

**Ezekiel Kalipeni and Paul T. Zeleza (eds) Sacred Spaces and Public Quarrels: African Cultural and Economic Landscapes. Africa World Press, Inc. Trenton, N.J. 1999. Price: Unknown. 360 pages + index**

The book is mostly a collection of papers from The 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Symposium of the Center for African Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana – Champaign in 1996. The theme of the symposium which was “Space, Culture and Society in Africa” came out of the assumption that Africa is undergoing rapid, enormous and complex changes that warrant explanation by an “interdisciplinary paradigm” or approaches.

Scholars from various disciplines attempted to put their efforts together in order to explain Africa’s transformation through the understanding of space in a number of ways such as a physical place, historical process, social reconstruction and imaginative process. At the symposium the nature and dynamics of African societies and cultures were being examined in order to understand Africa’s social phenomenon using new theoretical tools. These attempts to explain Africa’s social phenomenon depict the struggle with existing conventional perception in disciplines. The imposition of ideas from other parts of the world on African societies creates serious problems. The editors claim that the aim of the collection

“is to bring together streams of analysis, research and debate that focus on the spatial contexts of society and culture which have remained largely separated from each other, to cross disciplinary boundaries, as part of what must be our continuous collective efforts to devise paradigms and research methods that are better equipped to analyze and explain African histories, societies, and realities.” (p.viii)

In Sacred Spaces and Public Quarrels, the editors divided the volume into four sections: (1) The Changing Morphology of Urban Space (2) The Construction of Landscapes as Rituals, Therapeutic and Aesthetic Spaces (3) Spatialized Contexts of Literary Texts, Arts and Aesthetics and (4) Territoriality and Land Struggles in Southern Africa.

As African societies are undergoing fundamental transformations, the study of Africa is also being transformed to respond to the changes in development and sustainability. In this book, the types of spaces being discussed are: physical, socioeconomic, behavioral and experiential spaces. The editors, like many writers, think of space as active and evolving phenomenon determined culturally, symbolically and structurally by historical evolution.

The contributors to this volume have attempted to excavate and examine the notions of spatiality embedded in the conceptions and narratives of their disciplinary encounters with African social realities, processes, and data. In all the sections of the volume, attempts were made to highlight approaches that emphasize encompassing spatiality concepts and showcase interplarity in the social sciences and humanities. The introductory chapter by the editors –Paul Tiyambe Zeleza and Ezekiel Kalipeni provides the reader with a brief synopsis of all the chapters in the volume.

The summaries of the chapters are very well woven together and the editors understanding of the contributors' topics is very vivid in this chapter.

Section 1 contains three chapters which attempt to provide new concepts for the development and sustainability of African cities. David Simon's chapter on "Rethinking Cities, Sustainability and Development in Africa" provides the first work in the first section. The author opens up his interrogation with the question: What is (in) a city? The colonial era left Africa with a very distinct urban development pattern. One only needs to visit West African Anglophone and Francophone countries in order to appreciate the British and French impacts on Africa's major urban centers. Simon questions the Eurocentric simplistic and superficial description of African cities. Simon argues that indigenous African perspectives of urbanization are springing up in many urban settings. It is difficult to make this claim since many urban settings in Africa are predicated upon Western perspectives. The functional nature of African cities borrows tremendously from European ideas. Simon's chapter moves from one urban issue to another. For example, he claims that the sustainability of urban resources cannot be possible without adequately addressing the problem of equality and democratic government. Certainly, he is addressing social and political issues in this chapter and that makes it difficult for him to achieve great depth in either the social or political issues that he is interrogating.

In chapter 2, the co-editor, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, provides an analysis of the impact of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in terms of how SAPs have shaped spatial organization of production. This chapter is an interrogation and examination of the SAPs impacts on the economies of Africa. Structural adjustment programs were steps taken by Bretton Woods institutions to streamline the economies of the developing countries. Removing or reducing government subsidies for development projects and programs and encouraging privatization was one of the steps which developing countries had to take in order to rectify their problems of development. There are those who argue that the policies of SAPs have really hurt many people in Africa especially those who reside in the urban areas. It is argued that unemployment has increased and development has actually declined in the urban areas of Africa. The negative social impacts follow the disruptions caused by economic declines on the continent as a result of SAPs. The problems of SAPs have been highly contested by scholars in the developed and developing countries. The economic and social ramifications have been addressed extensively in the literature but scholars seem to disagree on the benefits of SAPs. Most African scholars believe that, overall, SAPs have done a great deal of harm on Africa and Africans on the continent. Zeleza's approach is refreshing in that he examines the "metaphors of urban bias, globalization, and reconstructions" which seem to be fostered by SAPs. SAPs, he argues, seem to be affecting how and where people build their communities. Spatialization is determined by the conditionalities of SAP. This reviewer, who is an urban and environmental planner, does not agree. SAP is just one of the factors that influence spatializations. After all, African cities and

towns have vestiges of the colonial past and even today, modern African cities are emerging with strong European influence because the African architects and planners are highly influenced in their training in Western “truths” of urbanization.

In chapter 3, Ezekiel Kalipeni provides a case study of Lilongwe, Malawi. Cities play important roles in the economic growth of countries and regions. Kalipeni argues that authoritarian developmentalist model set the tone for the spatial development of Lilongwe. South Africa’s role in financing and championing this type of development was highly criticized in this chapter. In many Africa cities and towns, the informal sector thrives and millions of people make their living through businesses conducted in the informal sector. Kalipeni argues that the informal sector plays a dual role of being a reservoir for such activities but provides an arena for corruption to thrive in cities.

The second section of this book focuses on “Landscapes as Ritual and Therapeutic Spaces.” This section contains papers which seem to address issues that focus on a wide variety of concerns ranging from human ecology (as it pertains to gender), to spatial dynamics (as it relates to traditional medicine). In the first chapter in this section, Wilbert Gesler discusses the issue of shifts in paradigm in medical geography. The rationale for encouraging traditional medicine is offered from an ecological and economic perspective.

By relying on literature on disease and health in Africa, Gesler attempts to extend the theoretical framework or argument that other scholars have provided on the subject of therapeutic landscapes. His main thrust is to connect “ideas about illness and healing through the concept of place” (p.112).

The second chapter in section II is “Ethnomedicine, Sacred Spaces, Ecosystem Preservation and Conservation in Africa.” Religious beliefs influence attitudes toward the environment and natural resources. Anyinam traces the links between religion and current environmental crisis. He discusses the links between ethnomedicine and ecology. In the argument about religion and environment, he contends that enough work has not been focused on the links between indigenous religions and ecology but there is a lot of work on the links between Christianity and environment. Having examined how the relationship between indigenous religions and the environment has not been adequately investigated, Anyinam proceeds to discuss and define ethnomedicine, and sacred space. He discussed the links between ethnomedicine, sacred spaces and ecosystems in Africa, preservation and conservation of nature and the loss of sacred spaces.

Social and cultural variables greatly influence the way people use space and for a long time, the spiritual world determined space. Sacred places played important roles in villages and rural and urban life. Recently, however, sacred spaces are being lost due to vandalism, desecration and lack of interest by younger generations. Anyinam bemoans this point and thinks that the disrespect and lack of fear of local gods has led to the desecration of sacred places and thus the

change of the landscape. The chapter that follows: "'Stray Women" and "Girls on the Move:" Gender, Space and Disease in Colonial and Post Colonial Zimbabwe"' written by Lynette Jackson is a case study which appears not to fit the theme of second section of this book.

Jackson takes the reader through her personal observation of the changes she witnessed in Zimbabwe between 1983 and 1992. This chapter is basically an account of the struggles of African women in their attempts to make ends meet through crime and prostitution. These women, she argues, contributed to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as AIDS and HIV. Jackson's account laments the victimization of single women by government efforts to combat social decadence and the spread of STDs.

The outbreak of AIDS and HIV in Zimbabwe is a very serious health and social problem. Personal conversations with Zimbabwean students and colleagues by this reviewer confirm that one out of four Zimbabwean is probably HIV positive. Single Zimbabwean women have been targeted as being the main conduit for spreading the AIDS and HIV diseases. The author of this chapter argues that the movement of single women and girls within Zimbabwe was controlled by many mechanisms including marriage certificates. These certificates were used as "town-pass" when traveling alone without a male companion. Since these sort of difficulty in traveling defined how and where women occupy urban spaces, one can see how this chapter might fit into the overall theme of the book. The fact that the author contends that "colonial anti-venereal disease campaigns were expressions of both colonial/race and patriarchal/gender power" (p.162), focuses the chapter on the implications of colonial policies on current or existing public policies in Zimbabwe and one can extrapolate such conclusions to the rest of the developing world wherever there was colonial rule. Post colonial Africa still has vestiges of the oppression of women and the spaces women occupy are indications of their status in their societies.

Section three of this book deals with "Narrating and Imagining Spaces." The first chapter in this section discusses: "Art as Time-Lines: Sacral Representation in Family Spaces" is written by Nkiru Nzegwu. African artists have always thought of space, time and reality in their creative works. Family memorials are vivid expressions of how Africans occupy the "here and how" and use "after life." The artworks of Africa depict how Africans occupy space; express their morality and values. This chapter provides the reader with many dimensions of the philosophy surrounding the African interpretations of space. Spatial shifts mean a lot in terms of self-extension into time and space. Nzegwu provides solid analyses of change, shift and hierarchy in space and time with regard to African realities.

In the second chapter of the third section, F. Odun Balogun discusses "Self and Place in African and African American Autobiographical Prose: Equiano and Achebe, Soyinka and Gates." This chapter seems to claim or read too much into the four writers' works and style and strategy of writing. Balogun read too much into the writers' writings in order to place their works into the theme of the section and eventually the theme of the book. There is no doubt that the writers

were highly influenced by their ethnicity, origins and backgrounds. These writers' culture influenced their thinking. They articulated their views in order to make the reader understand the prevailing circumstances. Balogun's discussions about self and place for each work (writer) have some merits but it must be said that the discussions are exaggerated. The third chapter in the third section is titled: "The Niger Delta, Nativity, and My Writing" by Tanere Ojaide. The exploitation of memories to return to one's past can provide opportunity to chart a course for the future. Ojaide brings a poet's perspective to the discussion of space. He sees the intricate connection between a writer's place of origin and writing. Individual land ownership, and communal ownership of property are important issues in African societies. All through the chapter, Ojaide makes his argument by citing numerous writers. His reliance on scholars from different disciplines supports the contention of the interdisciplinary nature necessary for explaining "Space" in Africa. However, the difficulty with this chapter is the inability to critically explain the functional aspect of space from a development and/or planning standpoint.

The fourth and final section is about "The Spatiality of Nations, Communities, and Identities." The first chapter in this section raised a number of very interesting questions. Kwaku Larbi Korang in his chapter titled "Crisis and Accounting: Towards a Spatial History of the African Nation." refreshes the reader's memory of the past discussion on Africa as a "nation." Korang makes the following observations and poses a number of questions.

Today, if thinking the nation in Africa again is unavoidable, it is a proposition that enjoins us to ask certain key questions. Where did the nation go wrong? Where, then, might it recover ground? A resolution of these questions hinges on asking still others. Who imagines the nation and in what capacity? What is invested in this imagining and hence in what terms is the nation couched? How have circumstances, in allowing the nation to be imagined in certain ways, also constrained this imagining in certain other ways? (p. 256).

Many Africans like Kwame Nkruma, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Owolowo have attempted to wrestle with these questions in one form or the other. But it must be said that Nkruma was at the forefront of the struggle for Pan Africanism. The fragmentation of Africa and its people was greatly influenced by colonialism. The creation of the African middle class, which represents the "haves", has had a profound impact on the complex situations in Africa. The social configurations on the continent have been problematic because the privileged middle class find themselves positioned between nativity and colonialists/modernity. Colonial legacy provides the elite with European education, and Eurocentric development patterns such as infrastructure which support their needs. The heightened position which the middle class enjoys alienates it from the natives. Defining who Africans really are and what makes one a "true African" is the vexing question which seems to be echoing throughout this chapter. The theoretical argument in this chapter is supported by solid evidence. However, the author does not adequately address the issue of how

natives acquire western education and transcend their nativity. The answers to the many questions that are posed are not given.

The chapter by Dickerson Eyo “Community, Citizenship and the Politics of Ethnicity in Post-Colonial Africa” discusses the strengths and weaknesses associated with ethnic identity. Many authors who have addressed the issue of ethnicity within African societies have examined the roles of ethnicity in countries that have many different linguistic groups. The issue of loyalty to community, culture, and country are addressed in this chapter. The last two chapters by Tiyanjana Maluwa and Richard Levin concentrated on land matters pertaining to Southern Africa region. The land issues of Africa whether it is land use, land tenure, and/or land disputes have always been central to Africa’s problems and development. These authors provide particular case study of areas of Southern Africa. The strengths of these last two chapters is that they offer the reader opportunities to probe matters of inequity, territoriality, redistribution and ethnicity as they relate to land use in Southern Africa.

Overall, this is a good book for Africans and scholars of development who are interested in multi-disciplinary approach in discussing space. My only concern is that there was an absence of “true” urban planners, city planners, environmental planners and architects among the contributors. This is a very useful book for any scholar interested in theory of “space” – public or private.

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