

Exploring Afrocommunism

Michael Clough

CARL G. ROSBERG and THOMAS M. CALLAGHY, Eds. *Socialism in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Berkeley, University of California Press for the Institute of International Studies, 1979.

DAVID and MARINA OTTAWAY. *Afrocommunism*. New York, Africana Publishing Company, 1981.

ALLEN ISSACMAN and BARBARA ISSACMAN. *Mozambique: From Colonialism to Revolution, 1900-1982*. Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1983.

MICHAEL WOLFERS and JANE BERGEROL. *Angola in the Frontline*. London, Zed Press, 1983.

M. CRAWFORD YOUNG. *Ideology and Development in Africa*. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1982.

ON DECEMBER 20, 1969, Major Marien Ngouabi, who had come to power in a military coup in late 1968, reconstituted the Congo Republic (Brazzaville) as Africa's first "people's republic" formally committed to the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Despite Ngouabi's efforts to present this development as a historic event of global importance, most of the world paid little attention. For example, *The New York Times* of the following day devoted less than

half a column at the bottom of page 18 to the story. Several weeks after the event, the paper's editorial writers briefly reexamined the developments in the Congo only to note that they had "provoked mainly yawns."¹ Ten months later a like turn of events in another African country, Somalia, elicited a similar nonreaction.

By the late 1970's, however, these two precursors had been joined by five more African states—Benin, Madagascar, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Angola, in that order—in opting, at least in theory, for Marxism-Leninism. As a consequence, Africa watchers began to debate seriously the meaning and significance of what Carl Rosberg and Thomas Callaghy in their volume reviewed here have labeled the "second wave" of socialism in Africa, the first having crested in the early 1960's.² The rise of this second wave, which came to be called "Afrocommunism," generated fears in conservative circles, cheers in radical circles, and research opportunities in academic circles.

What is Afrocommunism? Is it fundamentally different from the first wave of "African socialism"?

What accounts for its emergence in the late 1970's? Does it constitute a threat to Western interests? These are the issues at the heart of current academic and policy debates concerning Afrocommunism.

At the risk of oversimplification, one can divide writings on this subject into three broad categories: critical, skeptical, and supportive. Although the arguments of writers within each group vary widely, they can be usefully categorized on the basis of their answers to three questions: (1) Should the claims of Afrocommunist regimes to be following a Marxist-Leninist path be taken seriously? (2) Is Afrocommunism an indigenous phenomenon? and (3) Is the emergence of Afrocommunism a positive development?

CRITICS do take the rise of Afrocommunism very seriously. For example, Thomas Henriksen discerns a "sharp contrast" between the outlook of the new Marxist poli-

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¹The *New York Times*, Jan. 10, 1969.

²On the "first wave," see William H. Friedland and Carl G. Rosberg, Eds., *African Socialism*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964.

tics and that of earlier radical regimes in Africa. For the Afrocommunists

*"espousal of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism has become more than a militant critique of European colonialism, as it was for moderate nationalists of the post-World War II period; rather, these concepts have become a ready blueprint for reordering society toward egalitarianism and for attaining power against opposition. . . . Planning beyond decolonization, the revolutionary parties envision noncapitalist development and centralized control over the political life of the nation."*³

A common thread running through the arguments of analysts in the critic category is the belief that Afrocommunism is an ideology alien to Africa, which has been imposed on hapless populations by narrowly based urban elites aided and abetted by the Soviet Union and its "surrogates," especially Cuba and East Germany. Again citing Henriksen:

*In their zeal, the new Afrocommunist governments seek to transplant the orthodox features of communist states, such as the party structure, from local cells to central committees, a system of party congresses, neighborhood vigilance groups, mass organizations, and the secret police.*⁴

The critics argue that if Afrocommunism is not "contained" (or, as some would prefer, "rolled back"), it will eventually threaten Western economic interests, particularly ac-

cess to minerals, endanger the security of shipping lanes, and destabilize countries friendly to the West like the Sudan and Zaire.⁵ These views, I would note, are strongly rejected by all of the authors reviewed in this essay.

SKEPTICS are distinguished by their belief that the rhetoric of Afrocommunists is taken too seriously by both the critics and the supporters. An excellent statement of the skeptical view is Kenneth Jowitt's highly original and thought-provoking essay "Scientific Socialist Regimes in Africa: Political Differentiation, Avoidance, and Unawareness" in the Rosberg and Callaghy volume.

Jowitt, who has devoted most of his career to the study of Leninist development strategies, cautions against a too hasty acceptance of African leaders' attempts to appropriate the "scientific socialist" designation. Instead, he argues that such "regimes might best be considered as organizations with identifiably non-Leninist characters who for particular reasons have formally adopted Leninist facades." The essence of Jowitt's argument is summarized in the following paragraph:

Self-designation as "scientific socialist" or "Marxist-Leninist" may be seen as an act of limited political differentiation, as an attempt by certain African elites to simultaneously balance the imperatives of political relation and separation in three arenas: (1) domestically, (2) in connection with former colonial powers, and (3) in connection with the "socialist camp." The defining

feature of self-designation by an African elite as either "scientific socialist" or "Marxist-Leninist" appears to be its effort to establish an intermediate domestic and international political position—to avoid hard (i.e., mutually exclusive) choices of international alignment and domestic political organization. (p. 146)

In Jowitt's view, the existence of a "multidimensional international order" (i.e., one that is not rigidly divided into two opposing camps but instead allows for the adoption of various intermediate—"non-aligned"—positions) and the absence of a single authoritative Leninist state capable of setting and enforcing an internationally "correct line" means that African states are free to attempt to reap the advantages of ideologically identifying with the socialist camp without paying a price in terms of greatly reduced freedom of maneuver. The potential international advantages of the scientific socialist designation include military and political support from the socialist bloc, greater regional autonomy for states such as Benin, Congo-Brazzaville, and Tanzania that risk "being overshadowed by a more economically viable, politically visible, and militarily developed neighbor," and enhanced status as a result of identification with a powerful and prestigious global movement. Domestically, the scientific socialist designation provides "unestablished elites comprised of individuals coming from previously subordinate tribal groups, neglected regions, or generational strata that have been excluded from the highest power positions" with a means of compensating for their "low status, lack of experience, and need for internal bonding and external boundaries" (p. 140).

³ Thomas Henriksen, "Communism, Communist States and Africa," in Henriksen, Ed., *Communist Powers and Sub-Saharan Africa*, Stanford, CA, Hoover Institution Press, 1981, pp. 115-16.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For representative statements of the "critic" viewpoint, see Michael Radu, "Ideology, Parties and Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Orbis* (Philadelphia), Winter 1982; and Morris Rothenberg, *The USSR and Africa*, Miami, FL, Advanced International Studies Institute, 1980.

In a long and not easily summarized passage, Jowitt carefully distinguishes between Leninism and populism. He clearly believes that Afrocommunist regimes, rhetoric notwithstanding, ought to be placed in the populist category.

A second variant of the skeptical view seeks to sidestep the debate over intentions by focusing on environmental constraints. Briefly stated, the argument of analysts in this category is that the options open to African leaders, especially in the economic realm, are so limited that it is misleading to pay too much attention to ideological declarations. Reflecting this view, Rosberg and Callaghy observe that

the economies of African socialist states remain dependent on and integrated into the world capitalist economy.... Economic autarky is not a viable option. Heavily dependent on commodity trade, they are also dependent on outside sources for capital accumulation, technical assistance, and investment plans. The relations between socialist states and multinational corporations appear to be little different from those in non-socialist states. Despite the ideological ties and orientation of scientific socialist African states with external socialist powers, no dramatic economic alternatives have become available. (p. 6)

Given the dire economic condition of these states, skeptics question the argument made by many in the critic category that Afrocommunist states are likely to threaten Western economic interests by withholding mineral exports from international markets.⁶

THE FINAL category of analysts, which I have categorized as supportive, are distinguished from the skeptics by their belief that the

Marxist-Leninist aspirations of the Afrocommunist leaders ought to be taken seriously, and, to varying degrees, they regard the appearance of such leaders as a potentially positive development. Among the supporters, however, there is considerable variation, ranging from the relatively detached arguments of supporters like David and Marina Ottaway to the outright enthusiasm of Allen and Barbara Issacman or Jane Bergerol and Michael Wolfers.

The term Afrocommunism was coined by the Ottaways. In their view, regimes like those in Ethiopia and Mozambique "should be considered as Marxist-Leninist ones, albeit in the initial stages of organization and consolidation" (p. 10). In contrast with Jowitt's stress on the pragmatic reasons behind African leaders' decisions to adopt a scientific socialist designation, the Ottaways emphasize ideological considerations. "Ideology," they contend, "has determined the choice of institutions, the thrust of foreign relations, the direction of major policy decisions, and has even created the major dilemmas these countries are facing today" (p. 195). More specifically, the "theory" of Afrocommunism is said to combine belief in a single scientific socialism, class conflict, the leading role of the proletariat, the need for a small vanguard party, the legitimacy of coercion as part of a socialist transformation, and proletarian internationalism. However, ideological identification with the international communist movement does not mean, in the Ottaways' view, that Afrocommunist regimes are extensions of the Soviet bloc. They write:

Like the European proponents of "Eurocommunism," the African Marxist-Leninist states are setting forth the argument that communism does not imply blind imitation of, and enslavement to the Soviet Union, but can be a choice freely made by independent states, adapted to local circumstances, and implemented with subservience to no foreign power. (p. 11)

Although acknowledging that relations between the Afrocommunist states and the United States are likely to be difficult, the Ottaways suggest that an informed and balanced policy would permit the United States to influence to its advantage the path that the Afrocommunists take, especially with regard to their relations with the Soviet Union. They offer "the Algerian outcome" as a possible end point for these states:

The United States has learned to live with, and has come to respect, Algeria as a representative of a militant but independent Third World position. The Afrocommunist states already share with Algeria its militant Third World outlook and its desire for economic relations with the West. They could well evolve toward a less aligned position on geopolitical issues once they feel they are not so threatened and their need for the Soviet military shield slackens. (p. 213)

Although the underlying tone of their argument is clearly supportive of the Afrocommunist option, the Ottaways acknowledge that it is too early to know with confidence which way Afrocommunist states will move or whether this phenomenon will prove to be a positive development for Africa.

This caution distinguishes the Ottaways from the school represented by Allen and Barbara

⁶For an excellent statement of this position, see Robert Price, "US Policy toward Southern Africa," in Gwendolen Carter and Patrick O'Meara, Eds., *International Politics in Southern Africa*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1982.

Issacman, who over the past decade have become America's most prolific interpreters of the historical development and current politics of Mozambique. An unconcealed bias in favor of the present government there strongly colors the Issacmans' writings, as demonstrated in their characterization of the Mozambican "experiment" as

a synthesis of the concrete experiences and lessons of the armed struggle—experimentation, self-criticism, self-reliance, peasant mobilization, and the development of popularly based political institutions—and the contemporary Mozambique reality with the broad organizing principles of Marxism-Leninism....

Mozambique's social experiment ... merits critical attention because of its highly visible campaign against tribalism and racism. In a continent marred by ethnic, religious, and regional conflict, the intensity with which the Mozambican government is combatting these divisive tendencies is unprecedented. (p. 3)

The Issacman's personal identification with the Mozambican revolution is reflected in a tendency to see all opposition to the "progressives" within Frelimo (the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front) as the result of Portuguese subversion and the "narrowly nationalist," "racialist," and "tribalist" posture of the progressives' rivals. The possibility that there might have been legitimate grounds for disagreement with the progressives' strategies and long-term plans (and that such factors might have something to do with Mozambique's current problems) does not appear to have been considered.

While the Issacmans acknowledge many of the problems that have beset the government of

Samora Machel, they always do so in a way that tends to absolve it of any responsibility for them. For example, Portuguese propaganda, Rhodesian and South African agents, and petty bourgeois self-seekers are blamed for the failures of the so-called dynamizing groups set up by Frelimo in 1974–75 "to familiarize people with Frelimo's goals and to provide them with a crash course in decisionmaking" (p. 107).

Throughout the book they paint a picture of a committed, sensitive Frelimo leadership with considerable mass support struggling to overcome a legacy of poverty, tribalism, and oppression in order to bring into existence an egalitarian, participatory socialist democracy and to further racial justice in southern Africa. Without making judgments about the intentions of President Machel and his aides, one must question whether leaders fighting for survival—as they have been for so much of their political lives—can match up to the sort of idealized portrait sketched by the Issacmans.

Mozambique is at present a country that is, by Machel's own admission, facing a major national crisis. Its economy is on the verge of collapse; its countryside, torn by war. So dire are the straits it is in, Mozambique has welcomed a security pact with and economic assistance from its greatest enemy, South Africa. The Issacmans' book provides little analysis that can help us understand how such a situation could develop. Admittedly, Mozambique's problems have been seriously complicated by first Rhodesian and later South African support for anti-Frelimo guerrillas, but then, as Frelimo's own supporters had argued before they achieved independence, a guerrilla insurgency cannot survive on external support alone. Had Frelimo

made the tremendous strides in winning over the masses that the Issacmans imply were made in their description of the creation of participatory institutions in Mozambique, it is unlikely that the current insurgency would have ever reached threatening proportions.

Despite its problems, the Issacmans' book definitely ought to be read by anyone interested in the development of Afrocommunism. The same cannot be said of *Angola in the Frontline* by Michael Wolfers and Jane Bergerol. This is a highly partisan account of the Angolan civil war and the policies of the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) government. Many of the details in this book are highly suspect. For example, Wolfers and Bergerol write that Nathaniel Davis was appointed US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs in March 1974 and imply that Davis's appointment marked the beginning of US efforts to intervene in the Angolan civil war (p. 5). In fact, Davis was appointed in March 1975 and resigned a few months later because he *opposed* covert intervention in Angola. These facts were widely reported,⁷ which makes the error more serious. This example should serve as a caution against relying on the accuracy of this entirely unfootnoted account of Angola's recent history. This book's only real value is as a reflection of how some groups in Angola perceive this history.

THESE LAST two books point out a larger problem. In most Third

⁷See John Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution Vol. 2: Exile Politics and Guerrilla Warfare, 1962-1976*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1978; Nathaniel Davis, "The Angola Decision of 1975: A Personal Memoir," *Foreign Affairs* (New York), Fall 1978; and Gerald Bender, "Kissinger in Angola: Anatomy of Failure," in René Marchand, Ed., *American Policy in Southern Africa: The Stakes and the Stance*, Washington, DC, University Press of America, 1978.

Book Reviews

World countries, critics and skeptics are not extended a warm welcome. This means that such writers are often forced to rely on newspapers, public speeches, interviews with nationals who have left the country, and secondary sources for information. This situation tends to discourage many researchers. As a result, the majority of books written on radical regimes are authored either by critics who use available sources to develop evidence to support their preconceived views or by enthusiastic supporters who use their access to find further grounds for their enthusiasm. Ironically, among the major victims of this situation are the countries under scrutiny. Since the enthusiasts are seldom seen as credible observers by mainstream opinion leaders in the United States, they are incapable of creating the kind of understanding of Afrocommunism that might foster the "more balanced" policy toward Afrocommunist countries

called for by the Ottaways (and strongly opposed by the critics).

One recent book that takes a step in the right direction is *Ideology and Development in Africa* by M. Crawford Young. The objective of this book is, in the author's words, "to explore the interrelationship between ideological preference and developmental performance" (p. 9). In order to do this, Young divides African states into three groups—Afro-Marxist, populist socialist, and African capitalist—and attempts to compare them in terms of six criteria: economic growth, equality of distribution, autonomy and self-reliance, preservation of human dignity, participation, and expansion of societal capacity.

As Young acknowledges in his appropriately titled final chapter "By Way of Conclusion: A Preliminary Appraisal of Ideology and Performance," this book does not constitute a final answer to the question of which development

path offers the best hope for Africa. But it does provide a good basis for moving beyond the rather sterile debates between Afrocommunism's critics and its enthusiasts. Young's own analysis of the Afro-Marxists makes use of insights from both skeptics like Jowitt and cautious supporters like the Ottaways.

Interestingly, Young identified Mozambique as the country upon whose political evolution and economic performance the ultimate verdict on Afrocommunism would hinge. Given that country's current plight, most critics would surely say we need wait no longer to render a negative verdict. However, even if the critics are right, Afrocommunism is not likely to disappear from the African scene in the near future. For that reason, scholars and policymakers would be well advised to read with care the Rosberg and Callaghy, Ottaway, and Young volumes.

Urban Policy in China

William T. Rowe

CHRISTOPHER HOWE, Ed.
Shanghai: Revolution and Development in an Asian Metropolis. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

MARTIN KING WHYTE and WILLIAM L. PARISH. *Urban Life in Contemporary China*. Chicago, IL, and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

LAWRENCE J. C. MA and EDWARD W. HANTEN, Eds.
Urban Development in Modern China. Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1981.

*Shanghai is a non-productive city. It is a parasitic city. It is a criminal city. It is a refugee city. It is the paradise of adventurers.*¹

WHEN the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) moved in 1949–50 from the rural areas upon which the success of its revolution had been based into the country's major cities, its leaders faced wide-ranging and serious problems. They inherited localities with accumulated inadequacies of housing and supply services, as well as productive capacities devastated by years of invasion and civil war.

¹ *Jingji Zhoubao* [Economic Weekly—1949], quoted in Howe book under review, p. 46.

They needed a quick restoration and expansion of production in order to finance their continuing consolidation of domestic control and, very quickly, a new foreign war. At the same time, they needed to demonstrate at least some progress toward fulfilling their political promises of greater economic equality and a guaranteed subsistence for all citizens. In achieving these (quite possibly contradictory) aims they faced a number of special handicaps, including a potentially hostile, demoralized, and politically cynical urban class, and—as the above quotation illustrates—the parochial anti-urban attitudes of many influential party members themselves.

In the longer term, the Communists under Mao Zedong faced an even more formidable task. As each of the works under review argues, industrialization in virtually all societies has left an inevitable mark on the nature of urbanism, creating cities far larger than those in the past and replete with the social problems urbanologists often refer to as “alienation” and “anomie.” Clearly, the CCP sought the economic benefits of industrialization while sensing and seeking to avoid its related social problems. In the attempt to realize their new “Chinese model” of industrial urbanism, the Communists have displayed a remarkable fertility of invention in organizational forms

and mobilizational strategies, along with an equally notable willingness to backtrack and discard experimental forms according to evaluations of success and to shifting priorities. To what degree have they succeeded in achieving their ends, and what have been the effects (intended or unintended) on the lives of Chinese urbanites? These three books, all important contributions to the growing literature on contemporary Chinese cities, provide many answers.

ALL THREE BOOKS begin, as they must, with a consideration of the unique historical traditions of Chinese urbanism. In the view of the Communists, and indeed of many 20th-century Chinese intellectuals, this legacy was almost completely negative. There was, on the one hand, the older, indigenous tradition of the city as political-military control center for its surrounding territory and as residence of the landlord-literati class. On top of this had been superimposed in the 19th century a new level of predominantly coastal treaty-port cities, the locus of investment and

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