

Bretton, Henry L., POWER AND POLITICS IN AFRICA. Chicago, Aldine Publishers, 1973. 420 p. hard \$12.50
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Henry Bretton, in Power and Politics in Africa, claims to bring to the study of African politics a viewpoint uncluttered by the abstract conceptual debates of American political science. He also is free, he argues, from both the narrow methodological techniques of contemporary political science and the naive and idealistic concern with the words and deeds of Africa's nominal leaders, the government officials of independent black Africa.

One of his basic concerns is with the "real" distribution of power in Africa. Bretton maintains that social scientists hitherto have failed to identify the powerful because they have defined power inadequately. In part, they have attempted to segment social phenomena into political, economic, and social spheres, and treated power as a phenomenon solely of the first of these spheres. They have then, he argues, further narrowed the conception of the political by equating it with the visible activities of and decisions of government. Bretton, conversely, treats power as a phenomenon of a virtually undifferentiated social, economic and political world. The political scientist should study the "economy of power and influence." When he does this he will find that, at least in Africa, "influence is the complete equating of money with social power."

The political resources one has at one's disposal are a measure of one's power or influence. Necessary to the possession of all other political resources, including arms, is money. Therefore, the amount of money at one's disposal is the basic measure of one's power. When one examines the African scene, unburdened by narrow conceptions of power, or formalistic definitions of the political, one finds that the most powerful individuals and groups are foreign ones. The English and French governments, settler interests, investors, corporate officials of multinational corporations, etc. all have access to far more funds than are typically available to indigenous individuals or groups, including government officials with control of "public" funds. Therefore, despite the winning of political independence, African politics remain under the control of Europeans.

The scenario for distribution of effective power is substantially different from the one that explains distribution of pseudopower for popular consumption. The pattern favors urban centers over rural areas, the already privileged and strong over the weak, those associated with or involved in major and economically critical production processes over those engaged in marginal work and activities. Foreign capitalists are favored over indigenous ones, except at relatively insignificant middle and low levels.

Such control operates through several mechanisms. One, and perhaps the most important, is that those who control funds control options. Decisions made by African government officials are meaningless without the funds necessary to effect these decisions. African governments have very limited ability to acquire such funds. They are dependent therefore upon the good will or self-interest of outsiders for their funding.

The greater concentration of wealth in the hands of foreigners is a given of the African "political" scene, independent of the perceptions or desires of the participants on that scene. One means by which that concentration is translated into control, however, is totally dependent upon the desires of African leaders. These leaders are basically motivated by economic goals. They have sought political position for economic security and aggrandizement. They are, therefore, available to the highest bidders, and, in fact, sell themselves to those with money. Since foreign interests possess more money than do various indigenous interests, this phenomenon too, reduces African leaders to dependence upon foreign, primarily Western, interests.

The phenomenon of corruption, then, is at the heart of African politics. Corrupt and wealthy foreign interests bribe African leaders to finance projects which further enrich the coffers of the west and do little to increase the wealth of the African country or the well-being of its population.

African leaders are not totally impotent, however, as they, too, have access to far more wealth than most of their subjects. They utilize this wealth, to the extent necessary, to buy political support: from the army, from the civil service, from any group whose continued input of votes, expertise or other resources is essential to leadership survival in office.

They cannot, and do not, say this, of course. Leaders talk of African socialism, of négritude, of Africanization, Uhuru, Ujaama. Behind the public rhetoric lies the reality of the omnipotence of money and the ubiquitousness of corruption.

Determining the loci of varying degrees and kinds of power is one of the goals of the book. Another is assessing various ways in which African countries might overcome their dependence upon the west and their incredible poverty. Should a leadership truly dedicated to the well-being of its population arise, it would find that the various economic givens of the African scene preclude any rapid economic changes, and perhaps any major changes at all.

Among these givens is the dependence upon foreign interests for massive amounts of capital, the further dependence upon foreign purchase of one's exports (in what is usually an unstable market) to finance and repay these loans, the necessity to expend on salaries what little capital accumulates, since the continued support of the salariat, both civilian and military, is essential for any regime's survival.

The basic methods by which these central conclusions were reached involved concentrated study of six countries: Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia. Bretton argues that the range of a number of crucial variables among these six countries is substantial enough so that consistencies characteristic of all of them are likely to be characteristic, as well, of all of Black Africa. He examines various secondary sources on these countries, the basic economic data their governments provide -- although he warns of the care with which such data should be used, and such useful sources as the studies by post-coup governments of the misdeeds of their predecessors. These various materials form the bases for his conclusions.

It is his methodology, or lack thereof, that I find most faulty. Let me make my biases clear. I am a behaviorally trained political scientist. I continue to have great respect for the emphasis of that tradition upon precision of argument and scientific method, although I fault the tradition for diverting the discipline for a number of years from central questions to peripheral ones more easily answered by existing methodologies.

Mr. Bretton's strength is that he asks important questions. Few political scientists have focused on the continued role and activities of the Europeans in Africa, have asked what weight they continue to have in the political process. Studies emphasizing the gap between the stated goals of leaders and the resources available to implement them are also rare. For his questions, for his foci, Bretton is to be highly praised.

Unfortunately, he has no way of satisfactorily answering the questions he poses. His book begins with a critique of the various concepts of power used by political scientists such as Dahl, Cartwright, Frey and others. I awaited eagerly his revised definition which would form the basis [when operationalized] for his study of the distribution of power in Africa. No such definition is ever given. What is given instead, are statements like this: "Once we accept that material resources and values derived therefrom are at the root of the power and influence tree, terminological formulation can be held to a level of clarity that permits intelligent discussion." Instead of a definition, we get a metaphor equating money and power.

Thus, the crucially important questions on the actual relationship between the substantial financial resources of the foreign community and influence over the politics of these countries are dealt with, not empirically, but definitionally. Money is power, according to Bretton. He does not suggest that, if the wealthy choose to use their wealth to influence political decisions, they will probably be successful, and, under certain conditions, more so than others. It is axiomatic both that they do so choose and that they are successful. All that he must demonstrate empirically, then, is the distribution of wealth.

Nor does he suggest that the wealthy will be powerful if government leaders want above all else money, and thus are vulnerable to being bought. It is axiomatic that this is their primary need, and thus that they are vulnerable. The only empirical question, then, is to demonstrate, where evidence exists -- and he correctly points out how little actual evidence there is, for obvious reasons -- the actual corruption of certain government leaders.

Bretton does qualify the stark simplicity of the above views. At various points, he refers to wealth as potential power or as

necessary to (rather than equivalent to) the acquisition of power. Similarly, he introduces into his discussion questions as to the rationality of leaders. The rational leader, having the basic need of personal survival and financial security, seeks money wherever he can get it. If he doesn't, the harsh reality that only money can guarantee survival will destroy him. Despite this, there are a few African leaders who seem to have different goals. (Of course, they just may not have been exposed yet.) We can assume, however, that since they are irrational they will soon fall.

The methodological weaknesses of his discussion of power and its distribution should not blur the value of his discussion of the desperate economic straits of African countries. His argument that economic deterioration rather than development is most likely seemed convincing to a non-economist, and this alone is an important contribution.

A final note. While there is much of value in the book, getting to it was difficult. A good editing job would have reduced it by a third. The frequent redundancies were a nuisance. More annoying, to a reader of footnotes, was the arrangement by which one had to go to the back of the book for footnotes, only to be referred further back in the book to a reference bibliography. Given 756 footnotes, that's a lot of unnecessary page flipping.

Robert D. Grey

Associate Professor of Political Science
Grinnell College