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Amin Y. Kamete. *Governing the Poor in Harare, Zimbabwe: Shifting Perceptions and Changing Responses.* Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002. 67 pp. No price listed (paper), ISBN 978-91-7106-503-2.

Reviewed by Tsuneo Yoshikuni (Senshu University, Japan)

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Urban processes in Zimbabwe over the past ten years or so have been marked by a curious combination of two developments–the growing salience and importance of the "city" in the country's political economy on the one hand, and deepening malfunctions and crises of urban management and planning on the other. In the country's capital city, Harare, the latter development is particularly grave: even the delivery of the most basic services–water supplies, road repairs, street lighting, refuse collection, etc.–has been in bad shape; since 1999 the elected town council has been twice replaced by a government-appointed commission; and "city politics" is so chaotic and mercurial that its tortuous path often seems to defy rational understanding. Cast against this background, the book under review is definitely more than welcome, as it is an attempt–and one with an impressive result–to analyze and interpret such a "messy reality" in the light of social science.

The author, Amin Kamete, was (at the time of publication) Senior Lecturer at the Department of Rural and Urban Planning, University of Zimbabwe. *Governing the Poor in Harare, Zimbabwe*, a slim volume, comes out as part of the research report series of Nordiska Afrikainstitutet. It is a very much a policy-oriented, sociological work, primarily dealing with the nature and problems of the "terrain of urban governance" in Harare, roughly during the period from the 1991 institution of the ESAP, or economic structural adjustment program, up to the March 2003 presidential and local government elections.

In the first four chapters Kamete sets the parameters of his study and displays the analytical tools in hand, while reconnoitering the target area intermittently. At the beginning, the term "governance" is defined essentially as "relationships and interactions" between the governors and the governed. Discussion ensues of key factors and variables that could possibly go into molding such relationships, including the urban poor, the governors' perceptions thereof, institutional practices, and modes of local governance.

The core of Kamete's study starts from chapter 6, following a brief review of poverty and the poor in Harare in chapter 5. Chapter 6 presents a detailed typology as to the ways in which the poor are perceived by the managers of the city. The poor are sometimes viewed in a "positive and paternalistic" way, and sometimes in a "negative and derogatory" way. The former case posits the poor as a "resource" (as when they create employment and housing by themselves), an "asset" (electoral asset and political capital), or a "helpless lot," whereas in the latter case the poor are thought of as a "nuisance" (crime, environmental destruction, violence, immorality, etc.), or a "liability" (embarrassment, electoral risk, polit-

ical danger, financial burden, etc.)

These perceptions–in practice, often, a mixture of more than one of these elements–help pattern the responses of the governors, which in turn cause the counter-responses of the poor. Grappling next with "interactions" (responses/counter-responses), the book provides us with a more complex picture. When the poor were involved in self-help projects concerning employment and housing, for example, the form of the governors' response could be "promotion" (with a perceptional base of the poor as a resource). The poor would then react in a "positive" way, that is, by forming clubs, paying subscriptions, and tolerating political rallies and official ceremonies. When the officials were reluctant to enforce laws and regulations on the illegitimate side of self-help (backyard shacks, undesignated tuck shops, unauthorized markets, street vending, and so forth), the poor tended to respond by expanding and intensifying such activities. Where the official response leaned towards control, the poor were found counter-responding in three ways, namely, by nonobservance, obedience, and "playing along."

The recent dramatic change in electoral politics–the vast majority of urban votes went for the opposition–is used as evidence to show a particular interaction taking place around the perception of the poor as an asset.

"Vote-buying is a practice that has been in existence for years, but it assumed greater proportions after the appearance of a stronger opposition in 1999. No longer could those who had held a monopolistic grip over the electorate rest on their laurels. Since they had failed to deliver for so long, they adopted short-term measures, which to all intents and purposes amounted to bribing the electorate."

The book continues:

"The poor have displayed two forms of counter-responses to these responses. They either become willing tools or, in some cases, they develop an indifferent attitude. During the past three years, the trend has been that the poor will play along. They accept the 'bribe,' take to the streets and do all that they are expected to do in order to shame or destabilise the opponent. However, when it comes to the ballot box, the poor have been increasingly reneging on their part of the deal. Those who are known to engage in such 'hiring,' especially established politicians from the ruling party, have been performing badly since 2000" (p. 45).

The study then examines the implications of such interactions for urban governance. Harare's governance terrain, influenced by the multiplicity of perceptions, the intervention of the central government and civil society, changing personalities and circumstances, and other factors, has been characterized, says Kamete, by "unpredictability," "volatility," and "fluidity." Among the cases cited to illustrate this is a municipal action to slash an illegally cultivated maize crop in Mufakose, Mabvuku, and Tafara in the early 1990s. The operation ended in an anticlimax (that is, an investigation) and the suspension of the very official who had initially authorized the action when the policy gave rise to public uproar and demonstrations, the embarrassment and wavering of councilors, and the intervention of the government. The author points out: "While in some cities fluidity can be anticipated or even predicted because it is based on known factors like political parties in power, the situation in Harare is so variable that change and contradictions have been known to occur within the same administration, on the same subject and with the same personalities" (p. 56).

One of the conclusions of the book is that the urban poor are becoming an increasingly important player in the game, much more important than is usually held. They in fact represent a locus of power in Harare's governance terrain, along with other, better-established loci, such as the local authority, the central government, the civil society, and the private sector. However, the poor are not recognized as such a locus, hence the lack of meaningful interactions with them. Policy development and decision-making are a "unilateral" exercise, despite the fact that the poor, through their various activities and actions, often make their presence felt in that process. Harare's malaise in governance has much to do with this. The text ends with remarks on ways to correct such distortions and problems.

A major strength of this monograph lies in its down-to-earth accounts of municipal "politics"–a politics that involves the poor, and that takes place over such issues as urban farming, illegal buildings, cooperatives and clubs, street vending, squatters, service fees, Harare's Tammany Hall, and elections. This may be quite understandable in view of the fact that the study is, and is intended to be, a kind of synthesis built upon a series of case studies undertaken by Kamete and his peers over the years. It is only in conjunction with this feature, I think, that Kamete's Byzantine typologies of perceptions and responses/counter-responses come to function as a unique, subtle device. This approach certainly challenges us to go beneath the enigmatic surface of Harare's gov-

ernance terrain and confront its core structure, i.e. the complex relationships and alliances of the poor and other stakeholders in that terrain.

Another important aspect of the book is its sensitivity to interactions, the people's ability to negotiate, and a plurality of powers. In this respect, it may be said, Kamete's study has a lot of affinities with social history studies (and related disciplines), in spite of a very different usage of language. Indeed, it is very much an inquiry into, to use Munro's term, "the moral economy of the state"[1]; and researchers with social history orientations should find in this book a source of inspiration for their own works.

There is one careless error, apart from a few typos, in the book: the table on the 2000 elections misplaces Harare North in the group of the HDRAs (high-density residential areas) (p. 31).

Note

[1]. William A. Munro, *The Moral Economy of the State: Conservation, Community Development, and State Making in Zimbabwe* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998).