

BOOK REVIEW

Rosalind Fredericks. *Garbage Citizenship: Vital Infrastructures of Labor in Dakar, Senegal*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018. xi + 200 pp. Bibliography. Index. Notes. \$24.95. Paper. ISBN: 9781478001416.

Beginning in the late eighties and continuing well into the 2000s with the 2012 arrival of the fourth president of Senegal, Macky Sall, *Garbage Citizenship* shows how continuous reforms of the waste management system of Dakar are symptomatic of the way “postcolonial cities codify government prerogatives and unequal citizenship across the urban landscape” (19). Through a “materialist understanding of infrastructure” (151), Rosalind Fredericks gives us an account of trash as a “political matter” (58), where trash’s power to disrupt and the way it is managed in the urban space set the stage for citizenship struggles, demonstrating its “toxic vitality” (18). In Dakar, since access to infrastructure is uneven, managing waste becomes synonymous with managing people and their perceived worth, because infrastructure is not neutral—recalling the old Langdon Winner formula that “artifacts have politics.”

Infrastructure contains “complex socio-technical and spiritual worlds” (5), because technologies and forms of sociality establish fluid relations, “their development, operation, maintenance, and breakdown... are imbricated with other discursive, symbolic, and religious realms” (15). The conjunction of people, infrastructure, and institutional arrangements in the urban space makes up what Abdoumalig Simone has called “people as infrastructure,” highlighting the importance of the human element. According to Fredericks, what happened in the management of urban waste in Dakar in the last three decades is indicative of how Senegalese authorities, national and municipal, have governed by disposability, transferring the responsibility of managing waste from the state onto the bodies of *dakarois* in the form of labor, through “neoliberal discourses of participatory citizenship” (34).

Garbage Citizenship is more than a book focused solely on the power of infrastructural politics or the spatialization and deepening of inequality; it is also an account of the negotiations of citizenship in a country captured by neoliberalism, where the downsizing of the state apparatus with the Structural Adjustment Programs has meant the degradation of urban

infrastructure and the decline of social systems. Two moments of critical importance in this account are addressed in the first two chapters of the book, “Governing Disposability” and “Vital Infrastructures of Labor.” First, through the discussion of what the Set Setal movement brought with it in the late eighties, namely a discourse against moral degradation on Islamic piety and orderliness of the public space, the author shows how municipal power has been capable of neutralizing social resistance by appropriating the religious ethos to mobilize disenfranchised youth and women into participation in growing flexibilized formulas of labor. Second, as much of the burden of insufficient waste services falls onto households, and garbage management is devalued as labor, the years since 2000 with Abdoulaye Wade in power mark the period where crisis in the sector has become the norm, a consequence of rapid urbanization, neglect, and degrading infrastructure functioning, mainly through what Fredericks deems to be “salvage bricolage” (81).

The remaining two chapters tell a slightly different story. The first of these, “Technologies of Community,” follows a participatory experiment in the Yoff Tonghor neighborhood, where Fredericks finds an elitist ethnized image of community in a technologically scaled-down garbage management system, where international organizations and local NGOs align to extend “women’s social reproductive duties into the public space” (120), turning trash collection into a highly gendered form of labor. The second, “The Piety of Refusal,” tells about the “trash revolts,” where the breakdown of a labor-intensive infrastructure leads to social unrest and political struggles and to the unionized garbage workers’ appropriation of the language of faith and piety as a critique of the flexibilization of labor, inverting the formula used during the Set Setal moment.

Rosalind Fredericks’s book makes a compelling argument for the recognition of human labor as a key ingredient of urban infrastructure, with its social, cultural, historical, religious, and political embeddedness, in Dakar and elsewhere in the Global South, but more and more also in the Global North. Through it we can think about the ambiguity of public discourses on religious piety, or of the often-misleading representations of community participatory efforts, in addition to the way urban infrastructures are sites of power struggles and social resistance, both materially and symbolically.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Chutek, Magdalena. n.d. “Hustling the Mtaa Way: the Brain Work of the Garbage Business in Nairobi’s Slums.” *African Studies Review*, 1–22. doi: 10.1017/asr.2019.46
- Thioub, Ibrahima, Momar-Coumba Diop, and Catherine Boone. 1998. “Economic Liberalization in Senegal: Shifting Politics of Indigenous Business Interests.” *African Studies Review* 41 (2): 63–90. doi: 10.2307/524827