

**Kara Moskowitz.** *Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945-1980.* New African Histories Series. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019. Illustrations. 336 pp. \$36.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8214-2396-7.



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“Kenya’s postcolonial state was neither a monolithic nor a monopolistic institution,” writes Kara Moskowitz in *Seeing Like a Citizen* (p. 231). Indeed, throughout her well-researched and impeccably written monograph, Moskowitz challenges the widely accepted notion of the gatekeeper state by showing how a diverse set of rural actors were able to contest, transform, and imagine what development and citizenship constituted for themselves in early independent Kenya. By focusing on the ways rural Kenyans were able to shape the process of development during the 1960s and 1970s, the book reveals the limitations of the newly independent nation-state and widens the discussion about statecraft in modern Africa to include the non-elite majority. *Seeing Like a Citizen* therefore offers readers a more complex narrative of the history of development and the nature of postcolonial citizenship in sub-Saharan Africa during the mid-twentieth century—a period of great political, social, and economic upheaval for the continent and the world.

In seven chapters, *Seeing Like a Citizen* shows how development programs and political practices were often contested and remade in local settings. More importantly, each chapter underscores the ways rural Kenyans influenced the political, social, and economic development of modern Africa. Chapters 1 through 3 focus on a state-sponsored and internationally financed development initiative known as the Million Acre Scheme, an ambitious resettlement program that aimed to address Kenya’s land problem by providing consolidated and planned farm units to close to half a million Kenyans. The creation of farming cooperatives and the impact they had on rural Kenyans’ construction of citizenship is the topic of chapter 4. The contentious relationship between Kenyan citizen farmers and state actors who disagreed over their respective obligations toward one another was made more pronounced during the maize crises of 1964-66, which is the focus of chapter 5. While still set in rural Kenya, chapters 6 and 7 explore the *harambee* (Swahili: pulling together) movement and the building of a contested paper

factory in the Turbo region of Uasin Gishu District, respectively. Taken together, the seven chapters reveal how the development programs of the decolonization and early independence eras were transformed by rural people who pushed back against an inadequate and inconsistent state because they were determined to define for themselves what it meant to be a citizen in postcolonial Kenya.

Rather than a strict chronological order, the book is organized around thematic case studies. The politics of land and agricultural development are the two central themes throughout the book. This emphasis makes sense given that land and farming both play an important role in Kenya's political economy and underpin rural politics and livelihoods. The first five chapters, for example, are in-depth explorations into the land settlement programs and agrarian initiatives of the decolonizing era, which development planners and state actors hoped would eventually improve the material conditions of the vast majority of new African citizens who resided mainly in rural settings. In committing a large portion of the book to analyzing these types of schemes, Moskowitz offers a richer account of the developmentalist project as it unfolded in local settings and affected the lives of average people who were both objects and agents of developmental change.

The non-elites profiled by Moskowitz reside mainly in what is present-day Uasin Gishu County located in Kenya's western highlands. Uasin Gishu historically has been home to a number of the country's main ethnic communities, such as the Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, and Kisii. This diverse and rural setting is an ideal locality for Moskowitz to focus her study as she is interested in how the "pluralist identities of ordinary Kenyans" shaped the outcome of development and citizenship making during the early independence era (p. 14). Uasin Gishu's multiethnic makeup resulted from successive migrations that began in the pre-colonial period and continued throughout the

postcolonial era. The successive migrations, as Moskowitz reveals throughout the body of the book, brought into the region various groups of Africans and European settlers whose competing identities and desire for land profoundly shaped how they responded to and made sense of the development initiatives as Kenyan citizens.

Moreover, the significant attention Moskowitz devotes to exploring the relationship between land and development shows her adherence to foregrounding the experiences of many poor Kenyans in the postcolonial era. Land scarcity was (and continues to be) a major issue Kenyans faced at the eve of colonial independence. Land-hunger and landlessness were especially acute problems for a number of rural western Kenyan residents, particularly for the women and squatters with whom Moskowitz spoke and whose life histories she prominently features throughout chapter 3. Although Kenya's land problem was not unique at the time, the resettlement programs adopted by the late colonial and subsequent Kenyatta administration as a means to address the land-hunger and landlessness endured by the majority of the population were the first of its kind. In three detailed chapters, Moskowitz elucidates the convoluted history of Kenya's ambitious resettlement program and makes plain how the land development program of this era, which was envisioned mainly by international agents and carried out by local authorities, produced inequalities that continue to threaten contemporary Kenyan society. Moskowitz's book is therefore a must read for individuals interested in a thorough discussion of the impact that land reform initiatives have had on ordinary citizens, particularly those in the early postcolonial world.

The book's notes and bibliography reflect the work of a meticulous historian: a scholar who is keen on making legible to her readers the bureaucracy of statecraft and the intricacies of the decolonizing development programs as they were conceived by policymakers in places like Nairobi,

Washington DC, and Geneva. Moskowitz's rich oral histories, conducted with 111 Kenyans at eight rural sites, however, are the heart of the book. They represent the commitment and tremendous effort on the part of the author to bring to the fore the experiences of a diverse set of rural actors whose actions, expectations, networks, and political philosophies influenced development projects at the local, national, and international levels.

Analyzing the lived experiences of ordinary Kenyans also allowed Moskowitz a glimpse of the realities and challenges faced by the majority of new citizens as they adjusted to the shifting political scene and determined for themselves what it meant to live in a "free" Kenya. Citizenship, in the context of early postcolonial Kenya, according to Moskowitz, was fundamentally "a product of compromise" made between state actors, international developmentalists, and the people, especially individuals residing in rural spaces (p. 233). The book, in other words, provides a more intimate and complicated portrayal of the construction and negotiations over citizenship (and rights) taking place among the entire body politic within the newly independent African nation-states throughout the early postcolonial era. Accordingly, it builds on the existing literature on citizenship and decolonization that has yet to pay much attention to the fact that individuals who were far removed from the centers of politics and power were very much invested in defining their new political identities and, by extension, to protecting their rights and claims to resources. *Seeing Like a Citizen* is therefore a powerful contribution to the discussion on decolonization and development in the early postcolonial world. It will be of interest to any scholar interested in deepening their knowledge of development, statecraft, and citizenship.

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