

## BOOK REVIEW

Kathy Dodworth. *Legitimation as Political Practice: Crafting Everyday Authority in Tanzania*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022. xxiv + 258 pp. \$99. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781316516515. eBook. ISBN: 9781009035170

Kathy Dodworth provides an erudite portrait, with implications far beyond its narrow case study, of the way non-governmental organizations (NGOs) intersect with the local operation of the state in the coastal region surrounding Bagamoyo, Tanzania. Once an isolated historic village, the completion of a paved road from the commercial capital Dar es Salaam, 60 km away, has made it an accessible tourist destination and commuter corridor. Dodworth spent a year in residence, observing, interviewing, and accompanying Tanzanian employees of six NGOs working in the district, but her analysis focuses on four of them operating in the public health sector. With a well-theorized analysis of legitimation practices, she succeeds in documenting the ways in which NGOs in Tanzania have become an integral aspect of governance itself, not merely institutional expressions of civil society. She undermines normative assumptions about sovereignty with a new conceptualization of governance as an institutional complex co-produced with notionally non-governmental institutions with exogenous funding.

“Legitimation ... is an iterative process” she states, “the everyday crafting of authority and of reproducing that authority once in place” (13). Such legitimation is not merely the province of the state, as NGOs are integral to this crafting of “the space in which to govern” (16). She approaches this process in terms derived from Bourdieu’s pioneering theory of practice, as “an accumulative process of claim-making that is negotiated and contested in the everyday” (37). There may be downsides to her refreshing decision to forgo extensive reflexivity in her analysis, but it allows her to focus on NGO practices in Africa, and on the subjectivity of the local staff and volunteers who interact most directly with the government officers and members of the communities they serve.

Her clearly defined theoretical approaches organize and give form to her five substantive chapters. The concise introduction summarizes the first two chapters and as such, the prefatory material might have been condensed. Nonetheless, Chapter One is an impressive review of relevant literature and theory, and Chapter Two is a well-stated account of her research and orientation towards practice. Chapter Three opens her substantive analysis with an application of David Held’s (1999) theory of spatial and temporal “extensity,” which is plucked from international relations and here applied to apt effect at the micro level. Chapter Four is central to her thesis in that it dissolves what Christian Lund

(2006) called the “profound mental template” in the social science distinction of state and society by observing the “lateral relations” of state institutions and NGOs. “Thus, the study of NGOs is not at the expense of state scholarship but in fact is indicative of how the two are intertwined” (92). I found Chapter Five particularly refreshing in its focus on long-term local volunteers working ostensibly under the same organizational auspices as short-term international “volunteers.” She highlights the way that “voluntarism has proven a resilient template of public action in Tanzania,” from memories of traditional communal labor to postcolonial “self-reliance,” providing a “heavily enforced normative framework” (119). Here we find local volunteers at once sincerely motivated by community service while also questioning the terms of their labor and its beneficiaries. Chapter Six provides a meditation on “representation” in Anna Holzscheiter’s (2016) definition as a “dialectic of performative practices between representatives and their real or imagined constituencies.” Specifically, representation allows her to address the nested identities at work here in internationally funded NGOs managed by a mix of well-educated Tanzanian and foreign administrators, each bearing a variety of subconscious prejudices, overseeing local staff recruited from the communities they serve. These local staff are at the bottom of the NGOs’ financial infrastructure, and their benefits are clearly not commensurate with their tasks, nor their importance to the entire process of legitimation for NGOs and government alike. Chapter Seven wraps up this analysis with a critique of NGO-produced data itself “as invocations of authority” that illuminate the “power asymmetries between NGOs and the extractive reporting pressures as exercised from ‘above’, chiefly donors” (171–72). In Tanzania, such data collection/production is mediated by an umbrella organization closely attuned to donor fads. Such intermediation draws attention to the neocolonial leverage entailed in social statistics. The imposition of a governmental monopoly over “statistics” by President John Magufuli was internationally condemned as dictatorial COVID-19 denialism, and perhaps it was. But Dodworth’s analysis suggests that a claim to sovereignty was also at stake.

One important limitation of her study is in her conscious decision to delimit her scope to the activity of six pseudonymous NGOs. Although her use of pseudonyms throughout is ethically proper, it also distills her material into mere evidence for the theoretical framework that is the book’s main intellectual contribution. The superstructure of foreign funding and agenda-setting goes unanalyzed here, as well as the political stakes of “rapid infrastructural development” (99) when Bagamoyo was also the home constituency of the president of Tanzania, Jakaya Kikwete, who makes only a brief appearance when he berates the District Commissioner over an embarrassing exposé of an underfunded primary school partly produced by one of the NGOs for national TV (184).

Nonetheless, to dismiss this as a restatement of a civil society thesis dating back decades would be to miss her point that “the conflation of descriptive and normative accounts” (16) of civil society not only obfuscates analysis, but

contributes to the often inept efforts of international aid and its neocolonial legitimization.

Paul Bjerk   
Texas Tech University, Lubbock, USA  
[paul.bjerk@ttu.edu](mailto:paul.bjerk@ttu.edu)

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