

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Mozambique: A Dream Undone, the Political Economy of Democracy by Bertil Egerö, Afro-Marxist Regimes: Ideology and Public Policy by Edmond J. Keller and Donald Rothchild, Eds.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6j02m45m>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 17(1)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Sheldon, Kathleen

Publication Date

1988

DOI

10.5070/F7171016912

Copyright Information

Copyright 1988 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Section Four examines development issues and prospects, which raise a number of critical issues for a useful debate on development in Zaire. The most important concern is the meaning of development, the overall development strategy, the respective roles of the public and private sectors in the development process, decentralization, the delivery of social services, including education, and the prospects for development.

The last major aspect of the Zairian Crisis to be discussed in this book is its international dimension. As in other areas of Zairian crisis, there has been a lack of serious research on the involvement of external powers, international organizations and transnational corporations in Zairian affairs and its consequences for the people of Zaire. Part Five (chapters 14-17) examines this important dimension of the crisis.

Finally this collection of essays offers a comprehensive but by no means exhaustive analysis of the Zairian crisis. Many questions remain that require further study. This is why there is an urgent need not only for a clearer definition of this particular crisis, its character, origin and social implications, but also for new and better approaches to the study of the structural crisis of peripheral capitalism in Zaire.

Duke More

Bertil Egerö, *Mozambique: A Dream Undone, The Political Economy of Democracy, 1975-1984* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1987). Edmond J Keller and Donald Rothchild, (eds.), *Afro-Marxist Regimes: Ideology and Public Policy* (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 1987).

These two recent books, Egerö's focusing exclusively on Mozambique while the Keller and Rothchild collection includes Angola, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia, as well as Mozambique, address and extend the ongoing debate about the nature of Marxism in Africa's socialist states. In each book the authors begin by defining their terms, and then allow their definitions of "democracy" and "Afro-Marxism" to set the framework of a book. Nonetheless, both books make many important points regarding current political structures, particularly in southern Africa.

Egerö relies on the concept of popular or people's power ("poder popular" in Portuguese) as the foundation of Mozambican

democracy, and attempts to explain the coexistence of this popular power with centralized economic planning. He differentiates popular power from democracy by pointing out that democracy generally refers to certain institutions including parliaments and party structures. Popular power in his usage pertains to the "creation of conditions for all to participate in and influence the development of society." (p.36) Thus the emphasis given to health, education, and information in the state sector. He further differentiates popular power from European-style democracies by the tip-down nature of the "innovating force." He describes this process as "a transitional process with a high degree of built-in instability, derived from the contradictory nature of a centralized elite leadership acting as spearhead for extended majority rights." (p.36)

One issue that obscures the democratic process in Mozambique is the formation of a one-party state. Egerö addresses the problem of party/state convergence in a chapter on "Organizing the People." This chapter provides a very useful overview of Mozambique's political structures from three perspectives: party, state, and mass organization. He begins with a description of Frelimo's internal organization as a vanguard party guided by principles of Marxism-Leninism. The Party is represented at the local level of villages and work places by over 4,000 local cells.

Egerö selects the People's Assemblies as the next institution to be discussed and describes them as the "first steps towards representative democracy" (p.120). Certainly it is not easy to promote democracy in a situation where people have not had previous experience of political participation, and he does not claim that the assemblies have had an unblemished record. The assemblies also accentuate the deep interconnection between party and state, as they are part of the state infrastructure, yet heavily controlled by party decisions about candidates and issues. While the development of the party and the state as two separate institutions is the ideal, it has been difficult. At the local level in particular there are too few skilled people to fill all the positions in state and party structures without having a great deal of overlap in personnel.

A third important sector in Mozambican political life is the mass organizations - the Organization of Mozambican Women, the youth organization, and such professional groups as the teachers' and the journalists' organizations. Egerö focuses on the Organization of Mozambican Workers (OTM), the state labor organization, to demonstrate the role such organizations play in Mozambican politics and society. For instance, OTM works with management in order to bring about improvements. In a situation where many managers are appointed by the state the outcome is to

have two official organizations, one representing workers and one management, negotiating with each other.

In order to better understand the dynamic of interaction between the party, the state, and the mass organizations, Egerö moved out of his base in Maputo to do research in Mueda in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. He describes this as centrally important to his own knowledge of the political process, and certainly the situation looked different from that distance. Mueda has historic importance in Mozambique, as the site of a massacre by Portuguese police in 1960, and as a starting point for the armed struggle that eventually brought independence. It is a primarily rural district, dominated by peasant activity and interests. Decisions made in Maputo regarding the collectivization of agriculture were difficult to implement in Mueda. The districts rarely received material aid or concrete instructions to support the more general directives, and the result was continued local control in the face of a seriously worsening economic situation. The peasants of Mueda, the base on which Frelimo built the armed struggle and won independence, did not rely on the central authority to bring improvements. As Egerö concludes in this chapter, "where the government fails to assume its responsibility, the local community has to do it." (p.169) He admits that this is an unresolved contradiction, as local sources of power may be a reactionary force when based on traditional non-democratic systems of power and authority.

The final chapters of the book include a brief report on Cuba by way of comparison, and a more general discussion of the difficulties of "socialism in a poor country." The issues of lack of resources and trained personnel, as well as the problems that arise from too much bureaucracy are dealt with here. And finally, the war waged by South Africa's proxy, the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), has taken a toll on the development of democracy and socialism that may be difficult to ever overcome. As his title states, Mozambique had a dream, and it has been "undone."

The Keller and Rothchild collection on Afro-Marxist Regimes addresses many of the same issues by looking at Angola, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe as well as Mozambique. Keller's first chapter discusses the history of socialist ideas in independent Africa, and concludes by listing five "commonalities" of Afro-Marxist regimes: the centrality of ideology, the key role of the vanguard party in reconciling ideology and policy and in directing the politics of the society, the emphasis on organizing authoritative state structures, the control of the economy by the state, and the commitment to a centrally planned economy. (p.11)

The articles that follow are divided into three sections. The first focuses on the ideology and consolidation of state power in

each of the four countries. The authors are well-known for their publications on these countries: Marina Ottaway on Ethiopia, Ottaway and Herbert Howe on Mozambique, John Marcum on Angola, and Masipula Sithole on Zimbabwe. There are useful chapters that primarily give an historical overview to recent political developments in the four countries. In discussing Mozambique, for example, Howe and Ottaway conclude that Frelimo itself is well-consolidated but that the state is in disarray, partly as a result of poor planning, and partly due to the MNR war of destruction. The result, in their view, is "the present paradox of a strong regime [or party] presiding over a very weak state." (p.61)

Zimbabwe is the most controversial inclusion in this collection. In fact, Sithole concludes his analysis by stating that "nationalism, more than Marxism, is likely to guide Zimbabwe patriots of both ZANU and ZAPU for quite some time to come in the essentially national democratic phase of the African revolution." This conclusion raises, but does not resolve, the issue of Zimbabwe's designation as an "Afro-Marxist" country in the context of this collection.

The second section of the book turns to policy making with a focus on economics and development in each of the four countries. John Saul writes about Mozambique, Dessalegn Rahmato on Ethiopia, Gillian Gunn on Angola, and Michael Bratton and Stephen Burgess on Zimbabwe. In the first three cases, the authors' goal is to explain the shortcomings in the current development plans given the high expectations particularly of Angola and Mozambique. Gunn's analysis of Angola emphasizes the internal contradiction of an economy dependent on western oil company technology and a state reliant on Soviet and Cuban military aid.

Bratton and Burgess focus on Zimbabwe's market economy, and question whether Zimbabwe can be characterized as a socialist country. They conclude that there is more rhetoric than real action regarding the implementation of a socialist economy, though certainly the ideology espouses a socialist perspective.

The third section of the book moves to international influences. Adele Jinadu, discussing Soviet influences on Ethiopia and Mozambique, concludes that the Soviet support has been limited but important in both cases. Robert Price looks at South Africa's relations with Mozambique and Angola; his more sophisticated argument amplifies South Africa's interest in maintaining regional dominance. While the South African government claims that the Marxist governments of Angola and Mozambique represent a Soviet onslaught on southern Africa, the reality is that South Africa continues to play the hegemonic role in the region.

The conclusion by Donald Rothchild and Michael Foley draws together many of the issues and questions raised throughout the collection. They ask first whether ideology "counts." What can ideology explain that is not simply explained by economic conditions, international environment, and "political networking and constraints?" Their answer is that ideology "identifies and legitimates the principles and purposes around which policies are determined."(p.281)

In that case, what makes a state an "Afro-Marxist" state? Rothchild and Foley list seven ideological elements they consider to be "'Marxist-Leninist' in the African setting."(p.282) But once again, the editors and contributors constrain themselves by working within their definition, which set the terms at the beginning. Because they look at Marxist ideology rather than economics, they include Zimbabwe, a country readily omitted from lists of "Afro-Marxist regimes."

In both of the books being reviewed the authors have set the discussion by defining their terms in a circular way. Thus, in the Keller and Rothchild book, Afro-Marxism is that form of Marxism found in Africa. They run into particular difficulty in including Zimbabwe, where their own contributors conclude that Zimbabwe in fact is not a Marxist or even a socialist country, despite some of the official pronouncements.

Egerö's definition of democracy in the Mozambican context is not so problematic. While it is also somewhat circular (democracy seems to include all forms of popular power being developed in Mozambique), the greater detail of his longer analysis is more satisfying and provides a more accurate assessment of where Mozambique has come from and what the future may hold.

Despite these conceptual problems, both books are recommended, as they raise and discuss issues of central importance to understanding southern Africa today, as well as the development of socialism in the Third World in general.

Kathleen Sheldon