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BOOK REVIEW

Joshua Grace. *African Motors: Technology, Gender, and the History of Development*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021. 432 pp. $31.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-4780-1171-2.

Joshua Grace's *African Motors: Technology, Gender, and the History of Development*, offers a sweeping account of African automobility over 150 years. Combining archival research with oral histories and ethnographic methods, and tracking the work of guides and *tanibois*, mechanics and users, political leaders and bureaucrats, Grace not only compellingly demonstrates the myriad ways that people "transformed motor vehicles from a tool of imperial rule into an African technology" (8) but also explores how automobility has emerged as a constituent component of what he refers to as "technological citizenship." Holding these various threads together is Grace's argument that technologies are composed in a "machinic complex," a concept that draws attention not simply to the materiality of automobiles, but to the industries, spaces and forms of expertise, ideologies of development, aspirations for the future, and material and financial constraints that gave automobility in Tanzania both its form and its meaning. Not simply a history of automobility, then, this is a grounded account of state (trans)formation and the lived experience of shifting political economic and technological regimes in what is now postcolonial Tanzania over the course of the long twentieth century.

Colonial automobility was critically shaped by policies of austerity that ensured that permanent infrastructures were the exception rather than the rule, leading to the emergence of a haphazard and incomplete road network. Mechanized movement was thus contoured by what Grace refers to as the "maintenance of impermanence" (36), leading colonial mobilities to be largely dependent on both the creativity and coerced labor of Africans. However, and eschewing a telos-driven narrative of technological change, Grace demonstrates how colonial automobility articulated with precolonial networks and strategies of mobility. As Grace writes: "walking provided a social and material foundation for the integration of mechanized movement into preexisting and dynamic itineraries of African movement" (67). It was along precolonial *njia*, or paths, that many labor migrants traversed the colony; paths that, for some, led to the cultivation of embodied automotive technological expertise.

The connection between emergent cultures of technological expertise and what Grace refers to as "effective masculinities" is the subject of Chapter Two. The "maintenance of impermanence" did not simply characterize infrastructures in the colony. Faced with limited spare parts, routine breakdown, and uneven access to capital, African mechanics developed embodied and tactile

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expertise through the experience (and requirements) of a car culture characterized by the need for constant maintenance and repair. This culture was generative of creative forms of refashioning, amalgamation, and modification, processes that were at the center of Africanizing automobility. For these men, this grounded expertise was not only superior to book learning, but enabled a form of self-reliance, a "gendered form of personhood that combined knowledge, people, and things into mechanical families" (124).

Just as cultures of impermanence shaped automobility in the colonial period so, too, did they shape the possibilities available to the postcolonial state, the subject of Chapter Three. With a dearth in government revenues, and the vexing need faced by all postcolonial states to retain foreign currency reserves, Nyerere's *ujamaa* emphasized the importance of nonmechanized technologies for ensuring individual and collective self-reliance. Automobiles emerged in this vision of African socialism as a symbol not just of the violence of colonial rule, but as emblematic of the forms of class stratification that *ujamaa* promised to stamp out. For some Tanzanian citizens, by contrast, access to automobility represented the promises of independence, offering forms of mobility often denied to them by the colonial state. As the state rolled out government controlled (though incomplete) networks of urban mobility, African vehicle owners created a technological alternative in the form of *thumni-thumni* (later *daladala*) that ferried citizens around the country. Far from a betrayal of the socialist project, these people made the case for *thumni-thimni's* "socialist qualities" in the context of the absences exacerbated by the oil crisis. These competing conceptions help explain why automobility emerged as a central component of what Grace refers to as "technological citizenship."

As Chapter Four recounts, if Nyerere's vision of *ujamaa* was shaped, at least in part, by the momentum generated by a culture of impermanence, so too was its materialization shaped by global energy dynamics. Although Nyerere might have viewed automobility as an anathema to African socialism, rural modernization projects were utterly dependent on petrol. As costs sky-rocketed following the oil crisis, Tanzania found itself spending half of the country's export revenues on oil. The most grounded in questions of political economy, this chapter brilliantly reveals how states are materially composed, and demonstrates how limited our understandings of postcolonial state-building are if we confine our conception of independence to the fact of political sovereignty.

Mobility, both a requirement and a problem for territorialized states, is a theme taken up in Chapter Five. By contrast to state representations of mobile populations as a dangerous threat to state formation and the socialist project, Grace demonstrates that automobility afforded drivers with semi-reliable ways of managing turbulence, while creating regional networks, forging relations of kinship, and producing themselves as respectable adults. This work entailed a great deal of risk, from spirits, from police, from dangerous roads. Nevertheless, moving across often incomplete infrastructures, and distributing scarce goods across the territory, male and female drivers fine-tuned their skills on the road as they attained the status of "dereva"—as they cultivated themselves while they fed the nation.

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This ambitious and sweeping account of automobility as a lens onto state formation, gender dynamics, and technological expertise was enabled by Grace's methodological creativity. State and corporate archives are read alongside oral historical research and ethnographic materials, generating a textured account of the complex politics of automobility in what is today Tanzania. This methodological multiplicity exemplifies not just Africanist scholarship at its very best, but is more broadly instructive for historians and anthropologists of the state and STS scholars.

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