

Walter Barrows, Grassroots Politics in an African State: Integration and Development in Sierra Leone. New York and London: Africana Publishing Company, 1976. vii + 265 pp. \$25.00

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Since the second half of the 1960s African political research has focused increasingly on local, rather than national, arenas of change. The most important reasons for this shift of emphasis include the demonstrated fragility of national regimes and institutions, which in any case rest upon political alliances with local elites; the paradox of overly ambitious national development plans and their shaky implementation in districts and villages; and a growing feeling that the real continuities and changes in African society can best be observed at the local level. Although the monographic literature on local politics in Africa is proliferating, few studies have seriously attempted to

generalize beyond the specific country in which the data were collected. Walter Barrows' fine study of Kenema District in Sierra Leone is to be welcomed as an exception to this tendency.

Based on fieldwork carried out in 1969-70, Barrows is primarily concerned to analyse the structure and the underlying logic of national-local political linkages in Sierra Leone. His strategy is to concentrate on the role of chief in a culturally homogeneous area, in the process gaining tighter control over the analytical variables he uses than is the case with more descriptive studies, which deal with a wider slice of institutional life. The background to the argument is built up with a detailed historical treatment of the changing position of the paramount chief in Mende society (chapters 3 and 4), concluding broadly that the chief's modern role is a synthesis of both pre-colonial and colonial elements. In the post-1961 period, Barrows argues, contradictory expectations that the chiefs will act as neutral figureheads, as party agents, and as civil servants, all at the same time, have weakened chiefly authority. This weakness has, in turn, forced chiefs into alliances with national party leaders in order to defend against threats to their position. In chapter 5, case studies of four out of Kenema's seven parliamentary constituencies amply illustrate the local variations on this theme.

Some of the most interesting sections of the book (to be found in chapters 2 and 6) use game theory to help explain the organizing principles of factional alliances in Sierra Leonean politics. I have yet to see a more successful analytical treatment of local factionalism in Africa, even though the situation under examination may not be totally comparable to other local political arenas. Barrows' major point here is that principles of identity (such as tribe, region, class, or religion) are of lesser importance than the principle of utility, or self-interest, in explaining why political actors behave as they do. At the same time that this motivating principle tends to explain political competition, it also helps to explain how the country holds together, since competing groups at the center must seek allies from different regions of the country. The factional system thus diffuses potentially serious cleavages between traditional and modern groups, between regions, and between socio-economic classes.

As other authors have also found, Barrows concludes that alliances with local elites limit the degree to which national elites can carry out reforms, and thus development. In fact, if a political system is based almost entirely on considerations of utility, economic development and national integration are contradictory. Since the resolution of this key dilemma cannot be inferred from his model, Barrows falls back on the necessity for some (any) ideology as a prerequisite to the simultaneous pursuit of both goals. If such an ideological integer were possible, however, the pure utility principle would no longer apply. Given the terms of the system as described, the dilemma is probably insoluble.

In that it proposes general categories of explanation to deal with a specific case, Barrows' book is especially valuable for students of sub-national politics all over the third world. The material is skillfully presented and interesting to read. This is an important and stimulating addition to the literature on modern African politics.