal "self-help" ideologies for community-based programs including healthcare, education, and rural infrastructure, especially roads. This chapter reveals the tensions between state promotions of fiscal autonomy, discipline, and honorable work, and local enthusiasm turned critique of state neglect. In Chapter Seven, Moskowitz examines the "Turbo Afforestation Scheme," a World Bank-funded project aimed at creating paper factories in Uasin Gishu. From its outset, squatters resisted the project, refusing to leave the forests, uprooting the trees intended to feed the paper industry, and demanding that President Kenyatta answer their pleas for protection. This final chapter offers a microcosm of the book's underlying preoccupations: high-modernist visions of development as understood, negotiated, resisted, and reimagined by everyday citizens.

As with many publications on Kenyan history over the past fifteen years, the book's conclusion brings these questions to bear on Kenya's neoliberal present and recent electoral politics. While convincing, this narrowly nationalist post-script misses the opportunity to explicitly extend Moskowitz's powerful insights beyond Kenya's borders. As its titular nod suggests, this book has much to contribute to scholars rethinking global orders of development, layered experiences of land and dispossession, and plural constructions of citizenship. The brief mention of the influence of Israeli models of communal development on Kenyan politicians hints at the book's wider connections and potential implications (122). Rich oral interviews and almost ethnographically embedded research allow Moskowitz to fulfill her ambition of "seeing like a citizen" and offer provocative readings from below. Uasin Gishu exists at a crossroads of ethnically diverse communities which engage in different livelihoods, rely on varied moral economies, and respond differently to state-imposed programs. This diverse yet relatively marginal landscape invites particularly nuanced and often conflicting claims to autochthony, "political subjectivities," and territorial projects, which Moskowitz handles with care (85).

Through exhaustive research and a sharp and inviting narrative style, Moskowitz breathes new life into debates over development, dependency, and the expectations of access to the "fruits" of independence. She convincingly challenges overdetermined high-modernist logics and Frederick Cooper's

foundational “gatekeeper” framework by refocusing on the agency, creativity, and strategies of diverse rural peasants. This book provides a necessary corrective and innovative perspective for the study of decolonization, development, and dependency from the bottom up as much as from the top down.

Julie MacArthur   
University of Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario  
[julie.macarthur@utoronto.ca](mailto:julie.macarthur@utoronto.ca)  
[doi:10.1017/asr.2024.7](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2024.7)