

SCHOLARLY REVIEW ESSAY

Dynamics of Land Governance, Extractivism, Urban Tech and Waste Infrastructures, and the Everyday State in Contemporary Africa

Laura A. German. *Power/Knowledge/Land: Contested Ontologies of Land and Its Governance in Africa*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2022. 333 pp. Figures. Maps. Notes. References. Index. \$90.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0-472-07533-1.

Omolade Adunbi. *Enclaves of Exception: Special Economic Zones and Extractive Practices in Nigeria*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022. 252 pp. Figures. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$30. Paper. ISBN: 978-0253059574.

Jonathan Silver. *The Infrastructural South: Techno-Environments of the Third Wave of Urbanization*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023. 330 pp. Maps. Notes. References. Index. \$50. Paper. ISBN: 9780262546874.

Brenda Chalfin. *Waste Works: Vital Politics in Urban Ghana*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023. 376 pp. List of Illustrations. Notes. References. Index. Maps. \$29.95. Paper. ISBN: 9781478019589.

Wale Adebaniwi, ed. *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa: Ethnographic Encounters*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2022. 450 pp. Notes. References. Index. \$39.95. Paper. ISBN: 9780821424902.

In the development discourse, there has been a tendency to frame the Global South, especially Africa, as a perpetual recipient of ideas from the Global North. This has led to the implementing of “development” initiatives based on the unsuccessful modernization paradigm and the associated Washington Consensus. Despite the emergence of counter theories such as dependency and under-development theories, they share similar assumptions with the modernization paradigm. These assumptions include the belief that historical change brings development or progress, the sidelining of noneconomic factors like ethnicity, race, and gender, and the sole emphasis on economic growth as a measure of development. Both models assume that the state should primarily drive advancement. To address the weaknesses of these development models, alternative perspectives such as women and development, women in development, and gender and development were introduced. However, these perspectives would be integrated into the mainstream development discourse, diluting their impact.

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The formation of a critical development perspective, based on poststructural and postmodernist thought, provided a strong critique of conventional development theories. This is because it encompasses critical feminist, postdevelopment, and postcolonial theories, which underscore the interconnectedness of race, ethnicity, and gender with power and inequality structures on local, national, and international levels. They also emphasize the socially constructed nature of gender relations and the neglect of ethnic and racial issues. Post-development theories argue that the language and practice of development are linked to a Euro–North American hegemonic project, which, due to its failure to achieve its vision, has become a hindrance to the communities it purportedly aims to assist.

In today's Africa, these postdevelopment perspectives are vital for understanding prevailing “development” conditions, as evidenced by scholarly works. Nonetheless, many contemporary African political leaders and their foreign partners continue to pursue projects grounded in the discredited modernization paradigm. There are, for example, the modernization-paradigm-inspired import substitution policies, which, in Africa, destroyed agriculture by destroying the state institutions that guided agricultural growth and eliminating the assistance that farmers had hitherto received.

Even where a postdevelopment model underpins the “development” initiative, the evidence on the ground fails to stack up in support of the postdevelopmental claims of such programs. As a result, development in the Global South and Africa in particular has proceeded mostly on a hybrid framework of both developmental and postdevelopmental dimensions. The books examined in this review study some of these initiatives as obtainable in the African context. The following five books reviewed here discuss various aspects of development in terms of land governance, extractive practices, tech infrastructures, urban waste, and the everyday state in contemporary Africa.

In *Power/Knowledge/Land: Contested Ontologies of Land and Its Governance in Africa*, Laura A. German partly utilizes ethnographic data to examine land governance regimes in Africa as well as the ontologies that underpin the practice. Against the backdrop of the 2007 outrage over worldwide land grabs and the redirected energies of activists “to garner support for land titling and procedural forms of rights recognition” (3), German examines the consolidation of land governance orthodoxy in Africa with a particular emphasis on rights, tenure security, and women's empowerment. To effect this consolidation of land governance orthodoxy, progressive terminologies were reappropriated by Global capitalism and weaponized to obscure the connection between these strategies, the privatization of land, and foreign interests in Africa's agricultural resources. The coloniality of the Eurocentric project that purports to improve Africa's land governance is highlighted in the book, as it portrays land as something to be secured and individualized rather than defending the rights of the impoverished farmers and land users in rural areas to steward their lands based on their autochthonous ontologies.

The neoliberal push for safe land access for investors and multinational investment, which has been the main cause of land loss and the increasing insecurity of land and livelihood in Africa, has progressively and strangely received little attention in the development discourse. However, German's three-part book intervenes per the positionality that regards anthropology as

being at the service of world-making. To this end, the book looks at the ways in which global knowledge regimes invoke metaphors such as “rights,” “security,” and “empowerment” to defend actions that encourage the commercialization of land and the expropriation of holders of customary rights. Thus, the book draws attention to the confusing and detrimental consequences of these safeguards as well as the stifling of criticism in international development circles, in contrast to the continuous rise in physical insecurity, tenure, and means of subsistence.

German shows how the discursive space and vocabulary around land change over time, moving from “land grabs” to “land governance” and down to “inclusive business.” To show how various actors have enlisted in the emerging knowledge regime, she also examines the increasing conceptual and programmatic alignment among players in the land governance arena, focusing on international financial institutions, bilateral donors, and socially progressive nongovernmental organizations. Further, she scrutinizes this global knowledge regime, describing the reasons for her decentering, denaturalization, and provincialization of the emergent truths, which are, on the surface, self-evident; for instance, how popular perceptions mute alternative realities—like the idea that big business is an opportunity rather than a danger to the interests of rural land users.

Conclusively, German presents components of alternate options for land, investment, and development by reimagining rural futures and everything that the emerging knowledge regime obscures. To center the conversation in the present, she draws on the place-based and relational ontologies of land and the current political visions of rural people. Responding to the poser, “What alternative visions might be advanced for reimagining rural futures?” (290–91), German explores alternatives for land and rural futures, decentering “land governance” and “inclusive business,” and thinking beyond the accompanying commodification of traditional land. She challenges some of the most ingrained beliefs that modernization ideologies are based on by offering visions like decentering ideologies of deficiency, conceptualization, and prospering in place.

The issues of alternative visions for both rural futures and the futures of the special economic zones that are springing up at the detriment of rural and Indigenous communities in Africa are what Omolade Adunbi takes up in *Enclaves of Exception: Special Economic Zones and Extractive Practices in Nigeria*. Adunbi, similar to German, utilizes ethnographic data among other sources to analyze the connections between state-centered economic activity and those run by people living on the periphery of the state. To that end, his “ethnographic analysis uses a mixed-methods approach combined with a critical case study format (linked with the extended case method)” (34).

Adunbi first examines the definition and organization of special economic zones (SEZs) in Nigeria, focusing on how enclaves of exception can develop into debated centers of power. He makes use of ethnographic instances of the Lekki Free Trade Zone (LFTZ) and the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone (OGFTZ) in Nigeria. His emphasis on the concept and meaning of “artisanal refineries” contributes to a better understanding of how artisans can construct refineries even though the term “artisan” was not originally used to refer to categories of individuals who are capable of utilizing advanced technology like oil refineries. Adunbi goes on to trace the history of Nigeria’s relations with China and Chinese

companies, illustrating how these relations shaped China's current engagement with Nigeria through the creation of free-trade zones (FTZs) and how these zones produce practices that are emulated by young people, former insurgents, and other community members in the Niger Delta region when they establish artisanal refineries.

Adunbi's use of the term "extractive practices" combines two mutually inclusive categories: the extraction of oil through the construction of artisanal refineries and the extraction of economic values through the creation of FTZs. In *Enclaves of Exception*, both of these extraction techniques led to the creation of SEZs. Thus, Adunbi attempted to give a nuanced picture of the ways in which Africa, and notably Nigeria, was integrated into contemporary neoliberal global economies through official and unofficial cultures of SEZs, particularly in resource enclaves, as well as legitimate and possibly criminal procedures as youths, community members, and former insurgents create alternative governance forms.

Additionally, Adunbi maps the several regulatory procedures that control the day-to-day operations of Nigeria's FTZs. Those who work in FTZs therefore consider themselves part of a new sovereign, since the zones are regarded as sovereign enclaves where the state selectively cedes part of its sovereignty to the zones. Therefore, according to Adunbi, giving up a portion of state sovereignty to an enclave is consistent with the economy's evolving definition as an object driven by statistics and other regulatory practices that influence development paradigms through oil politics, rather than as a system of social practices and relations.

Although generally Chinese neocolonial extractivism, imperialism, sexism, and land grabbing to the detriment of the rural and Indigenous land users are somewhat downplayed by Adunbi, he nevertheless offers some glimpses into the racist and colonial predilection of the Chinese operators of the Lekki and the Ogun-Guangdong FTZs as he witnessed instances of demonstrations "of the social and racial hierarchy that exists within the zone, where Chinese expatriates are considered to be of higher status than their Nigerian counterparts" (106). Adunbi also observes instances of Chinese "civilizing mission" or what, for want of a better phrase, I call the Chinese assumption of a Yellow Man's burden. A Chinese interlocutor in Adunbi's study of the Ogun State FTZs summed up the Chinese mission in Nigeria thus: "Nigeria is like eighteenth-century China, and we are here to help fast-track its movement to the twenty-first century" (173). Adunbi seems content with the epistemic violence that is a part of this Nigerian Chinese "civilization."

In a similar vein, Adunbi maintains the trend of infantilizing Africans by speculating that the extraction of indigenous liquor today and, consequently, the artisanal refining processes of petroleum may have their roots in the very recent history of Nigeria's colonization in the early 1920s. Indigenous liquor known by numerous names (such as *Ekpateshi*, *Kaikai*, *Mmanyaku*, *Ogogoro*, *Sapele Water*, etc.) in some Niger Delta villages is, according to Adunbi, called "ameereka," which is a corruption of "America" in some communities. This, to him, was probably because of an unlikely Indigenous traveler to the USA who came back to his community in the Niger Delta region with the technique to produce

moonshine. There are multiple improbabilities in this narrative, even if we ignore the statistical improbability of it being true. Adunbi's book, for instance, describes how the local Nigerian linguistic metaphors function in the Okada Air metaphor for the Okada motorcycle taxis (1), the Kpofire artisanal refinery metaphor (141–67), and the Cotonou metaphor for the barges that transport goods to Cotonou, the capital of the Benin Republic (167). In line with these patterns of metaphors, since the colonial ban sought to establish a monopoly for imported European liquor, and negatively characterized both indigenous liquors and moonshine as "illicit," any symbolic allusion to American moonshine may therefore be limited to the similarities between the two liquors' appearances, kick, and colonial hostility towards them. Similar to moonshine, Indigenous liquor is said to have been brewed for several generations before colonialism, according to historical and anthropological sources that cite oral tradition. This is because it is a necessary component of several Indigenous medicine potions and is used in cultural rites such as funerals and rites of passage. Furthermore, if the term "ameereka" refers, as Adunbi suggests, to the process of extracting moonshine, then why did the nebulous person who introduced this technique to the Niger Delta region fail to utilize the precise and easily accessible ingredients that were utilized to produce moonshine—"granulated sugar, yeast, water, a pressure cooker of one sort or another" (124)? These resources were readily available and did not require the additional labor-intensive process of firstly tapping palm tree milk, which also led to the irreparable destruction of the trees. Additionally, the anachronism of Adunbi's historical placing of the technology—from moonshine extraction to the present-day Kpofire artisanal refinery—is shown by his omission of the Biafran iteration of artisanal refinery technology in the region. This is because artisanal refineries were widespread and highly developed throughout Biafra (including the Niger Delta region) during the 1967–70 Nigeria–Biafra War.

Adunbi's concluding notes generally explore the relationship between state-regulated SEZs and communities of extraction by reexamining the idea of ownership claims in those communities. He also explores the implications of contested SEZs for democratic control of natural resources worldwide. It is to this commitment to democratize and socialize ownership and influence over public resources in the Global South that this review now turns.

Ownership and democratic control of both natural resources and the socio-spatial resources of the Infrastructural South constitute a focus of Jonathan Silver in his book, *The Infrastructural South: Techno-Environments of the Third Wave of Urbanization*. Silver conceived of the infrastructural south in terms of material geography, namely, the intricate networks of interconnected socio-spatial processes that are at once human and physical, cultural and organic, local and global. According to Silver, the Infrastructural South provides a framework for engaging with such techno-environmental networks and aids in the development of fresh infrastructural coordinates for the politicized present and future of urbanization. Silver showed that the challenge of rethinking cities is not limited to those that, due to their operational infrastructures, are perceived as antiquated; rethinking cities would also encompass certain urban areas in the North where presumptions about a specific type of networked or logistical city are no longer

valid. Hence, “the blurring of conceptual distinctions between North and South” (217) in this regard.

In place of the usual focus only on the technical aspects of systems, Silver analyzed techno-environments to show how broader metropolitan worlds both influence and are influenced by them. Thus, he laid the foundation for his theoretical formulation by establishing the Infrastructural South as both a condition or geography and an epistemological perspective. In case Silver’s argument is correct—that we require fresh critical perspectives to examine, research, and write about urban networks from a postcolonial and Urban Political Ecology perspective—then his book has contributed to a methodology that deviates from the accepted knowledge of social science studies in, about, and on Africa.

Silver uses his understanding of urban Africa as a springboard to construct a relational theoretical formulation that explains how the Infrastructural South came to be and could be used to destabilize current urban theory and encourage rethinking elsewhere, in this case, the concept of the Western city. Thus, in the context of a postcolonial urban environment, Silver promotes calls within comparative urbanism to change the flow of ideas about cities and to move from expected to surprising comparisons. He tries to provide a relationally informed analysis that is open to the potential of mobilizing the concepts and languages centered on the Infrastructural South rather than producing a direct comparison of findings from specific locations. He implies that presumptions regarding urban infrastructure in the Global North also necessitate reconsideration. It is, for example, no longer valid to argue that places like Manchester and Camden have reached the limit of their networked city and logistical power status. Silver questions presumptions regarding these structures that apply to “modern” cities in Euro-North America as well as urban Africa.

Silver notes that the search for investment by municipal and business leaders in the Global North to finance the rebuilding of postindustrial cities increasingly involves securing new flows of capital from the South, whereas the contemporary urban political ecologies at work in cities of the Global North such as Camden, New Jersey, lead-poisoned Flint, or Detroit are no longer reflected in the abstracted networked city model of the global geographies of infrastructure. With the example of Manchester, Silver observes that currently, the city’s colonial cotton mills have been redeveloped into luxury apartment complexes by a real estate partnership that includes the Abu Dhabi United Group, as the formerly colonized now benefit from the reconstruction of the industrial metropole and its rendering as a space for the accumulation of rent-seeking finance. Furthermore, not just the royal family of Abu Dhabi but Chinese construction businesses, both state-owned and privately held, Hong Kong families, Singaporean tycoons, and Saudi private investors have joined them in their pursuit of extractive rents out of Manchester’s real estate. Like certain African cities like Accra, postindustrial Manchester is emerging as the new frontier in real estate as these players from the so-called Global South look for new prospects for accumulation. As Silver posits, “Manchester’s transformation also reflects a historic shift in the financial geographies of the world economy that, like the breakdown of water infrastructure in Camden, trouble and problematize the

ways in which the Global North and South have been understood as a binary across infrastructure studies” (215).

When holistically contemplating the African context of the Infrastructural South, Silver posits that the emergent digital operations, huge new infrastructure corridors, pockets of sustainable and experimental technology, and the shifting global economic landscape challenge long-standing stereotypes of a technologically backward region. Amidst these resonances, Silver goes on to contend that certain areas of metropolitan Africa have infrastructure that surpasses the collapsing networks of postindustrial cities of the Global North, like Camden, New Jersey. He avers that these geographies and operations reveal a distinctive and varied experience of infrastructure modernity, placing urban Africa at the forefront of the creation of techno-environmental futures, noting the auspiciousness of the present period for considering infrastructure’s role in the third wave of urbanization from a perspective distinct from many prior popular depictions of it.

However, Silver notes further that these operations and these geographic locations, which call into question the notion of an Africa beset by infrastructure challenges, coexist with the techno-environments that serve as the foundation for the daily efforts of countless numbers of people to survive and progress. According to him, the imposition of overlapping governance regimes results in an infrastructure that spans time and space and further solidifies the class- and race-based divisions and inscriptions of the colonial and postcolonial eras. Thus, the breakdown of fundamental services and the ensuing absence of repair and maintenance procedures are the material manifestations of these imposed techno-environments. The uneven sanitation landscapes in Cape Town and the interrupted power supplies in Accra are only two examples of how the urbanization process has created disparities that reverberate through time and place across Africa.

Silver argues that the Infrastructural South’s urban modernity is defined by a range of techno-environments, such as high-tech enclaves, historical disparities, and newly developing digital layers. Infrastructure modernism does not have a universal pattern and cannot be universalized or teleological. Rather, it is sustained by multiple operations and geographies and is contextualized and spatially diversified. The technological environments of the past, found in cities like London or Paris, cannot serve as a model for comprehending the function of infrastructure in global urbanization. The perspective that has been developed by Eurocentrism abstracts and universalizes the Euro-North American experience of technology-taming nature in urban areas. The contemporary infrastructure geographies of African towns and cities cannot be taken into account by existing frameworks without labeling them as antiquated. Rethinking infrastructure and urbanization is necessary, and one of the major ideas of Silver in this regard is that of a “mutating modernity.”

The Infrastructural South is therefore, according to Silver, undergoing a mutation in modernity, a change in the form and perception of urban surroundings. This idea challenges preconceptions and emphasizes how modernity’s techno-environments are always evolving, highlighting how metropolitan areas are changing. The Urban Political Ecology of infrastructure urbanization, in

which all techno-environments are contingent, differentiated, and relational across time and location, is best understood in terms of “mutating modernity.” Since the abstracted model of urban modernity does not reflect current urban political ecologies, this approach is pertinent to both Europe and America. It draws attention to the ways in which underdevelopment, exploitation, and extraction have modernized urban Africa in connection to one another, as well as the difficulties it faces.

For the future trajectory of the Infrastructural South Silver proposes an emphasis on anticipatory forms of studies that critiques as well as “experiments, imagines, and inspires” (253). Silver also proposes that the Infrastructural South embrace popular infrastructure as a probable future trajectory. With this method, the emphasis will shift from problematization and critique to a framework for considering how infrastructure might shape the world. Silver proposes that popular infrastructure seeks to democratize and socialize ownership and influence over metropolitan networks to alleviate techno-environmental inequities. This way, urban popular economies would offer avenues for collaboration, idea sharing, and a sense of community among those who work within the city.

As a result, Silver suggests a Pan-African strategy for the Infrastructural South that emphasizes popular infrastructure and enlists a wider variety of players. This strategy promotes cooperation and resource sharing, not just in underprivileged areas but also in cities and other locations. To do this, Silver proposes a research program that centers on accepting “mutating modernity” and reconstructing techno-environments. Massive public works programs, heterogeneity, hybrid ownership, experimentation platforms, equitable financing arrangements, and a revitalized Pan-African political imaginary are some of this popular infrastructure’s salient features.

An instance of a study of the imposed techno-environment of popular infrastructure that assumes a “mutating modernity” in the Infrastructural South is Brenda Chalfin’s *Waste Works: Vital Politics in Urban Ghana*. It is to Chalfin’s work, which is part ethnographical and centered on the Ghanaian city of Tema that this review turns next.

Chalfin presents Tema, a modernist city in Ghana, as a shining example of the unanticipated political opportunities that result from the repurposing of otherwise abandoned excremental infrastructure in metropolitan settings. The city’s founders deliberately encouraged a sanitation system that was at the forefront of urban planning, design, and settlement. Nevertheless, the system’s shortcomings and collapse expose its unfulfilled promises. The reality of Tema’s excremental order highlights less conventional routes to comprehensive urban waste management, each with its political ramifications and assumptions. These excremental infrastructural substitutes offer additional workable answers to the physical and infrastructure requirements of cities, challenging the status quo while also drawing attention to it. Chalfin speculates that reconfigurations of this kind will increase in frequency as the enormous infrastructure investments made during the height of industrial modernity begin to fall apart. Tema’s creative expropriation solutions reveal an area of urban public life that is frequently disregarded but expresses residents’ “right to the city” (138, 154, 156, 177, 287).

According to Chalfin, Tema is a major social and political entity whose waste infrastructure has an impact on Ghanaian urban democracy. Tema's waste is a crucial component of governance because it exposes the populace to waste and emphasizes the significance of vital politics. The creative hygienic solutions of the Tema locals push the boundaries of public and private spheres and the limits of centralized control. These infrastructure-related initiatives are also political since they structure and validate urban "plurality," a relation that embraces both individuality and equality among people. These circumstances demonstrate the importance of infrastructure politics in action.

As Chalfin observes, Tema's waste infrastructure is a major social and political formation in Ghana's city, molded by inadequate foreign fixes and limited governmental competence. The hygienic remedies developed by the people of Tema are indicative of "vital politics," which is rooted in live entities and necessities and materials. Urban disputes revolve around these solutions, as locals confront and question the boundaries of centralized political power. For many urban residents, Tema's infrastructure investments raise the bar for what is acceptable in both public and private spheres. They also act as preliminary stages for the public to make claims, challenging established government policies and inherited technological usages.

Thus, Chalfin contends that three aspects of the crucial politics of infrastructure are predominant in Tema. Chalfin refers to the first (substantive) as "vital remains." She refers to the second (relational) as "infrastructural intimacy." She then refers to the third (institutional) as "deep domesticity." These are the key political dimensions of waste infrastructure, and each influences the others in turn. Both body waste and infrastructure are considered "vital remains" since they are never inert. Chalfin's viewpoint harmonizes waste anthropology with new materialist frameworks.

Actor-network theory by Bruno Latour and the conception of political life by Hannah Arendt are two different political theories that have an impact on Chalfin's view of Tema's urban political praxis. Martin Heidegger's phenomenological perspective on lifeworlds is the foundation for both. Arendt's method catches historical tendencies and transhistorical continuities, whereas Latour concentrates on the unpredictable processes and outcomes of relationships. Chalfin explores these theories in order to shed light on the complex historical roots of Tema's excremental infrastructures as well as its institutional and societal effects. These theories emphasize how urban political heterogeneity and experience can be expressed and oriented through the use of excremental infrastructures.

Utilizing these disparate but somewhat complementary theoretical frameworks, the growth, decline, and restoration of fee-based public restrooms in Tema's urban core are examined in Chalfin's discourse on excremental infrastructure and exception in Tema Manhean. Initially connected to the city's centralized sewage system, Manhean citizens claimed their "right(s) to shit" (138–80) and turned public restrooms into their own, viewing them as essential remnants as opposed to ruinous structures. This strategy disproved the assertions of political party hacks, Tema's municipal administration, and traditional chiefs who believed they were the legitimate owners of the infrastructure built

during the independence era. For the urban poor, Manhean's public restrooms fulfill essential requirements by bringing reproductive activities (including childcare, cooking, medical assistance, petty trading, prayer, sleeping, and so forth) into the public realm. As Chalfin observes, while it would be naïve to call these abilities "empowerment," these public excremental evacuation facilities serve as a fully "lived space" for a segment of society that the ruling class would prefer not to see or know about. Thus, the activities of the Tema Manhean residents permits "the staging of intimate forms of self-determination" (181).

Whereas Manhean's public restrooms symbolize an exercise of self-determination, elsewhere on the continent, Africans impacted by the empirically weak states created by colonizers have chosen to demonstrate resilience in their everyday interactions with the state. This is a perspective that *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa: Ethnographic Encounters*, edited by Wale Adebani, takes.

Against the backdrop of countless opportunities for self-actualization over the past several years in Africa, many people still face obstacles like insufficient infrastructure, communication barriers, and restrictive legislation. Consequently, there are few options for social, political, economic, or personal interaction. Adebani and the other scholars, in *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa*, ethnographically investigate the extent of these potentials and abilities, emphasizing daily life as a space that links regional, national, and international elements, and both reflects and challenges markets and politics. They examine the boundaries of persons whose potential and agential abilities are limited by various procedures and systems.


Adebani and his co-contributors report on how deceptive agents and inadequacy in Africa affect everyday life. They show that understanding the dynamics between the state and its people in a democratic setting can shed light on both the nature and characteristics of the state as well as the circumstances of people's lives. Hence, the authors argue for an analysis of the institutional and noninstitutional structures that shape daily existence in addition to a comprehension of the routine ways in which the state and its people are mutually constructed.

In their analysis, Adebani and the other scholars explore the ways in which experiences and articulations of the state and democracy in present-day Africa intersect with imagination, metaphors, literality, and materiality. To encapsulate the elements of commonplace acts and behaviors in connection to diverse organizations, structures, procedures, laws, and socioeconomic norms, the authors identified five key issues. These issues characterize and shed light on the extensive involvement of the state in numerous everyday facets of society. Experiencing the bureaucratic apparatus, the social economics of shortages and infrastructures, discipline, subjectivity, and violence, the social life of democracy, and ordinary politics of rights and responsibilities are their five chosen themes. By employing ethnography, the authors sought to address universal questions faced by ordinary people, focusing on specific instances.

In focusing on the social economics of shortages and infrastructures, for instance, contributors to Adebani's book, Ulrika Trovalla and Eric Trovalla, examine how infrastructure—such as energy, water, and phone services—permeates daily life in Nigeria. They portray the people living in the colonial

city of Jos as having their lives “inextricably nestled into webs of wires, roads, and pipes” (139), exposing them to the uncertainty and bewilderment of the state. Gaining the necessary knowledge about these grids is similar to practicing divination because it makes it easier for regular people to obtain and maintain vital services. As the investigation into the trajectory of the state in the African context continues, the unpredictable and irregular nature of infrastructures provides hints to its manifestations.

Generally, a hybrid framework containing both postdevelopmental and developmental characteristics underlies the majority of development that occurs in the African environment. Despite a few mechanical errors that could be found in all five books, *Power/Knowledge/Land* and *The Infrastructural South* stand out among the works this study examined for their attempts to generate progressive alternative perspectives and ideas for contemporary African development. For this reason, I recommend these books along with the others reviewed. In addition to offering fascinating approaches and viewpoints on the topic of contemporary African development, the five books collectively are helpful tools for scholars and researchers in a variety of disciplines that have connections to the topics covered in them.

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