

BOOK REVIEWS

Women in Africa and the African Diaspora. 1996. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Andrea Benton Rushing, eds., Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press. 286 pp. \$17.95 paperback.

Women in Africa and the African Diaspora is an eloquently illuminating addition to the thin bibliography on black feminism. In this book, eighteen essays by eminent black female scholars explore important segments of the black woman's life and give a succinct judicious and fair-minded portrait of the trials, tribulations, and accomplishments of women of African ancestry in Africa itself, and in the diaspora. Split into three sections, the story that emerges weaves around themes such as the theory and method for the study of black feminism, the black woman's status and her role in her native African society, the achievements of the African diaspora women in various fields, the sometimes terrifying agonies of black women in various walks of life, and a comparative study of the images of black women in Western literature.

The Western reader, used to judging other peoples not by their own standards but by what Caucasians deem appropriate, would find the essays in Part II of the book particularly intriguing. This section of the book is allocated to Africa, a continent whose history has for so long been distorted, misinterpreted, and misunderstood in Western circles. Whether it is Niara Sudarkasa's piece on "The 'Status of Women' in Indigenous Africa Societies," Andrea Benton Rushing's essay "On Becoming a Feminist: Learning From Africa," or the jointly produced piece by Harriette Pipes McAdoo and Miriam K. Were on "Extended Family Involvement in Urban Kenyan Professional Women," the results are illuminating portrayals of the least-understood, but often-condemned aspects of African culture.

Taking advantage of various research tools in their favor, tools such as Rushing's ability to read the Yoruba language, the time spent among the Yorubas of Western Nigeria, personal contacts with African feminists and an inside understanding of their female culture, the contributors interrogate some common, but erroneous assumptions of Western feminists about the African woman. Rushing's study, in fact, reveals striking similarities in the African, African-American, and Haitian women's "combination of fierce dedication to their children, dawn-to-dark work days, strong religious faith, and mouths that were...weapons" (p.121). She discusses the "matrilineal, matrifocal" culture of the Akan-speaking people of Ghana and reveals the powerful role of the Queen Mother, the economic power of often-unschooled market women and the political leverage it gave them (p.123), and uses those examples to dispel the once-fast-held notion that African women were silent drudges who were subjected to bearing many children, to the practice of female circumcision, and to accepting their husbands polygamous privileges unquestioningly.

<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i3reviews.pdf>

Niara Sudarkasa's analysis of the status of women in indigenous African societies reveals that, except for the Islamized societies of sub-Saharan Africa, women were conspicuous in high places in pre-colonial times. She says women in pre-colonial Africa were queen-mothers, queen-sisters, princesses, chiefs, and holders of other offices in towns and villages (p.73). All of the essays dealing with the role of women in traditional pre-colonial Africa agree that African women played far more important roles in the economies of their societies, where many were involved in farming, trade, and craft production, than previously conceived in Europe and America.

The contributors caution against the presumption that black women worked outside the home solely because of economic necessity rather than due to the choice of tradition, the kind of presumption that seems to say that the black woman, like her white counterpart, would choose the role of housewife and mother over that of a working wife and mother. Everywhere, black female and male roles are shown to compliment each other.

Studies in parts III and IV of the book show that the black woman in Africa and in the diaspora had well established rights long before the era of female liberation movements. The idea of giving these women respected rights was not borrowed from Europe, as some analysts have labored to write. The misconceptions about the black family, that became widespread among Europeans and Euro-Americans in the nineteenth century and are still very much alive today have fooled many into studying the black woman from the perspective of the white woman. They failed to take cognizance of the fact that the place of the black woman was not just in the kitchen. Thus in order to give the academic world a rational understanding of the role of the black woman, these lady-scholars took an Afro-centric view of the black woman.

There is a clear explication of certain vital themes in their writings: the impact of slavery and colonialism on women in Africa and the diaspora, the role of women-singers in African American poetry, images of black women in New World literature, African Diaspora women as black culture bearers, and their patterns of social and political interactions. There is no denial in the book of the disadvantages that black women suffered as a consequence of the social system that was rooted in centuries of contact with the white man as evidenced in the transatlantic slave trade. That trade laid the groundwork for European imperialism and forces of modernization which for so long denied black women equal access to formal education.

The book is a lucid popularization of a dramatic and enlightening story; the story is presented both accurately and honestly, critically as well as understandingly. The book certainly offers informative reading for university undergraduates and the general public. Freshmen with little or no backgrounds in Africana studies as well as lay readers shall be attracted not only by the intrinsic interest of the story, but by the interpretations and conclusion. At the college level, the book can be used not only to augment lectures in introductory courses, but also as a focal point for a more detailed approach to topics in Black Studies.

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Lethal Aid: The Illusion of Socialism and Self Reliance in Tanzania. 1997. Severine M. Rugumamu. Trenton, NJ: African World Press. 256 pp. \$69.95 hardcover.

Lethal Aid is an important contribution to the study of development assistance and, in particular, the resultant failures and pernicious side-effects of this assistance. Using the experience of Tanzania, an East African nation that historically has languished at the bottom of world economic development tables, Severine Rugumamu contends that aid must be understood within the geo-political context. Rugumamu presents four main arguments: first, "foreign aid cannot be understood outside of the global political context"; second, the aid regime began not as long-term aid to the south, but rather as short-term aid to post-war Europe; third, the Cold War created not only security needs and a concomitant competition for allies, but a related competition to assert the supremacy of economic systems; fourth, recipients of aid, hardly innocents, had ambitions of their own in accepting assistance (pp.7-10). The net effect, however, according to Rugumamu, was a culture of dependence that "eroded the self-confidence, creativity and pride of the citizens and the leaders and, in the process, saw donors usurp the role of managing national development policy" (p.10).

This usurpation comprises the first facet of lethality that Rugumamu's title alludes to. *Lethal Aid* draws from structural power theory which asserts that power relations in the international system are based on a hierarchy which is sub-divided into the powerful and rich and the weak and poor, and secondly that the inequalities and asymmetries of power are necessary conditions for control (p.26). In turn, this leads to three observations by Rugumamu: first, aid politics are governed by the differentials in power among actors; second, foreign aid is, and has been, a major tool of statecraft used by actors to advance their (and not necessarily the recipients') interests; and third, aid recipients are not pawns in a game, but retain agency and rationality as they pursue domestic interests (pp. 87-88). It is this conjunction of donor motivations for control, particularly during the Cold War, and the need on the part of domestic elites for resources with which to bolster their positions, that rendered aid "lethal".

The state of Tanzania emerged from independence institutionally and organizationally weak and, in particular, short of skilled manpower (p.96). This shortage meant that the government was unable to independently analyze sectoral needs and oftentimes need assessments were carried out by ill-informed donors. On top of this, past experiences with the conditionalities of bilateral aid laid plain the real costs of accepting assistance (p.121). Realizing the weakness of the state and its relative powerlessness, Tanzania adopted the Arusha Declaration as a statement of Tanzania's national philosophy. The movement it engendered, known as Ujamaa, was based on socialism and self-reliance. Although well-meant, subsequent implementation decisions that proved disastrous in tandem with economic crises left Tanzania poorer than before and more dependent on aid. The net result was that Tanzania was less able to resist the more pernicious effects of the aid regime at the same time as it was increasingly dependent upon it. The effect, according to Rugumamu, was an inexorable vitiation of the Tanzanian capacity to shape and direct development within its borders (p.200).

Turning to empirical evidence, Rugumamu uses cases studies to underscore this vitiation and to show how development projects were virtually removed from national oversight and run almost exclusively by donors. Looking at projects sponsored by the Norwegian, Danish,

and Swedish international development organizations, he paints a vivid picture of good intentions gone awry.

The first example, the Mbegani fisheries center, funded by Norway, was a "poorly conceived, ill-planned [and] designed project" (p.227). The project was meant to transfer Norwegian fishing expertise to artisanal fishers of the Tanzanian coast. Unfortunately, the "Norwegian experts lacked both the necessary background information about the fisheries industry in Tanzania and the expertise to determine appropriate solutions" (p.227). The Norwegians brought with them facilities and expertise appropriate for modern refrigeration practices, even though they were working with fishers who relied on smoking and drying fish. In the end, the Mbegani center was "perceived by neighboring artisanal fishers as a foreign high-technology island in their midst with no marked economic impact on their lives" (p.228).

Rugumamu's second example, the Sokoine University of Agriculture, funded by Denmark, was meant to provide training in livestock methods and animal husbandry practices appropriate for Tanzania. Yet from the outset, the Danish experts held sway due to a lack of local participation in planning the college and the related lack of local experts who could translate Tanzanian livestock practices into appropriate curricula (p.232). The result was an ill-fitting adaptation of Danish curriculum to local conditions that never fully worked and took tremendous resources to sustain.

As in Mbegani, Sokoine was dominated by donors until assistance was phased out, at which time the government found itself with a school that had never met its intended role and was too expensive to sustain intact (p.244).

The last of Rugumamu's cases concerns the Tanzanian Central Bureau of Statistics (TAKWIMU) and the assistance it received from Sweden. In this example, most of the project goals were met, and the Bureau did vastly improve its scope and capability, but even in this "success" story, we see the seeds of disaster. For example, although the bureau did increase its vehicle fleet for data collection, this increase was almost entirely funded by the Swedes and little provision was made by TAKWIMU for the replacement of aging vehicles, to say nothing of equipment or retiring staff. Clearly these gains, originally purchased by the Swedes, were going to be hard to maintain. The point is that progress can be had with sustained donor interest, but without significant local participation and investment this progress proves illusory once donor support is withdrawn.

Rugumamu concludes that the only viable way for Tanzania, and other states in similar predicaments, to avoid the slow erosion of national sovereignty is by turning to a strategy of self-reliance (p.277). As Rugumamu demonstrates, aid dependence slowly erodes national capabilities to govern and rule and undermines moral authority. States that wish to avoid this diminution have the option to delink and pursue a self-reliance strategy. He argues that this may already be happening by default.

Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa) comprises just 1.5 percent of world trade (p.270). Even though the self-reliance strategy was a flop in Tanzania, Rugumamu argues, this should not dissuade us from the intrinsic merits of the strategy (p.269). If dependent states want to avoid or lessen the toxic effects of the international aid regime, Rugumamu's book provides an object lesson on some of the mistakes to avoid. For scholars of East Africa and development

administration, *Lethal Aid* is a noteworthy treatment of the historical, political, and economic aspects of development and how it has so often failed to deliver on its promises.

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South Africa Limits to Change: The Political Economy of Transformation. 1998. Hein Marais. London and New York: Zed Press. 284 pp. \$25.00 paperback.

Many observers of South African politics are dismayed by the economic policies recently adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) government. These analysts fear that the promise of the struggle has been sacrificed to a market-oriented economic policy that is tailored to the demands of national and global capital. In other words, the ANC has been captured by capital.

Arguing in this vein, Hein Marais offers an analysis of the process of transformation in two parts. The first portion of his book outlines South Africa's social and economic structure under apartheid, and discusses the vicissitudes of the popular struggle against that system. The second portion of the book builds on this foundation to argue that the ANC's doomed strategy led the party to dispense with an emphasis on state-led growth and social expenditure that was at the core of the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). The promise of the RDP was rejected in favor of the pro-business Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) program, betraying the ANC's core constituency, the working class poor.

Marais's discussion of South African political economy serves as a fairly standard "radical" analysis of the unholy alliance between South African capital and the apartheid state. Not much is new here, although it does serve as a helpful condensed summary of this approach. In contrast, Marais's interpretation of popular resistance offers a relatively new scholarly trend that might be called the "radical revisionist" history of the struggle. In this view, the ANC has consistently betrayed the black working class, its true constituency. Rather than emphasizing class-based mobilization, the ANC has relied on a nationalist approach that has relegated the labor movement to a secondary role, and encouraged a futile "insurrectionism," or what Robert Fine has called "boycottism."

The ANC certainly deserves some pointed criticism. There is no shortage of histories that "celebrate" the organization, lionize its leadership, and generally rely on sycophancy rather than historical analysis. With the benefit of hindsight, many of the ANC's tactical and strategic blunders become clear. Marais points out, for example, that resistance in the 1950s remained fragmented, and that the ANC failed to capitalize on popular militancy in this period. Marais also criticizes the ANC for its decision to embark on armed struggle in the 1960s. This position makes less sense, resting in part on the very dubious claim that the ANC might instead have moved into a Gramscian "War of Position," which would have entailed an attempt to create a proletarian mass movement. Virtually all discussions of the 1960s suggest that the state's

extraordinary repression in this period squelched even hints of public dissent, so a "War of Position" was not really an option. Marais's brief discussion of the 1970s emphasizes the importance of trade unions early in the decade, and generally downplays the importance of Black Consciousness ideology.

In his account of the 1980s, Marais is most critical of the ANC and the loosely allied United Democratic Front (UDF). He argues that the ANC and the UDF failed to build on the growing strength of the labor movement in this period, relying instead on a rudderless strategy of insurrectionism that had no real hope of transforming South African society. By the late 1980s, Marais argues, the UDF/ANC alliance had achieved only a stalemate in which it was forced to broker a settlement with the National Party and white capital. Overall, this assessment reflects a trend in radical scholarship that has emerged since the 1990s that seeks to imagine an alternative past in order to create an alternative present. This view seems to suggest that if the ANC had been more committed to working class mobilization during the resistance years, it might have been possible to achieve a more sweeping transformation, even socialism, in South Africa.

This analysis sets the stage for the second portion of Marais's book, in which he discusses the formation of a "class compromise" between the ANC and capital. In this view, because the ANC had failed to build a sufficiently strong and disciplined popular movement, it was unable to wrest control of the economy from white capital. Instead, the ANC was forced to focus its efforts on control of the state and to appease capital. This balance of forces led the ANC to reject its initial strategy of "growth through redistribution" as outlined in the early versions of the RDP. Instead, the ANC bent over backwards to accommodate the demands of national and global capital. These interests forced the ANC to reject the ambitious social policies of the RDP in favor of the neo-liberal market based policies of GEAR, even though most analyses suggested that such a program would do little to improve the rampant social inequalities created by apartheid capitalism. Further, Marais argues, the GEAR policy of export-orientation is likely to fail in its own right because of South Africa's weak global economic position.

Having set out the manner in which the ANC has adopted an economic policy that shuts out the working class, Marais spends the final chapters of the book discussing how political forces might be arrayed to compel the ANC government to adopt policies that put the working class in the favored position rather than capital.

There is little doubt that the ANC has moved away from the redistributive orientation of the RDP, and even further away from the social democratic vision of the Freedom Charter. The critical question is why did it make the shift? Marais doesn't offer a complete explanation: "It is difficult to pinpoint the factors that led to the conversion of ANC economic thinking to orthodoxy" (p. 150). Yet this seems to be a critical question. Why would senior ANC leaders, most of whom have spent their entire lives fighting the social, political, and economic injustices of apartheid, turn about-face and abandon this cause? If GEAR serves the interests of capital at the expense of the working class, then why did the ANC adopt it?

Marais offers two major possible explanations, but neither seems satisfactory. In one section he describes an elaborate program of neo-liberal indoctrination mounted by South African corporate conglomerates and international actors led by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Marais explains the shift to orthodoxy as resulting from the

"bewildering assortment of seminars, conferences, workshops, briefings, international 'fact-finding' trips'... financed by business and foreign development agencies" (p. 150). He also offers a related argument that leftists in the ANC could not match the technical savvy of the pro-business elements inside and outside the organization. This meant that the leftists could not defend the RDP against the blizzard of technical data, models, and forecasts offered by the advocates of neo-liberalism. A more compelling argument might simply be that the ANC leadership concluded that South Africa's serious economic problems, precarious international position, and the sometimes shrill fears expressed by domestic capital made it impossible to go ahead with the statist orientation of the RDP without raising the threat of massive capital flight and shrinking trade. Marais dismisses this view as too pat, relying on the claim that there was simply not enough technical expertise in the Department of Economic Policy to back the RDP.

The key problem with Marais's account of popular opposition is that even if the reader accepts his criticisms of the ANC during the struggle, there is no real attempt to suggest viable alternatives. If we accept, for example, the claim that the UDF and the ANC led a more or less pointless insurrectionist movement in the 1980s (and it is far from clear that such a characterization fits), one is left wondering what alternative Marais would have endorsed. A close reading of this portion of the book reveals some hint of the alternative strategy that Marais might have prescribed. He generally heaps praise on the trade union movement for its role in the resistance struggle, at times implying that it offered a model for other organizations, but he never makes it clear if this is in fact his argument, and if so, how exactly the diverse elements of popular resistance (e.g. churches, soccer clubs, student groups) might have used the model of shop-steward based trade unions while also facing the might of the apartheid security apparatus.

Marais is more concrete in his discussion of the ANC's economic policy, offering a suggestion that parts of the RDP can be used as the starting point for a new "progressive" agenda to bring the ANC back to its working-class roots. But Marais's failure to offer a satisfactory explanation of the rejection of the RDP puts this strategy in doubt. If the ANC leadership has already decided that the RDP is economically unfeasible, then it won't do much good to put it at the center of a progressive agenda. Marais does not attempt to establish whether the RDP is in fact a feasible approach for South Africa. More troubling is Marais's hint that some form of "inward-looking industrialization strategy" (p. 131) is the most viable alternative to the ANC's export-oriented policy. He never says exactly what this might look like. Nationalization of key industries? Investment in sectors that produce for a domestic market? The reader is left with only hints, such as "progressive macroeconomic and industrial policies" (p. 193). Ironically, Marais's language suggests that he would propose some variant of import-substituting-industrialization (ISI), the very policy that contributed to the chronic economic crises of the South African economy under apartheid.

Many readers will agree with the book's overall theme that the ANC should have been closer to its working class roots during the resistance years, and that since 1990 it has gone too far to accommodate capital while making only modest social investments. But readers will be frustrated by Marais's general reluctance to explicate alternative paths, either historical or contemporary. It is essential that the ANC face penetrating criticisms such as those offered by Marais, but such criticisms won't build houses, improve schools, or provide better health care in

South Africa. What should South Africa do? What can South Africa do? Those are the key questions today.

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