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Jennifer Hart, *Making an African City: Technopolitics and the Infrastructure of Everyday Life in Colonial Accra*. Publisher: Indiana University Press, 2024, 316 pages. ISBN # 978-0-253-06932-0.

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In *Making an African City: Technopolitics and the Infrastructure of Everyday Life in Colonial Accra*, Jennifer Hart provides a profound exploration of the intricate interplay of urban governance, colonial legacies, and local agency in Accra, Ghana. This analysis spans the historical evolution of the city from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, revealing how colonial policies shaped urban development while simultaneously highlighting the resilience and resistance of its inhabitants. Hart's work emerges as a critical contribution to African urban studies, colonial history, and the broader discourse on globalization and urbanization.

The book is structured into several thematic chapters, each addressing distinct aspects of urban life in Accra. Hart begins with an introduction that sets the historical context of colonial rule and urbanization dynamics. In the chapter "Fruity Smells, City Streets, and the Politics of Sanitation," Hart scrutinizes the colonial fixation on sanitation, framing it as a necessary condition for modern urban life. She argues, "The fixation on cleanliness was often rooted in deep-seated racial assumptions that deemed African bodies and practices as inherently dirty" (Hart 15). This perspective underscores how colonial policies extended beyond public health into the realm of racial hierarchies. Similar dynamics can be observed in Nigeria, where British sanitation policies in cities like Lagos frequently disregarded traditional practices, imposing European standards of hygiene that reflected a belief in the inferiority of indigenous customs (Ogunlesi). In Kenya, the colonial emphasis on sanitation in urban centers such as Nairobi often overlooked local context, contributing to tensions between authorities and residents (Guma).

In the subsequent chapter, "Health is the First Wealth," Hart connects public health initiatives to the broader colonial agenda, stating, "Health was framed not just as a human right but as an economic imperative" (Hart 40). This framing underscores the colonial perspective that health served as a

precursor to development, often privileging Western medical practices over indigenous knowledge. In Nigeria, the introduction of Western medicine was similarly portrayed as a pathway to progress, marginalizing traditional healers and local practices, which created tensions within communities (Arunsi et al.). Likewise, in Kenya, the emphasis on Western health standards resulted in a dual health system, where colonial authorities promoted hospital care while neglecting local health practices, generating public discontent and mistrust (Hope).

Hart further explores the economic interactions between local traders and colonial powers in the chapter “African Trade and Expatriate Enterprise in the Colonial City.” She emphasizes the resilience of indigenous economic practices, noting, “Despite the pressures of colonial capitalism, local traders navigated the complexities of the market, often finding ways to assert their agency” (Hart 75). This resilience is evident in Nigeria, where local markets and trading networks continued to thrive despite colonial efforts to control commerce. In cities such as Kano and Lagos, indigenous traders adapted to colonial regulations while preserving their economic autonomy (Meagher). Similarly, in Kenya, local entrepreneurs engaged with colonial markets, negotiating their positions within systems designed primarily to benefit expatriate enterprises (Ngugi).

In the chapter “Of Pirate Drivers and Honking Horns,” Hart discusses mobility and transport systems in Accra, asserting that “transport is not merely about moving goods and people; it is a site of negotiation and contestation” (Hart 105). This insight illustrates how transport became a means for local residents to assert their rights and influence urban planning. In Nigeria, the informal transport sector, exemplified by “okada” (motorcycle taxis) and “danfo” (minibus taxis), reflects similar dynamics. These modes of transport emerged as locals navigated a system that often marginalized formal public transportation, highlighting the creativity and adaptability of urban residents (Adeniran). In Kenya, the “matatu” (shared minibus taxis) serves as both a vital transport solution and a medium for cultural expression, embodying local identities while challenging state regulations (Hope).

Hart’s final chapter, “Building Homes in the ‘New Accra,’” emphasizes how local communities adapted to and resisted colonial urban planning. She posits that “the built environment is not just a reflection of power but a canvas for negotiation, identity, and community” (Hart 130). This observation highlights how residents shaped their environments to reflect their needs and identities, often in opposition to colonial plans. Urban areas like Lagos have experienced similar adaptations, where informal settlements frequently arise

in response to inadequate formal housing solutions. Communities creatively utilize available resources to construct homes that embody their cultural identities and social structures (Adelekan). In Kenya, the rapid urbanization of Nairobi has similarly led to the growth of informal settlements, where residents engage in self-help housing initiatives that challenge state urban planning efforts (World Bank).

Through comprehensive analysis, Hart provides a rich exploration of the complex interplay between colonial policies and local agency in shaping urban life in Accra. Insights into sanitation, health, trade, transport, and housing resonate strongly with historical and contemporary issues in Nigeria and Kenya. By situating these themes within broader African contexts, Hart invites a deeper understanding of the complexities of urban governance and the enduring legacies of colonialism across the continent.

In conclusion, Hart's *Making an African City* offers a nuanced examination of technocratic colonialism, local agency, urban identity, and the intersection of history and politics in Accra. The themes articulated in her work resonate throughout Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Kenya, where the complexities of urban governance, resistance, and identity continue to evolve. By drawing connections between Hart's analysis and broader African contexts, we gain invaluable insights into the intricate dynamics shaping urban life on the continent.

Furthermore, Hart's rigorous interdisciplinary approach—integrating historical analysis with ethnographic insights—enhances the richness of her work, providing a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in urban life in Accra. This book stands as a significant contribution to African studies, urban history, and postcolonial studies, challenging prevailing narratives that often depict African cities as sites of chaos or dysfunction. Rather, Hart presents a vision of urban life characterized by dynamism, complexity, and resilience, inviting scholars and policymakers alike to reconsider their assumptions about urban development in Africa. Ultimately, *Making an African City* serves as essential reading for anyone interested in the socio-political dynamics of city life, illustrating the ongoing relevance of historical narratives in addressing contemporary urban challenges and highlighting the potential for grassroots agency to shape urban futures.

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