

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Book Review: Lars Rudebeck, Guinea-Bissau. A Study of Political Mobilization

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9cv366s1>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 5(3)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Yoder, Stanley

Publication Date

1975

DOI

10.5070/F753017498

Copyright Information

Copyright 1975 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

BOOK REVIEW: *Guinea-Bissau. A Study of Political Mobilization*, by Lars Rudebeck, Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1974. Pp. 177.

The political situation in Guinea-Bissau has changed so rapidly in the past several years that many books and articles have been quickly outdated. The chroniclers of the success of the PAIGC in the late 1960s publicized the national liberation movement when it needed international support and recognition.¹ Yet today Guinea-Bissau is no longer the site of a struggle for national liberation from Portugal; rather it is a state whose people are building a new society. This study of political mobilization in Guinea-Bissau will not be easily outdated, for it presents both the basis for success of the PAIGC in the past and the party program for the new society in the future. Furthermore, the author places his entire discussion in the context of the broad issues of neo-colonialism and underdevelopment, issues of overriding importance to all of Africa.

Rudebeck wrote the book to provide reliable information about Guinea-Bissau and to improve understanding of the more general political principles and mechanisms in the emancipation of oppressed societies. He characterizes his study as both a description of the struggle for national liberation and a work of social science. He recognizes that he set himself a difficult task.

Our design is simple, but our purpose ambitious, perhaps overly so. By presenting important facts in a theoretically ordered way, we hope to make those facts better understood. But we would also like theory to be illuminated and possibly improved by the confrontation with those same facts. For only by letting theory work upon facts and facts upon theory is it possible to come to grips with reality. p. 1.

He succeeds admirably in providing a general source book on Guinea-Bissau and the program of the PAIGC; he is less successful in improving the conceptual tools of social science.

The author draws on excellent sources for the book. In visits to the liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau in 1970 and in 1972 he conducted many interviews with PAIGC members at various levels of responsibility. He observed military and political activities of the party, including part of the process of electing the first National Assembly in 1972. He relies heavily on the official party program and on the speeches of Amilcar Cabral in his presentation of the goals and ideology of the PAIGC. The statistical data come from both PAIGC and Portuguese sources.

The book emerges clear and simple in structure, though the wealth of information presented makes for somewhat tedious reading at points.

The major theme of this work centers around the concept of *mobilization*, a term for

the crucial political process and mechanisms through which political leaders organize support for revolutionary efforts by appealing to the people's self-experienced and concrete interests in a better life.
p. 230.

Political mobilization consists of building popular support for actions which can free people from the situation of underdevelopment and dependency in which colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism have placed them. To Rudebeck, Guinea-Bissau is a case study of successful political mobilization as demonstrated by the military, political, and social achievements of the PAIGC. The people have reclaimed the power to use their resources for their own needs, a power they had temporarily lost to the Portuguese.

Any strategy for political mobilization must be based on a thorough analysis of objective social conditions. Thus Rudebeck begins with a descriptive survey of the people of Guinea-Bissau and the effects of colonialism on their lives in order to show the social situation faced by the PAIGC leadership. Rudebeck presents statistics showing how closely the cash economy of Guinea-Bissau was tied to Portugal and the impact of PAIGC activity on exports in the late 1960s. He also offers statistical comparisons of the conditions of health and educational opportunities with other West African countries. Although the data are incomplete and not always strictly comparable, the author carefully indicates his sources and the basis for his reasoning in a manner that lends credence to his whole analysis.

In the following chapter Rudebeck summarizes the ideology and goals of the PAIGC as reflected in the party program, the guidelines for party workers, and speeches of Cabral. The great stress on the importance of ideology comes through clearly. Cabral defines ideology as, "the system of valuations and factual knowledge that ties together your political goals and the conditions of reality." (p. 73) He emphasizes that to succeed, a liberation movement must know and understand the historical reality which it confronts. National liberation is attained only when the national productive forces have been completely freed from every kind of foreign domination.

The concrete goals of the party program have an increased importance now that the party is free to work toward developing the human and material resources of Guinea-Bissau. They display a deep respect for individual freedom and a faith in human judgment that is usually missing in programs for development today. The party recognizes that it can obtain and keep the support of people only if they can see for themselves the connection between the goals they strive for and the means for achieving those goals. Rudebeck describes the major points of the program and includes them in outline form as an appendix. His exposition is particularly useful because of the attention he pays to meanings of concepts often taken for granted. He answers such questions as, Who are "the people"?, What constitutes collective leadership?, What does democracy mean for decision-making at various levels?, What is the difference between military and civilian personnel?.

Nearly one-half the book is devoted to a description of "the emerging social order," or the new society in the liberated areas. The chapter on military, judicial, and party structure demands close attention. Excerpts from interviews with villagers give a glimpse of these structures operating at the local level. Rudebeck describes the problems confronted in the implementation of the national elections in 1972 as an illustration of how party policy adapts to village situations, and how compromises to party directives are achieved. He also thoughtfully raises the question of how the party will relate to the state in the new era of statehood. Until 1973 the party *was* the state. As the state assumes more functions its personnel will demand more power. The present party program declares that the party will continue to direct policy, but the state will implement it. The people's continued control of their government hinges on this relationship.

Rudebeck offers abundant evidence of improving living conditions in the "emerging social order" in the liberated areas. Popular support is directly contingent on such improvement. As the president of a local village committee stated,

We have to work and struggle. Through the struggle we change, and our lives improve. We want better lives, we want roads, clothes, food, security, good lives. We are not tired, and we shall fight until victory.

Cabral put it this way,

National liberation, the struggle against colonialism, working for peace and progress, independence, - all

these will be empty words without real significance for the people, unless they are translated into real improvements of the conditions of life. It is useless to liberate a region if the people of the region are then left without the elementary necessities of life.

The final chapter is devoted to a discussion of various approaches of social scientists to the process of mobilization and to a presentation of his position. He notes that some scholars use the term in ways differing from his own, while others describe the process he calls political mobilization without using the term. Thus while Marxist scholars consider the process of becoming class-conscious and enlisting mass support for political mobilization, Rudebeck would like that to change, for his research has led him to conclude that,

marxist-inspired theoretical thought is indispensable to the systematic organization of factual knowledge about underdevelopment and development.

I do not anticipate that social scientists, Marxist or otherwise, will rush to adopt the concept of mobilization for their analyses as it is here presented. The concept is not clear nor sufficiently incisive to be used as such. Rudebeck uses mobilization and political mobilization interchangeably at times (p. 230). It is in the sub-types of mobilization that the concept becomes ambiguous. The two basic sub-types are political and social mobilization. He considers social mobilization to be, "the intransitive aspect of mobilization," a conception that seems intuitively contradictory. The process described consists of changes in the social consciousness of individuals, a heightening of awareness of structural oppositions in society. Nothing would be lost by dropping the term social mobilization altogether (and *fictitious* mobilization as well). The definitional problem is worth noting only because Rudebeck expressly tries to add to our conceptual tools for analyzing certain types of social change.

One aspect of Rudebeck's conception of political mobilization deserves particular attention, for it adds to our understanding of the bureaucratization of revolutionary movements. Political mobilization consists of two poles of activity: one pole of guidance, direction, planning, control; the other pole of voluntary participation, individual initiative, control of leaders. For mobilization to be successful these poles must both be strong and mutually reinforcing. This implies that a dominance of one pole will lead to either the co-option or the collapse of the movement, depending on which one dominates.

Rudebeck suggests that the context of struggling against a colonial power may force these poles to both remain strong, for they depend on each other for their very existence. Once the colonial power is defeated, the chances for one pole to dominate the other are vastly increased. This line of reasoning suggests that when a liberation movement inherits a bureaucracy from a defeated colonial power, the pole of guidance and control will become dominant, and the people risk losing control of their leaders.

Rudebeck's conception of underdevelopment (heavily influenced by Amilcar Cabral and Walter Rodney) has implication beyond the domain of liberation movements. For him the modern phenomenon of underdevelopment grew out of the expansionism of Western Europe and North America through which the people of the Third World were deprived of the power to use their own resources to meet their own needs. Peoples of the Third World must reclaim that power to emerge from underdevelopment. The state of Guinea-Bissau is a lesson in what can be accomplished on a major scale. But it also serves as a lesson on a more minor scale - that people will support programs for development that produce small improvements in living conditions, that allow for individual choice among alternatives, that promote collective leadership. Once people are assured of access to their own resources for their own needs, they are in a position to choose (or not) outside counsel and material. But without that assurance development programs can only add to underdevelopment.