

BOOK REVIEWS

Issa G. Shivji, Class Struggles in Tanzania. New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1976.

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In the past several years, social science writing on Africa has undergone a major revision in orientation. The perspective of modernization, with its emphasis on sequential and incremental change and its explanation for the poverty of Africa rooted in the backwardness of the practices and attitudes of African societies, is slowly but surely (though not without a struggle) being discarded. Its successor, a perspective of underdevelopment and dependence, which emphasizes the link between European progress and African impoverishment and which stresses the need for a major transformation of European-African ties, has now become so commonplace that even its critics have adopted much of its terminology. Since the underdevelopment and dependence perspective is itself in large part a radical critique of, and corrective to, previously dominant ideas, and not really a developed alternative theoretical structure, its dominance will, I suspect, be brief.

It is in this intellectual transition that Shivji's book must be situated. Shivji, a Tanzanian graduate of the University of Dar es Salaam now on its Law Faculty, has developed a major critique of much of the previous writing on Tanzania. In doing so he has, by extension, also developed a critique of much of the writing on other African countries. Shivji suggests the outlines for a departure from the previous work and has begun to elaborate an understanding of Tanzania derived from an alternative theoretical orientation. (I stress the intellectual site of Shivji's work here to highlight its strengths: it shows us what was very wrong in previous work and it indicates future directions.)

Shivji is concerned with power, with conflict, and ultimately with development in Tanzania. After a brief introduction on marxist methodology, which is unfortunately too sketchy, too selective, and too simplistic even for an audience unfamiliar with the method, Shivji attempts to apply that method to Tanzania. He delineates the role of the African petty bourgeoisie during the period of anticolonial nationalism, culminating in its accession to power. Once in office, that petty bourgeois leadership then used the mechanisms of state power to defeat its most important local rivals, a primarily Asian commercial class. In the course of that struggle, the segment of the petty bourgeoisie whose strength derived from their positions in the state administrative and political machinery--in Shivji's terms, the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie"--emerged into the dominant position within the ruling class. Most recently, Shivji sees signs of the beginnings of a strong proletarian orientation in class conflict in Tanzania. Clear about the on-going

nature of class conflict, Shivji identifies obstacles to this proletarian orientation. In fact, Shivji is not particularly optimistic about the immediate future and is among the most outspoken critics of the Tanzanian leadership. The book includes an appendix describing several facets of the integration of Tanzania into international capitalism.

As a critique of, and corrective to, earlier work, Shivji's book is extraordinarily useful. He goes beyond reviewing the active underdevelopment of Tanzania during the period of European rule to identify the nature of class conflict in the decolonization process. A clearer understanding of the petty bourgeois class base of the nationalist leadership helps us make more sense of the behavior of the independent government. That is, its efforts to use state power to secure control of the national economy are not only an anti-European strategy but also an attack on the nascent local merchant class. In the Tanzanian context, where the Asians emphasized their ethnic exclusiveness to preserve community solidarity and where the nationalist struggle often juxtaposed African ethnic identity to white rule, that anti-merchant struggle merged with anti-Asian sentiments--class and ethnicity (or race) are not alternative explanations but inter-linked motivation for behavior.

Similarly, Shivji's characterization of the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie"--a phenomenon that, whatever the terminology, is recognizable throughout Africa--helps us develop an understanding of the seemingly contradictory current behavior of the Tanzanian leadership. Though frequently stressing the impoverishment of Tanzania that stems from Tanzania's integration into the capitalist world economy, the Tanzanian leadership continues to depend heavily on trade and aid from the major capitalist powers. Though ostensibly committed to a socialist organization of production and to active mass participation in policy formulation and implementation, the Tanzanian leadership pursues policies that emphasize technocratic and bureaucratic concerns, thus undermining both socialist organization and mass participation. As Shivji points out, the class base of that leadership led it to pursue an anti-imperialist strategy to secure decolonization, but as the ruling class itself becomes enmeshed in international capitalism its anti-imperialism yields to its capitalist connections.

There are important weaknesses in this book, many of which have already been outlined by Shivji's critics. (In fact, this book is a response to critics of an earlier, incomplete analysis, The Silent Class Struggle, and an elaboration of the ideas introduced there.) The most serious weakness is Shivji's inclination to rely on rigid categories and mechanistic linkages. From the perspective of the social science mainstream, Shivji's analytic structure is too gross an instrument to capture the nuances of Tanzanian politics. And from the marxist perspective, Shivji's analytic structure is more mechanical than dialectical; outcomes are seen as determined by static structural arrangements rather than as the result of tensions and conflict. In short, too much is explained too quickly and too smoothly. To take just one example, Shivji's outline of the class structure of Tanzania is reminiscent of the stratification studies common in the writings of sociologists: a relatively static listing of categories (metropolitan, commercial, and petty bourgeoisie, kulaks, workers, and peasants), rather than a categorization derived from a detailed analysis of the changing organization of production both within Tanzania and in the world economy. As a result, shifts in the focus of class antagonism and rearrangements of class alliances can be

described but not explained.

Yet Shivji's major contribution is as a critic, and there he is very successful. As well, he has outlined a direction for future work. In this regard, Shivji's book ought to be considered an initial hypothesis: a comprehensive first approximation of the nature of Tanzania's political economy. The next step is to match the empirical study of that political economy to the hypothesis, in the process correcting and refining the hypothesis. Successive approximations, each in the form of a proposed comprehensive explanation, will permit a fuller understanding of the events. And since the initial appearance of this work in duplicated form in 1974, that is exactly what Shivji has been engaged in.

Thus, as a country study of Tanzania, this book is seriously flawed. At the same time, it is a major step forward in our understanding of Tanzania, and of Africa. And it has generated the sort of debate that will permit substantial advances in the future.