



Megan A. Styles. *Roses from Kenya: Labor, Environment, and the Global Trade in Cut Flowers.* Culture, Place, and Nature Series. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019. Illustrations, map, charts. 256 pp. \$95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-295-74651-7.

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Megan Styles has written an anthropology of place based on the export cut-flower industry in Naivasha, Kenya. In her analysis, place stands for the center of a web that connects mostly foreign-owned factory farms producing flowers to grace the tables of Europeans; the descendants of the Maa-speaking communities displaced first by white settlers and then by the farms; the workers who have come from all over Kenya to labor in them; the Kenyan professionals and skilled workers who make up the middle class in this enterprise and have their own connections of politics and patronage linking them to both workers and broader Kenyan circles; and the whites, both expatriot and Kenyan, who own and control the industry. While she locates this nexus within the geographic and environmental confines of Naivasha, hers is not a history of a landscape but a study of the social, political, and economic interactions that have for a time created Naivasha as a “nerve center” in local, national, and global networks.

Styles frames her work around the anthropology of place as a social construction. She highlights the export cut-flower industry that grew up in Naivasha as a nexus of potential that drew capital and workers from Kenya and the world. Styles situates the development of the industry in the

neoliberal moment that began in the 1980s in Africa. Chapter 1 seeks to physically situate the place that came to house this nexus. Ironically, this chapter represents perhaps the weakest part of her argument. In a work centered around the concept of place, the landscape of Naivasha remains ascribed, not described. Rather than being integrated as an actor, as in the best environmental scholarship, the landscape in this chapter remains a captive of the human forces acting on it, from Maa-speaking pastoralists to white settlers to flower entrepreneurs to the communal politics of postcolonial Kenya. The 2007 postelection violence that shook Kenya took place during her fieldwork. Famously, some its most deadly outbreaks took place among the workers’ settlements around Naivasha. Styles’ analysis of the conflicts is circumspect.

From there, Styles moves to firmer ground when she locates four distinct groups or institutions drawn to and linked with the nexus of flowers in Naivasha. She analyzes in turn what has drawn workers, middle-class Kenyan professionals, the state and its functionaries, and white farm managers, both Kenyan and expatriate, to Naivasha. For workers, the lure of flowers is the opportunity to gain access to resources through wage employment. Styles illustrates the way many

workers remained linked to a home place where any resources accessed go to build ties in home communities and provide education for children. She shows how solidarity as workers vies with communal ties and patronage networks to make life survivable while also placing limits on aspirations. She also situates Black Kenyan members of the middle class inside patronage networks, which are sometimes overtly political but at others linked internationally to professional, NGO, corporate, and governmental networks. For both workers and the Kenyan middle class, life remains “slippery” in Naivasha.

Styles then analyzes the “government” as a separate actor and conflates within that section an analysis of the Kenyan state, corporate interests, and public pressure, primarily in Europe, to ensure that products sold in Europe were produced “ethically.” She situates state and corporate action as transitioning from a “rollback,” or destructive phase of neoliberalism that sought to dismantle economic controls seen as hindering capitalist productivity, to a “rollout,” or creative phase that sees corporate interests partner with the state to achieve goals such as ensuring enough water in Naivasha to continue to produce flowers and mandating at least minimal standards for working conditions, the latter goal often phrased as ensuring that all producers, large and small, face the same conditions. Styles finally turns to the networks of whites, both Kenyan and expatriate, that work in the farms. She notes the existence of occasional animosity between the two groups, as both seek in different ways to find or maintain a sense of belonging in postcolonial Kenya. For expatriates, this effort means defining themselves as playing a role in the development of Kenya as a modern economy. For white Kenyan citizens, it means claiming a particular tie to the land, especially in Naivasha as formerly part of the White Highlands, that in many ways they privilege as stronger and deeper than even those of the African communities displaced for white settlement at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Styles has produced an insightful work filled with evocative analysis. She shows the links stretching from the homes of the workers across Kenya to supermarkets in urban centers in Europe, from the halls of power in Nairobi to the stock exchanges in Amsterdam, to the shores of the lake. Styles shows how these links create a place, at least for a while. The final insight of the work lies in the transitory nature of the nexus she describes. Commercial flower farming in Kenya and Naivasha developed relatively recently and has already seen changes in the source of its capital as more comes from the developing economies

of Asian, and is perhaps being challenged by geothermal energy as the most important way to exploit the resources of the area. The very nexus she analyzes may be as slippery as its denizens describe their place in it.

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