

As he charts Eastleigh's overlapping social, ethnic and economic maps, Carrier zooms in and out of the neighbourhood, interspersing the description of broader dynamics with the individual experience of Somali refugees and diasporas lured in by the 'Eastleigh dream'. What emerges is the description of an urban space actively shaped by the often conflictive interaction of policymakers' and residents' visions of the neighbourhood.

This book is a useful reminder that the reality of displacement, particularly with reference to the protracted Somali crisis, is multifaceted and animated by both needs and aspirations that translate into, and thrive upon, material infrastructures. It also offers a refreshing contribution to the literature on transnationalism, which too often emphasizes the significance of flows while forgetting that of locality and permanence.

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Alex de Waal, *Mass Starvation: the history and future of famine*. Cambridge: Polity Press (hb £55 – 978 1 5095 2466 2; pb £16.99 – 978 1 5095 2467 9). 2018, xiv + 260 pp.

Alex de Waal's *Mass Starvation* argues that 'better politics have led to fewer famines' (p. 172) and shows that famines have become rarer, and that relatively few people now die in them. Humanitarian and public health efforts have helped, but most important, the book argues, has been (p. 6) 'the decline of megalomania and of political attitudes that regard people as dispensable'. Nazi Germany's 'Hunger Plan' to depopulate the Soviet Union is seen as archetypal of famine as a mass political crime, but the book identifies many others.

De Waal divides the history of famines into those of: (1) European colonialism; (2) the period 1914–50; (3) 'post-colonial totalitarianism' (including the 1958–62 famine in China); and (4) crises since 1986, mostly associated with conflict. The last group includes smaller 'new atrocity' famines in Uganda, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, South Sudan and Nigeria. The recent absence of famine from Ethiopia, despite considerable population growth, is given a chapter. It might be questioned whether some of the events discussed – such as Japan's treatment of war prisoners – are best described as 'famine'.

It is hard to disagree with de Waal's claim that the recent 'near eclipse' of famine owes much to political progress – in the broad direction of democratization. He discusses Amartya Sen's point that famines do not arise in democracies. He also acknowledges that famines are often multi-causal, that non-political factors can be involved, and that in certain respects population increase can be problematic. Nevertheless, apropos some crises, he arguably gives insufficient weight to non-political factors some of which are outlined below. In explaining the recent decrease of famines, there is inadequate discussion of progress in infrastructure, communications and mass education. The book would have been helped by a list of acronyms and the endnotes often contain little comment or substantiation. Finally, criticized views are sometimes portrayed in over-simple terms. It is partly a campaigning book; excellent in places, elsewhere frustrating.

First, a specific point. De Waal refers (p. 80) to the exceptional famine that led to 'the doubling of child mortality in Iraq in the 1990s, due to the havoc caused by the first Gulf War, the international sanctions regime and the policies of Saddam Hussein'. He exhibits some caution about the exact number of deaths.

Nevertheless, besides the question of whether these events are best described as 'famine', there is compelling evidence that child mortality did not increase hugely in Iraq in the 1990s. The idea that it did results from a deception.

Second, de Waal states (p. 48) that Sen in his book *Poverty and Famines* 'showed empirically' that several famines (Bengal 1943–44, Ethiopia 1973, Bangladesh 1974–75) occurred without food availability declines (FADs). He mentions Sen's critic, Peter Bowbrick, as having attempted to show that FADs caused famines. But this is an inadequate account of the criticisms of Sen, especially when it comes to Bengal. Among others, the writings of S. Y. Padmanabhan and Mark Tauger merit mention. As I have noted, while they are far from being complete explanations, FADs were probably involved in all five famines analysed in Sen's book.

Third, de Waal devotes a chapter to what he calls 'Malthus's zombie' – the idea that 'overpopulation' causes famine. He admonishes Malthus (p. 42) for not 'at least trying to slay the zombie he had brought forth'. Among several writers regarded as tainted by the 'zombie', David Attenborough is criticized for what appears a casual remark about Ethiopia (p. 46). However, the chapter's treatment of population is patchy. Malthus's description of famine as 'inevitable' was highly qualified; it was not a simple 'prophecy'. Many economists consider that, other things being equal, rapid population growth is a significant factor keeping people in poverty. If famines have disappeared from Ethiopia, they may have done so on a firmer basis if population growth had been lower (moreover, the country's government has tried with some success to reduce the birth rate). There is also much research linking rapid population growth with socio-political instability (consider Uganda, Somalia, Yemen, etc.). Conversely, there is also much research relating the demographic correlates of slowing population growth to the promotion of democracy. De Waal might have paid more attention to this literature.

Finally, there is the threat of climate change – addressed in a chapter with the indicative title 'The famine that isn't coming'. Rightly, de Waal states (p. 169) that 'we have every reason to be extremely worried'. He discusses how climate change may raise food insecurities for vulnerable people. Nonetheless, he considers (p. 172) that 'the risk of these insecurities turning into famine will depend on political decisions'. As elsewhere in the book, the near deterministic stress that is ultimately placed on politics almost runs the risk of tautology. However, major famines have occurred, and in the longer-term future they may recur, to some degree unrelated to political factors (although politics is certainly important). Although it tends to be avoided in mainstream academic circles, many climate scientists believe that humanity is already past the stage at which dangerous climate change can be avoided. The level of atmospheric CO₂ is rising relentlessly and by increasing amounts. In that context, and despite all of the rhetoric to the contrary, politics is proving itself utterly ineffectual. While the future is uncertain, if there is indeed really major – possibly abrupt – climate change later in this century or the next, it may well have proved wrong to have concluded that famine isn't coming.

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