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BOOK REVIEW

Food, Culture, and Survival in an African City. Karen Coen Flynn. New York: Palgrave, 2005. 254 pp.

The study of food in Africa is entering a brilliant new phase. Along with the long-awaited publication of works examining food consumption by Lisa Cliggett and Elias Mandala, the arrival of Karen Coen Flynn's book is good news for those interested in hunger, poverty, and the critical role of food in everyday life. She offers an intriguing and provocative analysis of hunger and food supply in Mwanza, a Tanzanian city located on the shore of Lake Victoria. The careful treatment she provides to the ways diverse communities within Mwanza obtain food is crucial for scholars and policymakers who wish to understand how poor people develop strategies to obtain sustenance in cities. Her theoretical contributions build on the foundation of entitlement theory set by Amartya Sen over two decades ago while adding important nuances, especially on the role of charitable gifts.

One of the major strengths of this study is Flynn's willingness to enter into dialogue with previous work on urban food supply while noting how Mwanza offers a different context than the rural regions and capital cities that usually furnish the settings for scholarly work on hunger and food. The context is brought out by over 200 interviews taken in the early 1990s. Her analysis of food market organization and periurban agriculture fits with previous studies. However, Flynn's research on food consumption in Mwanza is quite innovative. From detailed reviews of the changing popularity of different staple cereals to revealing the challenges that state authorities, market people, and consumers have in buying and selling food in Mwanza, the author's ethnographic approach is quite effective. The evolution of taste reveals much about the evolution of Tanzania from the late colonial period through *ujamaa* socialism to the present. Flynn has documented the growth of more processed foods, especially certain types of corn and rice, which one often sees in daily life in many African cities.

Another aspect of food consumption in Mwanza highlighted in this monograph is how people buy and prepare food. Chapter Four and Five's consideration of food consumption across the social divides of Mwanza is fascinating. The detailed survey of food preparation patterns and the shifting composition of families seeking to obtain entitlements to food shows how access to food marks social distinctions. Foodways will be quite different between street children and well-off African and Asian families, obviously, but it is rare to see such an approach to urban food consumption so informed by detailed sociological analysis and the mundane details of daily urban life.

Furthermore, the need to commit time and resources to other obligations besides food proves a central challenge for Mwanza people who need to develop an array of resources to feed themselves. Choices by individuals to straddle urban and rural connections to obtain and sell food commonly occur in any African city in the same ways one sees in Mwanza. As economic conditions in the city grew worse in the 1980s and early 1990s, previous strategies to juggle ways to raise income and connections needed to acquire food proved less effective. The image of "balancing on one foot" is a very apt one for how individuals can prove unable to pull together the variety of demands of time and money many city residents face.

Another aspect of eating in Mwanza that Flynn surveys is the daily struggle different groups of destitute children and adults have in obtaining food. This moves beyond other studies more concerned with market organization and agriculture. AIDS, family difficulties, and disabilities led many of the homeless of Mwanza to the city. For many women, "survival sex" was a key way for women to obtain food as gifts or payment. As some women failed to establish a stable residence from where they could turn to sex work, they had to rely on sexual encounters as a form of food scrounging. Street women desperate for food had little ability to resist the demands of their clients or counter male unwillingness to use condoms. Government camps designed to house and employ the very poor often could provide food, but the constraints placed upon their residents (often placed in the camps by police roundups) led many homeless to avoid this kind of living. Street men often appear to have better access to kin and other

networks they could turn to for food, especially through begging. They escaped the stigma placed on street women, who many city residents view as lazy or in violation of gendered norms of women as food providers and members of established family networks. Gendered differences also can be noted among street children: while girls have the dangerous but often unavoidable choice to obtain money and sustenance through sex work, this is not a common option of boys.

All in all, this excellent book would make for a great textbook in undergraduate courses on modern Africa and for courses on food studies. The wealth of detail combined with an eye to uncovering the diversity of challenges in African cities makes for good reading. While theoretical discussions are important, they do not detract at all from the readability of the book. Especially for instructors seeking to provide a human face to master narratives of problems within contemporary Africa, I recommend this text.

Jeremy Rich
University of Maine at Machias

REFERENCES

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