



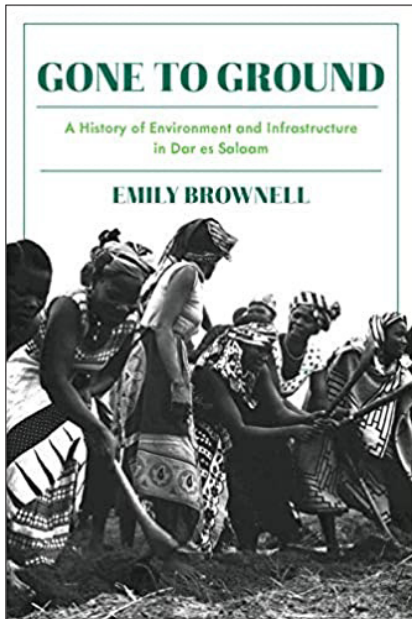
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Gone to ground: A history of environment and infrastructure in Dar es Salaam



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Dar es Salaam has always held a particular fascination for urbanists and environmentalists alike. In the wake of the monumental publication edited by Bernard Calas, *From Dar es Salaam to Bongoland. Urban mutations in Tanzania* (Mkuki Na Nyota Publishers, 2010) comes this major contribution by Emily Brownell, a lecturer in Environmental History at the University of Edinburgh.

In *Gone to ground – A history of environment and infrastructure in Dar es Salaam*, Brownell focuses on the central tension between city and countryside to narrate the story of the city's environment and infrastructure. The title refers to how urbanites settled in the urban periphery to escape the state's policing of urban space. Brownell's analysis of the city's changing landscape during the 1970s and 1980s is also valid for many of South Africa's populous cities: she chronicles the perpetual transit between city and periphery, the quest for housing, food and transportation. It is a narrative about making do with what is available and about ensuring one's own survival.

Although the story of Dar es Salaam must be read against the scramble for Africa, Julius Nyerere's forceful re-enactment of a socialist rural future had an even greater impact. Nyerere's "blunt, antiurban rhetoric" occupies

centre stage in many histories about the city's postcolonial phase of development.

Brownell's book is organized thematically around the struggles and opportunities of the Dar residents during the period in question, with what she terms the "quotidian processes of city making", as illustrated by her chapter headings. "Decentering Dar" is an overview of Tanzanian socialist development or *ujamaa* at a time when Dar and other cities were viewed as crisis sites. "Belongings" describes how families found material and land, whereas "Building" explores building politics and practices. Chapter 4, "Waiting", investigates how infrastructures of transportation shaped definitions of labour in the city as well as urban landscapes "in ways that unfolded daily, seasonally, and ultimately over decades". "Wasting and Wanting" makes for particularly good reading from a South African perspective: "What should Third World manufacturing look like, and where was the sometimes imperceptible line between citizens who conserved and citizens who hoarded?". The final chapter, "Fuelling Crisis", chronicles the city's charcoal market within the broader global moment of the fuelwood crisis that emerged alongside the oil crisis.

Brownell ends on a positive note: "Rather than predicting a future spent in a state of ongoing crisis, historians that highlight the ways communities have shaped the landscapes of African cities when plans go awry might instead suggest that urban African cities have a deep capacity to solve problems and re-imagine the present." (p. 186). It remains to be seen whether the same can be said about urban decay in South Africa; there may be lessons to be learnt from the urban history of Dar es Salaam.

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