



# Iron Cages: Paradigms, Ideologies and the Crisis of the Postcolonial State

By Alison Jones

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Iron Cages addresses the crisis of the African postcolonial state by exploring the interaction between the 'iron cages' of expert knowledge - of which social science paradigms are taken as emblematic - and lived worlds as experienced by 'ordinary' Africans. The book focuses on two paradigms in particular, modernization theory and Marxism-Leninism, and argues that they were designed not so much to chart the mutable and permeable contours of local landscapes as to affirm the immutable, purportedly scientific, reality tracks embedded in each paradigm. A related investigative trajectory targets the interface between social science paradigms and political ideologies, and argues that the frontier between scientific observation and ideological conviction often is honored more in the breach than in the observance. Author Alison Jones concludes that, by relegating lived worlds to shadowy and insubstantial landscapes of non-being, social science paradigms are implicated in the inability of political ideologies to make sufficient sense to African constituencies. A negative consequence is that in a number of cases, 'national unity' either disintegrates altogether or is coercively enforced by incumbent regimes. However, two African leaders - Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania - broke free from paradigmatic constraints by consciously seeking to bridge the gap between expert knowledge and local worlds. In so doing, they created a third space of humanist enunciation informed by - but not exclusive to - the lived experience of African peoples. By situating local specificities within global contexts, they flagged a way forward for the continent and her many countries.

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