LOOKING BACKWARD TO GO FORWARD

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IN "RETHINKING STREET VENDING," Krishnendu Ray calls us to rethink markets as social infrastructure rather than as mere sites of capital accumulation. In doing so he invokes a meeting of liveliness and livelihoods at the place of the street market.

There is no doubt from our work in African cities that street food vendors play an integral role in the food security and nutrition of urban Africans, even in areas where modern food retail abounds (Battersby and Watson 2018). However, there is also no doubt that these vendors are persistently framed by local governments as unsafe, parasitic, and leaching out the liveliness of the city (Rogerson 2016). This government discourse is articulated by officials in their personal and professional capacities, but it is often at odds with personal practice (going to market to buy fish after a meeting in which you were decrying the market, complaining about street vendors forcing people to walk in the road while blindly allowing banks to block off sidewalks and force people to walk in the road).

Traders and the spaces they occupy are persistently precarious. While local politicians and officials may have caught the developmentalist dream/delusion as it travels around the world, carried on the air by development agencies, philanthropists, and consultants, this antipathy toward street food is entrenched in the DNA of the colonial city. The question is therefore less about who is creating the vision for the city's future, and more about how these future visions are being grafted onto the historical production of space, place, and power—and current electoral politics.

African urban governments appear to have little mandate to address food and nutrition security; however, if we trace the history of African cities, it becomes apparent that the control of food has been central to the state's efforts to control urban spaces and urban populations. For example, in Zambia the 1937 Market Ordinance, also called the Lusaka Markets Act, placed markets under the control and management of local authorities, giving them the power to regulate market buildings, what goods could be sold, and when and at what maximum prices. It also gave them the right to inspect and grade goods. The act further stated: "No person shall, in any public place within a radius of two miles from the centre of a market, sell any goods except in a market" (Government of Zambia 1997, sec. 5, para. 5), which therefore prohibited street vending. This effectively protected sanctioned traders from unsanctioned domestic and foreign traders and privileged particular kinds of food value chains and rendered others illegal. In this act, control over the economy, space, and food became intertwined (Battersby and Muwowo 2019). As Ananya Roy notes, the state through its planning and legal apparatus creates informality and constructs and reconstructs categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy (Roy 2005).

In addition to the planning and legal apparatuses of the state that cast street vending as informal and in opposition to formally mandated food retail, the departmental competencies of local government regarding food have further perpetuated the visioning of street food as problematic. One of the few officially mandated areas in which urban government in Africa governs the food system is through public health. So, for example, in Kisumu, Kenya: "The Kisumu Municipality by-laws spells [sic] that vending is allowed upon payment of [the] prescribe[d] fee but the General Nuisance By-law overrides this provision and can be used to declare street vending a public nuisance [and] therefore illegal. The study found that the by-laws give and remove the legitimacy to vend" (Onyango et al. 2012: 112). The General Nuisance by-law requires a permit issued by the medical officer of health. Health therefore trumps any other consideration. As a result the existing biases against street trade are reinforced over and over again.

The cumulative impact of these colonial laws and their unamended postcolonial frameworks has been the creation of a bifurcated food system and urban system, and the production of informality. Planning in the postcolonial era has tended to be characterized by the imposition of laws, zoning ordinances, and adherence to a master planning approach inherited from the Global North. Although such planning's roots are in the colonial era, post-independence governments have "tended to reinforce and entrench colonial plans and

land management tools, sometimes in even more rigid form than colonial governments" (UN-Habitat 2009: 55).

The values espoused in planning codes and by-laws have been taught to and internalized by officials. Planning and by-laws, therefore, hold not just technical power, but also render alternative framings of street vending invisible to officials acting in their official capacity, despite their use of street vendors in their personal capacity. This cognitive dissonance echoes Jane Jacobs's reflections on her conversation with a planner about a low-income area of Boston—the planner expressed sorrow that such a terrible place existed, but admitted that he personally enjoyed the place. "Here was a curious thing. My friend's instincts told him the North End was a good place, and his social statistics confirmed it. But everything he had learned as a physical planner about what is good for people and good for city neighborhoods, everything that made him an expert, told him the North End had to be a bad place" (Jacobs 1961: 10–11).

The developmentalist dream that views street traders as legitimate only if contained and controlled and secondary to a modern, formal food economy finds fertile ground in African cities as a result of the knowledge and governance effects of historical planning and the current limited capacity of an underfunded state.

How, then, can we work toward creating a governance environment in which planners are able to see the vitality and value of street food vending in their professional capacities? Public litigation and advocacy are essential, as is research that reveals the contribution of street food to urban liveliness and livelihoods. These will have little impact, though, if planners are not mentored toward an understanding of the long shadow of historic planning and policies on current governance discourse and practice, and the production of conflicting rationalities between state and trader (Watson 2003). This will require trust building on the part of state and civil society and "a commitment to societal learning through agonistic engagement and continuous agreements to take the next step, without being able to resolve all difference" (McFarlane 2011, in Pieterse 2019: 33). Street food trading only has a future if planners are able to critically engage the ongoing knowledge and governance effects of historical planning and legislation. ⦿

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