

# Localising history of electrification: Technicians and their skills in Dar es Salaam, 1980s - 2020

By

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This article discusses the material culture of electrified homes in Dar es Salaam in an endeavour to chart the local history of electricity. It explores how daily lives of electricity users depended on skills of ordinary local technicians. Focusing on skilled practices of the local people in the installation, repair, and maintenance of household wiring and appliances, the article argues that skilled practices of local technicians (*mafundi*) were crucial *material culture* of electricity in homes. Even though large quantities of electrical material used in Tanzanian homes were transferred technologies (invented and innovated from the other parts of the world), their everyday usage still depended on the local skills and knowledge of ordinary technicians. This made Dar es Salaam a place not only of growing electricity use but also of knowledge production and mastery of skills. The article shifts away from the conventional Eurocentric view of technology transfer and large technical system (LTS) narratives to engage with bottom level realities in electricity usage in African cities. Broadly, the article draws and contributes to the existing African urban literature which have so far studied how the provision of infrastructure services in African cities involves ordinary people's agency. The analysis in these studies lacks historical depth because urban scholars have treated local people's agency and creativity as a product of poor infrastructure coverage, scarcities, and precarious services. Based on oral interviews, newspapers, and archival sources, this article takes local people's agency in infrastructure services beyond this contemporaneous analysis. It maintains that African skills and knowledge did not develop from service scarcities and perilous urban conditions only but were historically embedded in the *material culture* on which Africans lives have for so long been drawing upon.