

# MILITARY MARXISM

*Africa's Contribution to Revolutionary  
Theory, 1957–2023*

ADAM MAYER



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By Adam Mayer

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*For Ibrahim Traoré and the other marxisant officer-leaders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, for giving political hope to all Africa.*

*For György Vári of Bét Orim, for giving spiritual hope to (Reform Jewish) Budapest.*

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Motto: “Africa is ripe for revolution.”—Zhou En-lai, Mogadishu, 1964

Motto: “Courage is the mother of all virtues because without it, you cannot consistently perform the others.”—Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*



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# Introduction

## AFRICAN MARXISM AS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

“African Communism” is similar to so-called “Jewish Communism” in some ways. These are slurs that hide virulent conspiracy theories. The first was an accusation once always on the lips of apartheid-era Afrikaner “security experts” who talked of a “massive onslaught by Moscow.” Both terms are still widespread neo-Nazi tropes. But this should not lead us to believe that Africans, or Jews, have been unimportant in the history of Marxist ideas, radicalism, or Communism. Some Jews today are unduly embarrassed about the role that Jews had once played in constructing the world’s most important revolutionary Communist experiments from East Berlin to Beijing and Moscow. An article about “Mandela’s Jews” some years ago in the conservative Jewish press went as far as *editing out* the memory of Joe Slovo<sup>1</sup> and his magnificent revolutionary wife Ruth First<sup>2</sup> from a retrospective account of Mandela’s Jews.<sup>3</sup> Both Slovo and First were, of course, Baltic Jews before becoming South African heroes. My private excuse for writing on African Marxism as a white man and a Hungarian does not end at historical junctures where Jews, my co-religionists, have been relevant to African emancipation. My wife is West African, and my in-laws are almost without exception Gambians. With a topic as controversial as this, being clear on my own positionality seems essential.

Numerous African middle-class intellectuals today are also embarrassed about the history of African radicalism, the pan-African movement, the memory of African battles for justice and agency, and especially the history of African Marxists, African Marxisms, and African Communism in the West and the Caribbean as well as within Africa. Despite the obvious role that Communists had played in liberating South Africa from apartheid, or,

say, ridding Guinée of France for decades. Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe today calls the entire tradition of national liberation and African Marxism “liturgical incantation,”<sup>4</sup> an “exercise in African victimhood,” “pious dogmas and empty dreams,” essentially a shame for today’s global African intellectual who does not want to antagonize the West but wants to become *of it*.

Today’s sleek, sophisticated, and worldly African career diplomats in Geneva, or *American African* professionals<sup>5</sup> in Washington, Alabama, or Florida may be embarrassed about the robust history of the phenomenon that I call *African Marxism*. This meant in fact a transformation of Soviet and “Chikom”<sup>6</sup> foreign policy toolkits called “Soviet Africa” or “Beijing backed socialist experiments” into a more comprehensive, more African “*Marxist Africa*,” a genuine anti-imperialist world of ideas and praxis. Its theory and efficacy had evolved around the early 1960s, but its representatives as we shall see are at the forefront not only of Black diasporic thought<sup>7</sup> but also of US and generally Western socialism even today. Whilst diplomats may be embarrassed about his memory, the Burkinabe people wax lyrical about the late Marxist president of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara,<sup>8</sup> when they recall their fallen African Communist leader. This book will focus on one crucial but unexpected strand in the African Marxist theoretical toolkit: *Military Marxism*. I discuss here the theory of movements where African radicals actually decide to fight the intruders, and their reasons for doing so.

African diaspora Marxists are important today in the West. Olufemi O. Taiwo is reshaping Western radical progressive thought on a global scale,<sup>9</sup> Biko Agozino is emblematic in critical criminology worldwide,<sup>10</sup> Biodun Jeyifo still rules literary criticism.<sup>11</sup> Every single author alive, discussed in this book, has enlarged on our knowledge of Africa itself. The living among them include Yash Tandon, Eboe Hutchful, Issa Shivji, Ifeoma Okoye, Amina Mama, Biodun Jeyifo, Biko Agozino, Mahmood Mamdani, and Chinweizu in 2024.<sup>12</sup> Today’s *American Africans* are important actors in what happens to American, as well as Western, socialism. When the rap song *This is America* came out, it was not only inspiration for a similarly socially conscious rap song *This is Nigeria* in almost no time, but the other important story was that the original song itself had been co-produced by none other than a Nigerian Marxist social scientist Claude Ake’s similarly revolutionary son!<sup>13</sup>

Western academic knowledge on Africa is today sadly more reliable, more structured, and probably more detailed than academic knowledge within the African continent.<sup>14</sup> Most major Africa research institutions are located in the West, and their conferences gather everywhere in the Global North from Denver to Paris, but rarest in Africa.<sup>15</sup> The reason behind this staggering epistemological imbalance is that the post-colonial and neoliberal order had forced an *exodus of intellectuals* from their countries, primarily to the United

States, but also to France, Europe, and South Africa in the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> This had been a function pointedly *not* of 1960s independence of African states and least of all their allegedly “wasted resources” and so called “white elephant projects,” but *of the 1980s–1990s neoliberal onslaught on the African middle class*.<sup>17</sup> Structural adjustment turned on African institutions, societies, economies, and life worlds. I argue here that this was primarily an effort to restore Western capital’s rate of return on investment in peripheral Africa.

Somewhat absurdly, the CIA had never protested the arrival of African Communist intellectuals in the United States of America, *if and when they could increase America’s state of knowledge on the old continent*, even before Communists had stopped being a national security threat in practical terms in the United States,<sup>18</sup> despite their ruthless suppression of home grown African American radicals such as the Black Panther Party.<sup>19</sup> The majority of American African intellectuals I discuss in this book are today, or have earlier been, working in the West, especially since 1990.<sup>20</sup>

*Since the spread of internet in Africa twenty years ago, however, their influence now regularly transcends their diaspora status, and their influence is stronger in Africa itself even than before their emigration.* With China focusing on the domestic economy, and Eastern Europe undergoing its post-apocalyptic transformation into a newly pauperized sub-imperialist circle of hell, African intellectuals had no options left in the 1990s. They could not possibly opt for any other vista than the West when forced by circumstances to abandon their academic roles in Africa; later, some, notably including Harvard’s Biodun Jeyifo, also explored the People’s Republic of China, but this shift is ongoing right now for most, on a larger scale.<sup>21</sup>

This tome differs from others when discussing this epic Africanist academic shift “away” from Africa in some important ways, while simultaneously building on them. Recent works place African radical and Marxist thought in a more-or-less *Afrabian* context.<sup>22</sup> The truly paradigmatic work on Black Marxism has of course been Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism*,<sup>23</sup> a monograph that has since then inspired thousands of explorations on the radical Black Atlantic.<sup>24</sup> Atlantic-centered Black Marxisms had established deep and early connections between Africa, Black America, and the Caribbean, righting a historical hiatus and a moral wrong in the literature (CLR James, Hakim Adi, and *an avalanche of research articles* in Q1 peer-reviewed journals in the last two decades).<sup>25</sup> At the time of George Padmore in the 1930s–1950s, Caribbean thinkers inspired early African Marxisms,<sup>26</sup> and even in the 1970s, a British Guianian, Walter Rodney, was a major influence at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.<sup>27</sup> Caribbean thinkers, important as they have been, do *not* constitute the majority of important African Marxist theoreticians, thinkers, activists, historiographers, belletrists, or socialist-feminists at all, however.

I claim that the Black Atlantic paradigm, despite its historiographic validity and usefulness, has also now been *overused*. It has often been abused to serve *Black Atlanticist paradigms* in US-leaning foreign policy, in cultural orientation, and elsewhere. It has demonstrably shifted attention away from the continent of Africa and its cross-regional, internal connections in the historiographic sense. In its worst avatars, it has even strengthened the already monstrously intimidating neoimperial framework in Africanist historiography. It is not only Europe, not only Britain, that one must provincialize à la Dipesh Chakrabarty,<sup>28</sup> but also the entire Anglophone imperial nexus. Not only is late 19th-century “Anglobalization” rather misleading as the French language more or less ruled the *belle époque*’s imagination from France to Cairo,<sup>29</sup> but the practice of “global” intellectual history can easily turn into a category of neocolonial exclusion.

Startling early 20th-century examples, today largely forgotten, have included instances of Anglomania in Black thought itself. Mamadou Diouf and Jinny Prais reconsider William Henry Ferris’s such conceptual construction, embarrassingly labeled the “Negro-Saxon,” and conclude that “Ferris’s concept of the Negro-Saxon (was) based on his understanding of the Anglo-Saxon accomplishments as the highest ideal the world had ever seen.”<sup>30</sup>

I propose to contrast this veritable monstrosity of the “Negro-Saxon” with Nigeria’s Marxist historian Yusufu Bala Usman’s take on Anglo-Saxon culture, who had deemed Anglo-Saxon culture as *both predatory and naval gazing*, insular, parochial, and downright philistine (in comparison with his primary acculturation in the Islamic republic of letters in Zaria of Northern Nigeria in his aristocratic and secluded youth).<sup>31</sup>

Most thinkers that are dealt with in this history of ideas will proudly defy the self-congratulatory notions embedded in the Anglophone imperial nexus between Africa and Anglia. Indeed, in an African context, delineating Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone regions of the continent is all too easy. The old colonial empires had also quite consciously fostered linguistic divisions.<sup>32</sup>

But we might give thought to the following issue here. It was not neoliberal Kenya but socialist Tanzania that achieved better unity, and Guinée, Mali, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, and the People’s Republic of Congo had also arguably done better at tackling internal divisions than their neocolonialist, capitalist, ethnicist, right-wing neighbors.<sup>33</sup> What if we *think the unthinkable* and posit that even Africa’s *one-party systems*, exactly those very maligned “military-ideological states,” *could do more than others to serve the purpose of people’s and polities genuine structural unity*? Matthieu Kérékou, Marxist “dictator” of Benin, brought back indigenous languages to Beninois education, Nyerere’s Ujamaa system successfully oversaw Swahilization,

while capitalist-oriented states deepened their cultural dependence on former metropolises.<sup>34</sup>

*What if unity, even national unity is actually a precondition to power?* What Black people in Uganda, as well as the United States, today arguably need is power more than anything else in order to effect meaningful change.<sup>35</sup> When the global intellectual historian Sudipta Kaviraj establishes a classification for his craft, he states that the two possible kinds of intellectual histories are: “(one where) their object of epistemic interest is social history. For a second group of scholars, the objects of analysis are the intellectual systems or processes themselves.”<sup>36</sup> Kaviraj thinks that *thought either changes only thought* (a sad prospect), or else it uncovers *the sources of discontent* in reality as in social history.

He seems to forget entirely about the possibility of establishing connections between intellectual history and *political history, intellectual history and the history of changes in power relations at the top*, including revolutions and the people—the locus of power par excellence! Thus, it is *de rigueur* to address the context and praxis of Marxist and socialist states of Africa here. Not doing so would mean that one subscribes to romanticism where all failed revolutions are equally celebrated but no victorious ones are ever pure and nice enough for the analyst. . . . My chapter 1 in this volume delineates the political fate of Marxist systems and state socialism in Africa. These are only outlines, but to my dismay, I had to discover that even such an outline has *not* hitherto appeared in the literature!

“Intellectual history has most often meant studying western European and North American subjects,” says the world’s premier Africanist Frederick Cooper, with beguiling innocence. One must shout to the winds: *No, it has not!*<sup>37</sup> Only *intellectual history written in English for Northern consumption* has meant exactly that which Cooper claims. That particular limitation is real and decisive. *But other languages have produced other corpuses, sometimes radically different.* Does it not occur to Cooper that if for no other purpose than nationalist, culturalist, or ideological agitation and propaganda, the USSR in the Russian language, China in Mandarin Chinese, Bulgaria in Bulgarian, or even Japan in Japanese, had devoted *colossal resources* to a vernacular intellectual infrastructure in order to better allow self-reflection by its own intellectual class, and that *these accomplishments never reached the supposedly “global” English language public*, but that they should be considered part of our global human intellectual heritage, and the rubric of global intellectual history?<sup>38</sup> This way, the Global Northern orientation of intellectual history itself might be properly challenged.

Does Cooper think that every German porcelain potter of importance has a monograph on her in English as opposed to German? Can research articles written on Macedonian thinkers (hitherto discussed in Macedonian

at length) *always break the barrier of Q1 intellectual history journals?* Most intellectual histories *never reach the collective mind of the global epistemic empire's core, they never get translated into "standard" English,* and they never see Q1 peer-reviewed journal publications on their preferred topics. To come closer to security studies, one may recall that Russian "operational art," *operativnaya isskustva*, launched by the great Tukhachevsky as the military theory of the operational level of war, had hundreds, if not thousands, of works appear in the Russian language before a single exposition appeared in English.<sup>39</sup> Cooper mentions Islamic and Chinese history as exceptions and caveats, and some works on African intellectual history,<sup>40</sup> but clearly he seems to think that true "intellectual history" is really only what *reaches and feeds the empire's mind*. Yoruba, Zulu, Peul, Hausa, Orthodox Hebrew, Mandarin, or Classical Arabic self-reflections and intellectual histories including religious histories but also state socialist or Maoist works in Czech or in Nepali, for Cooper, would not be called truly global intellectual history. This is what I call *myopia and this is what the present book volunteers to battle* especially in the context of Military Marxist writing in Africa, even if it focuses on English-language authors. Communist literature is dismissed off hand as propaganda very often. Here I shall show that Marxist theory has flourished in Africa, and influenced in a major way African national liberation and anti-imperialist revolutions. Marxism in Anglophone circles is similar to a foreign language: distanced by feeling as well as institutional limitations. Domenico Losurdo's "controversial" analysis of Stalin did not see an English translation for decades!<sup>41</sup>

Provincializing the Anglophone imperial nexus is psychologically more difficult to do in centers of research in the UK or America, and *practically* difficult to execute in most African universities. The author of this monograph is privileged to earn a livelihood at the American University of Iraq in Baghdad, but he is also a Hungarian academic with a Hungarian passport who experienced state socialism and Marxist-Leninist rule as an adolescent. Now I am a radical Marxist historian of African Marxism, and a person married to a Gambian Sufi Muslim lady, one of the first African residents, as far as we know, in my Hungarian hometown, since the Ottomans had left town in 1604.

Eastern European hearts can be warmed by African cultural output—if it reaches us! Up to this day, Burkinabe serials remind one of heartwarming Czechoslovak series such as *Nők a pult mögött*<sup>42</sup>—and Ousmane Sembéne, Cessay, and many other film makers, indeed *the entire West African art film tradition*, practically grew out of Moscow's artistic academe, and reflect on state socialism's legacy in an African context—as well as their experiences with racial capitalism in France and Senegal.<sup>43</sup> China's revolutionary cultural imprint was similarly relevant in Tanzania, Zambia, and other places.<sup>44</sup>

*Authors discussed at length in this volume will all be Anglophone.* In one particular case, that of Tatcha Mentan of Cameroon, Marxist analysis will actually serve the purpose of emancipating that author's genuine identity community, *English-speaking Cameroon*, a linguistic minority, *Ambazonia* for separatists like Mentan. As fighters for the rights of that minority are in threat of incarceration within la République du Cameroun, Mentan must work in the United States. But none of the other authors here will display the particularist aspect embedded in speaking the English language, the world's supposed *lingua franca*.

In fact, it would be harder already to claim that one challenges entrenched paradigms when it comes to Francophonous African Marxist thought, as that had already been achieved by Françoise Blum and others.<sup>45</sup> Overlaps with Portuguese African thought will in this tome include Eduardo Mondlane.<sup>46</sup> The French language itself contains the expression "militaro-marxiste" as English yet *does not*.

Even given levels of sophistication in English will necessarily influence my selection. This is due to how language interacts with its social, economic, and artistic content. Sudan, for one, had had one of the earliest Communist movements in Africa<sup>47</sup> originating in the 1920s as well as Egypt's. But Sudan's long practice of *using Arabic as language of instruction in schools, but English at the university level*,<sup>48</sup> has had adversarial effects for its intellectuals, who are not very well published in the language.<sup>49</sup>

Organic African working-class intellectuals grew out of, and also left behind powerful movements, people's armies, and indeed, working-class power.<sup>50</sup> In some radical states, such as Mugabe's much maligned Zimbabwe, they could even afford to stay put and not emigrate. An example is the indomitable Sam Moyo.<sup>51</sup> But it would be a great mistake to think that they were or are elitist Bolshevik intellectuals in ivory towers. The works of these authors, and the movements they grew out of, constitute the intellectual ammunition behind the recent removal of France's neocolonial empire from Mali and Burkina Faso, Niger (2023), Senegal (2024), and the difficulties that France, Germany, the United States, and others face on the African continent, while also Western dominated multinational corporations strive for maintaining their habitual, violent racket on the continent. Africa's new political vigor and self-assertion in theaters as varied as sub-imperialist Rwanda or Ethiopia are not independent of Africa's new-found self-esteem in West Africa. How much more obvious this is behind the militant cohorts of Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters in South Africa, and the raw anger of the street in Khartoum before the current civil war, and in Ouagadougou, toppling government after government and *teaching the world the meaning of popular democracy itself*. My chapter 2 will present the classics of Africa's Marxist radicalism, and how they provided the intellectual,

emotional, and intuitive background to taking up arms against empire in Africa.

*Is this all a Russian disinformation campaign* or a Chinese “trick” in Africa? Is anti-Western sentiment an implant there? I claim in this tome that such an allegation is unfounded, tendentious, and imperialist in itself. Russia’s and China’s engagement with Africa both consciously build on the memories of 20th-century Soviet and Chinese foreign policies on the continent. *But the impetus behind African Marxism is African.* China and Russia had for all practical purposes disappeared for decades as revolutionary actors on the continent. The only relevant radical foreign state actor who had never had to change course has been the embattled, much maligned state socialist Republic of Cuba—but Cuba has never had much in the vein of resources. Still, Cuba in Africa is interesting for us for a number of reasons. Once a beacon of military help and hope in Angola, Mozambique, as well as the Horn of Africa,<sup>52</sup> Cuba has been the only bona fide Marxist-Leninist state that never actually aimed to artificially eradicate religion from public life in the Khrushchevian manner, a feat many African socialists have special respect for.<sup>53</sup>

Marxist Africa speaks to politics, proposes a new economy, and attempts at reorganizing societies along new lines. It also speaks the language of creatives. African Marxism fuels protest songs in today’s Kenya and Uganda (*Time Bomb*, Bobi Wine), underwrites Swahili rap songs in Tanzania,<sup>54</sup> entertainers in Nigeria (Burna Boy, especially with *Monsters You Made* and Falz with *This is Nigeria*)<sup>55</sup> and they await the return of the revolutionary dances that FRELIMO had taught its insurgent women and men through the movement for national liberation.<sup>56</sup>

Marxist Africa is still speaking of the dignity of Africa and Africans, wherever its works are published. It may be that *Vogue* and Chanel had just discovered African elegance,<sup>57</sup> but such developments by the global spectacle<sup>58</sup> are timed according to the vagaries of globalized capital and its companies. Sotheby’s recently drew attention to contemporary African visual art, a veritable craze in Britain’s and the West’s art world since the 2010s.<sup>59</sup> But the artists that sappy curators had introduced to the world market *cannot help but tell the truth* about Africa’s condition, Africans’ predicament: the looting of the continent by the West still. Art speaks of suffering. It speaks of suffering getting through to Europe “the back way” by migrants. It speaks of the Fourth World.<sup>60</sup> It has spoken of violence.<sup>61</sup> Some musicians, painters, actors, and sculptors choose not only to chronicle the onslaught but issue calls to resist it.<sup>62</sup> Class-based Marxian literary criticism fuels much of today’s best literary criticism when it addresses post-colonial celebrity artists such as Achebe, Soyinka, Ngugi, and Adichie—where Africa figures as rife with class antagonisms, class distinctions, and class conflict (Biodun Jeyifo, Amuta, and Akin Adesokan).

But this is not to fall into the romanticization one was set out to avoid. Action, praxis, and political power, *even radical military power*, are legitimate fields of study in the humanities and social sciences, and they should be so dealt with via global, African intellectual history. Even Samuel Moyn, based on reading Frederick Cooper, advises that “Instead of the cunning of reason, (. . .) global intellectual history needs to be based on the cunning of action.”<sup>63</sup> However more this should be true for Marxists, whose aim must be *changing the world!*

Robust African trade unionism and socialist thought fuel everything that is truly genuine within African democracy from Sudan’s street protests right before the civil war to Nigeria’s EndSARS and other human rights protests from 2020 onward. The selfsame heritage also helps gather support for African leaders who choose to enter different social contracts than those of liberal democracy (as in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso), arguably still representing *the general will* in the sense of Rousseau. Against them are the structures and cohorts of empire: a colonial currency CFA,<sup>64</sup> mercenary armies, AFRICOM, western corporations, and international organizations that despite the intentions of their founders represent more than any other interest, the interest of the neocolonial boss.<sup>65</sup>

Much of Western Area Studies, African Studies, operates along the lines of “democracy promotion” (especially *The Africa Report*),<sup>66</sup> applying neat US and UK Political Science to godfathers and violence ridden, sham elections, whilst really worrying about what happens to foreign direct investment. This is all disingenuous. Marxist revolutionary thinker and martyr Ruth First had *this* to say about military coups and putschists in Africa:

The government of Africa, in the hands of the politician-manipulators, or the less flamboyant but infinitely more parochial soldier-rulers, is not on the whole tyrannical, but bumbling. Time and again it makes false starts, and spreads false hopes. Condemnation there must be; but compassion, too, for those who talked so boldly about freedom but had so little freedom for manœuvre. (. . .) As for the soldiers who seize government to reform or radicalize it, their success or failure will depend on the popular forces for change that they release within Africa; not on the force of armies or the power that flows out of the barrel of their guns.<sup>67</sup>

She does not view these rulers with undue suspicion on account of how they try to organize their countries, or ensure auto-centric development in them. But First might not go far enough in her own Marxist analysis. She could have said that the Military Marxist regimes’ success or failure will depend on the popular forces, and not *only* on force itself. . . . Force also has its internal logic. After all, troops are composed of *people*; armies may or may not be *pro-people* organizations. The Red Army was set up by none

other than Trotsky! Chairman Mao Zedong won the Chinese civil war by engaging the peasantry in guerilla warfare. So did Uncle Ho of Vietnam. . . .

*What if Sankara, Samora Machel, Mengistu, or Mugabe did the same? What if we are to give them the benefit of the doubt as historians? What if we are to do the same for today's Military Marxist rulers in Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, or elsewhere? Why do we measure every polity to the Westminster system, wholly irrelevant for Africa? What if since 1970, African officers have become more sophisticated in their conception of the world, and how it works?*

I claim with this book that real democracies are ipso facto *popular democracies* that reflect the interests of a given country's working majority, irrespective of the particular mode of how governance is provided by their political superstructures, including military structures. The PRC, the DPRK, Laos, and Cuba are all democracies according to their own respective self-definitions—but Franco and Salazar, Mussolini and Horthy, Sani Abacha, Mobutu Sese Seko, and Hitler did not call their realms “democracies,” and this in itself should be taken to mean something! Conflating state socialisms or revolutionary national liberation movements with fascists and Nazis under the rubric of an imagined “totalitarian” continuum serves no one but the imperial core and its security services.<sup>68</sup> Vijay Prashad's concept of the civilizational state versus the neocolonial state is relevant here.<sup>69</sup> Can any country be content with being a colony or a neocolony? Can any society be happy with its most important decisions being taken for them far away, in rich and cynical metropolises such as Paris still, in 2024? Can inherently unstable, artificially ethnicized, bourgeois “democratic” systems withstand foreign interference on the continent?

It is time that social science addresses the lived experiences of populations under its study, and not the arbitrary norms dictated to it by capital. In Eastern Europe, transition to liberal democracy after 1989 for the majority of the population meant a loss of agency. For three decades, barely any mention was ever made of the positive achievements of state socialist systems in Eastern Europe; indeed, this was anathema if an academic wanted to stay in employment. For the first time in decades, today we start seeing interviews with Egon Krenz,<sup>70</sup> we read that sex was better in the GDR than in West Germany! *Jacobin Magazine* as well as *MROnline* scrutinize the concrete social realities of that country and how they changed after being swallowed up and not really unified, by West Germany.<sup>71</sup> Similar studies are wanting regarding, say, my very own Hungary or the African postsocialist states.

Not only in Africa are revolutionary leftist movements again relevant. In Nepal, a Maoist party replaced a degenerate monarchy ten years ago. In India, Naxalites are of great importance as a social force against reaction and the fascist BJP. Africa's socialist experiments are constantly reduced to

Ethiopia's *Red Terror*, Equatorial Guinea's misery through its early years of independence, and other hair-raising episodes, instead of a comprehensive assessment that employs class analysis and Marxian tools when assessing the legacies of Africa's socialist experiments. *The African street knows better than this*, and my own account here follows their wisdom and not the wisdom presented by academics. I am not therefore criticizing in an unconstructive way, in this work Sankara for steps that Lenin or Mao had also taken before him, as some others do.

There used to be in the 1980s a subdiscipline now entirely forgotten, that compared economic indicators and gains by people in different versions of really existing state socialist economies, as well as capitalist economies, and presented those findings quantitatively, called *Comparative Economic Theory*.<sup>72</sup> Their epistemological innovation was that their method employed scientists simultaneously living in different economic systems through the act of real quantitative comparison across the fault-lines, edited in the US. This comparative synthesis was achieved in the 1980s and had no following in the field of intellectual history or comparative intellectual history. China only escaped neoliberalism due to a number of factors.<sup>73</sup>

In Africa's case, the convenient method is *to deny any Marxist or socialist content to every single African Marxist state by default*—however lazy this approach really is—and forget entirely about African intellectual achievements and how those contributed to the experiments anywhere. I do the opposite here. Even quantitative methods of comparison are re-appearing in unexpected ways, allowing us to stamp out the terrible epistemological impact of the past three decades from our consciousness. For example, Daniel Morales' World Power Index that operates with economic indicators as well as population and geographical data, has the potential to overtake or challenge indicators such as GDP in themselves—giving us a more accurate picture of a changing world that is turning in a multipolar direction.<sup>74</sup>

I have included temporarily victorious political actors in this collection: Nkrumah, A.M. Babu, Cabral, Sankara, Nabudere, Tandon, and Sam Moyo, who have directly influenced their countries' policies for some time. I also diverge from Western Marxist or Africanist consensus with my selection in other ways. Selecting authors according to the dictates of today's Western Left will mean that I would give attention *only to lost and pure revolutions, valiant but doomed figures*, lost causes, bare-chested fights with rocks, and violent victimhood. I respect lost fights, I respect grassroots organizing irrespective of whether they win, and I bow to martyrs of the revolutionary Left always. But I am no Murray Bookchin here: I think that activism without proper guidance and an organized vanguard actually benefits mostly corporations.

As Mazrui pointed out, Africa needs heroes more than martyrs. I will *not* want to reflect only on fighters and protesters embedded within opposition movements,<sup>75</sup> however more flamboyant a Lamin Senghor or a Diop in Senegal had been than an Angolan Marcelino dos Santos, a poet, but somewhat dour after gaining power! A dos Santos before and after gaining power, a Castro before and after Santa Clara, are to be studied with the exact same interest and respect, as well as criticism, as any other socialist fighter. When I recently asked a US Marxist academic about East African Marxisms, he quipped: “Do you mean the bastardized version in Mozambique?” and I was aghast at the blatant absurdity of the notion that any social experiment could *ipso facto* be deemed “bastardized”—bastardized compared exactly to what? To one’s own personal tastes?<sup>76</sup>

It may not be by accident that it is an Eastern European who is writing such a book. Africa is dotted with eternal flames, arches de triomphe, and brutalist state socialist structures that had been intended as help but also for “demonstration effect” as to state-led development’s capacity to deliver improved lives, or better urbanization.<sup>77</sup> Calabar was designed by a Hungarian town planner; East Germany built Zanzibar’s architectural projects of state socialist provenance; Communist China built a rail line for Tanzania and Zambia. In turn, African comrades were welcome in Eastern Europe. *It is easy for a decent Eastern European to celebrate African works of theory.* Indeed, it is easy to see the capacity of the African to speak universal truths. People who grew up in the state socialist East did not have to internalize subconsciously pro-Western “democratic socialist” “truths.”

I also personally happen to be a Marxist who is not a doctrinal atheist, a Marxist who is religious in some practical ways, or tries to be. I share this outlook with many, many African Marxists, including Military Marxists,<sup>78</sup> but few Western radicals.<sup>79</sup> The relevance of religion and the numinous in studying Africa is a powerful one, advanced by Leftist and non-Leftist academics alike: Mazrui on Islam, Toyin Falola on traditional Yoruba religion, Stephen Ellis on Christianity, including Pentecostalism, all come to mind. John Okello, Zanzibar’s revolutionary leftist leader (later sidelined by Abeid Anami Karume), was deeply Christian.<sup>80</sup> I recognize that political religion, however, may be motivated by foreign policy considerations, and may thus be contradictory to building a real civilizational state. Chinag Kai-shek’s Christianity comes to mind.

This is helpful also in other ways. The scholarly Catholic missionary Joseph McKenna, in his *Finding a Social Voice*, where he analyzes three Afro-Marxist regimes and their relationship to the Roman Catholic Church (Angola, Madagascar and Zimbabwe), finds that from those three, *only in the case of Angola can we talk of mild repressive steps*, and even then, only until 1981. The Marxist general Ratsiraka in Madagascar enshrined complete freedom of religion in

the country's *Red Book* by the general,<sup>81</sup> and even McKenna surmises that the general was a practicing believer *and* a Marxist.<sup>82</sup> Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe went as far as calling Zimbabwe "a Christian country" after taking power,<sup>83</sup> a position almost as religiously positive as North Africa's Islamic Marxists'.

I will prove through this tome that African Marxisms have been ignored and maligned *exactly because of their subversive potential*, and that this is the reason for the dismissal and hatred against African Marxism by the liberal mainstream. Converting Africans to conservatism will supply global capital with easy extraprofit, the Northern proletariat with a little improvement in their standard of living, and the Africans with terrible injustice as well as deprivation in material goods, rights and skills, free time, and human fulfillment. If my tome hastens the flight of the African Chiang Kai-sheks and the other sub-imperialist warlords of 21st-century Africa *just by one day*, this tome will have served its highest purpose.

## VIOLENCE AND AFRICAN MARXISM

Mali and Burkina Faso have restarted purchasing their arms from North Korea in 2023.<sup>84</sup> The popular military government of Niger uses Sankarist language. Where does this come from intellectually? What are the justifications behind steps that look so radical? Why would Military Marxists turn even against the UN in 2024 in West Africa? The intellectual history behind this is complex and interesting.

Late 20th-century Afro-Marxism had for decades triumphed at university campuses, women's organizations, and trade unions in Africa's people's republics as well as under staunchly capitalist socioeconomic systems such as those of South Africa, Senegal, Kenya, or Nigeria in the era. Kwame Nkrumah had been one of the first serious African analysts wielding Marxist tools when he attacked imperialism, precipitating his own fall from power in 1966.<sup>85</sup> Dozens followed in his wake.<sup>86</sup>

The historical development of radical African political economy and its Marxian sister disciplines have so far received attention from two distinct sets of research networks. One was a product of the Cold War, but it continued until the late 1990s: "Kremlinologies" on the African people's republics and Marxist-Leninist insurgencies, written from Security Studies viewpoints.<sup>87</sup> The other, more sympathetic to radicalism, has been Marxist Literary Criticism and postcolonial and decolonial thought, as well as Marxist subfields of law (Biodun Jeyifo, Chidi Amuta, Akin Adesokan, Olufemi Taiwo, and Olufemo O. Taiwo), whose findings sometimes made their way into Western Marxist Literary Criticism (Fredrick Jameson, Terry Eagleton) as well as non-Marxist Africana Studies (Molefi Kete Asante).

Marxism had once enjoyed such a hegemonic position in Africa-oriented Literary Criticism in the late 20th century that Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka talked of Leftocracy in the 1980s.<sup>88</sup> However, while some of these schools and radical activist-scholars (Björn Beckman, the *Review of African Political Economy*, CODESRIA in Dakar) have addressed the effects of Marxism and Marxist-Leninism on the working class, less attention has so far been given to the role of women in African Marxist theory (Ifeoma Okoye, Ruth First, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Stephanie Urdang), and also to the dissemination in the 1980s and 1990s of elite Communist intellectuals into INGOs and UN bodies (Bade Onimode, Eboe Hutchful, Thandika Mkandawire, Yash Tandon, Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, and Bernard Magubane), international trade union bodies (Baba Aye), and grassroots NGO organizations (Ogundipe-Leslie, Dani Wadada Nabudere, Edwin Madunagu, and Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem) as well as to criticism of NGOization (Issa Shivji, Elenga M'Buyinga/Moukoko Priso) and radical thought in the service of local African Marxist agricultural initiatives such as radical land reform in Zimbabwe (Sam Moyo). Also lacking is the effect that the essentially involuntary 1990s emigration drive of elite Afro-Marxist thinkers from the continent to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe had on Western epistemic centers that focus on Africa (Ali Mazrui, Mahmood Mamdani, Hutchful, Mkandawire, Tandon, First, Mama, Ogundipe, Claude Ake, Baruch Hirson, Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba, Olufemi Taiwo, Issa Shivji, and Tatah Mentan). African Military Marxism is avoided like the plague in the literature. I discuss all the above authors in chapters 2 and 3 in this volume.

Eduardo Mondlane, already at the turn of 1950s/1960s, taught at Syracuse University in the United States—an early example.<sup>89</sup> Historians study this kind of alter-globalization in Berlin today. African-Eastern European state socialist entanglements existed in terms of ideological transfers, sometimes African presence in Eastern Europe, and obviously the idea of the vanguard party itself was a potent ideological transfer. One must remember also the demonstration effect of modernist and brutalist architecture in Angola, Mozambique, Dem. Rep. Congo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Ethiopia, Togo, Madagascar, Tanzania, and early 1980s Zimbabwe.<sup>90</sup>

China's entanglements with African state socialism as well as independent Marxist thought in Africa are being studied by Jodie Yuzhou Sun.<sup>91</sup> Eastern European state socialist connections<sup>92</sup> are today studied by Eric Burton (Innsbruck, Austria)<sup>93</sup> and Constantin Katsakioris (Bayreuth, Germany),<sup>94</sup> Steffi Marung at Leipzig, James Mark in Exeter (UK), Sebastian Conrad and Michael Goebel in Berlin, Arno Sonderegger and Immanuel Harisch in Vienna (Austria),<sup>95</sup> Ferenc Laczó in Maastricht, János Besenyő,<sup>96</sup> Dávid Vogel, Zoltán Ginelli in Budapest. The “demonstration effect” of state socialist architecture has been studied by Lukasz Stanek.<sup>97</sup> More sources are

available in the magnificent architectural guidebooks/research encyclopedias of *Dom Publishers* (Berlin), where Africa's modernist architectural worlds, including the Communist-inspired ones, are given thousands of pages of space (including stellar visuals, plans, documentation, and interviews),<sup>98</sup> an improvement on even David Adjaye's magnificent series on Africa's modernist architecture.<sup>99</sup>

But even Eastern European entanglements and inspirations, dear as they may be to the author's diehard Eastern European heart, may be disingenuous in *mapping Africa's own output* where African philosophy provides solutions to Africa's problems, and Africa's own art tells the truth and defines the focus on Africa's condition! *Extant scholarship today does not adequately address African ownership of Marxist thought at all—and has not even begun to unearth the tradition of Military Marxism, the Marxism that is ready to fight.*

The African lumpenbourgeoisie had triumphed since the 1970s in most of sub-Saharan Africa, but its conquests are not in the annals of capital despite the growing realization that simply looting Africa, and destroying Africa through mercenary adventurism, is central to the continent's very political economy. Readers of popular accounts of *adventure literature* actually know better! It is exactly through Bob Denard, Mad Michael Hoare, and Simon Mann of the Comoros, the *Seychelles coup*, and the *Wonga coup*,<sup>100</sup> where mercenaries had arrived drunk for the overthrow of sovereign national governments, is *where the paradigmatic relationship of international capital to Africa is found*. In obscene as well as badly planned acts of violence, committed by the worst dregs of the western world in tandem with the usual lumpenbourgeois locally. In most other countries, these selfsame criminal elements have employed a modicum of planning and operational reasonableness as when organized by the French state and other states. That is not to say those operations are more defensible morally: they are worse because they succeed better.

I think it is sad, and even scandalous that *The Cambridge History of Communism's* two chapters on the history of Communism in Africa purportedly "covering" African Communism give 95% of textual space to Algeria and South Africa alone,<sup>101</sup> and a mere two sentences to the "really existing socialist regimes" of Africa.<sup>102</sup> The second chapter focuses on the effects of Cuba's engagement and guerilla war,<sup>103</sup> calling Amílcar Cabral himself a *non-Marxist*.<sup>104</sup>

Amílcar Cabral, who had helped *Czechoslovak state socialist security services versus Yugoslav ones*,<sup>105</sup> was a Marxist.<sup>106</sup> If Cabral was not Marxist, then what is he doing occupying two pages of an already very short chapter that introduces us to African Marxism from 1968 to 1989 in the *Cambridge History*?<sup>107</sup> The assertion here is made of *Cabral using Marxism as an intellectual toolkit*, as a method, as opposed to dogma. . . . Well. Lukács had

famously *defined* Marxism as *a method*, and this particular aspect of his thought has not been criticized by Marxists in the last one hundred years. Cabral did not want to limit his intellectual freedom by bandwagoning his thought to whatever Soviets were thinking at the time: he used Marx as he had intended to be used, i.e., as in tune with *his own society's needs!* This makes him as Marxist as anyone, or more.

These verdicts of “non-Marxism” on Africa’s Marxists by Western historians are usually stamps of tacit approval, stamps of “ownership”: “see he was not bad, he was just a radical but did not belong to the enemy,” his memory is “*ours*, the West’s, still.” . . . Cabral was no pro-Western namby-pamby “good African,” in fact he was *bad*, perhaps even the *baddest* for Western hegemony: so much so that the Western sub-imperialist Portugal probably had him murdered.<sup>108</sup>

The West has had its own reasons for its multiple offenses. More disturbing yet, Soviet theoretical literature on African Marxism was almost equally problematic in terms of respecting Africa’s own independent Marxist trajectory.<sup>109</sup> From the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, Soviet African Studies was an important field of inquiry in the USSR, so much so that foreign minister Gromyko’s son was the chief architect of the subfield in terms of research. Today, Maxim Matusевич, Apollon Davidson, Filatova, and Tatyana Smirnova remain as important Russian Africanists, along with Russian security architectures in West Africa, Mozambique, the Central African Republic, etc. The main literatures of African Studies and *the non-capitalist path, later “socialist orientation”* included the following thinkers: the Soviet Azeri Karen Nersesovich Brutents, Makosch in the GDR, Attila Ágh in Hungary,<sup>110</sup> András Sugár,<sup>111</sup> and György Kalmár.<sup>112</sup>

Soviet Africanists and IR scholars tended toward what Trotskyists have called “stage-ism”: the notion that different historical formations had to follow one another in neat and universally valid order, where economic life carried “superstructures” from communal society through ancient slavery through medieval feudalism to finally capitalist and socialist modernities. This scheme had much to recommend it from the vantage point of pedagogical value and has provided myriads of real insights for Eastern European historiography. However, when they applied this scheme to Africa, Soviet Marxist social scientists arguably ended up producing a mental straightjacket for Africa.

This straitjacket, according to Karen Brutents, was the following classification of the stages of African development. Dominant formations and countries: Overwhelmingly capitalist—*Lebanon*; Dominantly semicapitalist and pre-feudal formations: *Senegal, Zambia, Ghana, Liberia, Dahomey, Madagascar, Congo Brazzaville, Cote d’Ivoire*; Dominantly feudal and semifeudal formations: *Ethiopia, Uganda, Nigeria, Yemen*; dominantly

semifeudal, prefeudal and tribal formations: *Niger, Chad, Mali, Cameroon, Sudan, Gabon, Rwanda, Burundi, Sierra Leone*; dominantly prefeudal and tribal formations: *Kenya, Malawi, Guinea, Upper-Volta, CAR, Tanganyika, Angola, Mozambique, Mauritania, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Somalia*; with slavery present in Sierra Leone, Somalia, and some other countries, remembering here that slavery denotes a “slave mode of production” for Brutents.<sup>113</sup> In a related chart, Brutents determines how relative ratios of the peasantry within a given country on the eve of independence are the basis of the above, with 70–80% of them in Ghana, 80–90% in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Somalia, and 90% in Tanganyika, Chad, Uganda, Niger, Upper-Volta, Dahomey, Mali, Togo, Guinea, and Sudan.

One must conclude that, sadly, most of these characterizations are more or less arbitrary. Jean Suret-Canale and many others had challenged the concept of feudalism in Africa, with Walter Rodney disagreeing with Suret-Canale in principle. Rodney saw feudalism in Africa.<sup>114</sup> But the entire concept of this classification depended not only on a stage-ist, rigid, and rather vulgar understanding of historical and economic formations, but also on a total inability to recognize that there is not only *re-feudalization* in the Habermasian sense but also re-feudalization in the immediate historical sense, such as in 16th- and 17th-century Italian principalities *where capitalism regressed back to land-based power with the disappearance of the Mediterranean trade*, Italy sinking into a feudal decline for centuries. Also regression and coexistence, in this case a racialized capitalism, had achieved primary capitalization through slavery, theft, thuggery, and violence, and subjugation of non-European peoples, lands and epistemic worlds. This was constitutive of European, British, Caribbean, and North American capitalism.

The Brutentsian classification “places” Lebanon in the capitalist group, but what would Brutents have said when, through the civil war, Lebanon “regressed” to tribal and religious identities sooner than anyone expected? Similarly, although few will debate the relevance of feudalism for Ethiopia, placing Nigeria in the “feudal and semifeudal” category (excluding the tribal as well as the capitalist aspects) *would not have made sense any time following the country’s civil war*, where possibly a million people perished due to a conflict that was essentially, tribal—and Nigeria is a very capitalist country, maybe the most capitalist on the continent. There are undoubtedly classes in Africa. But we need to free ourselves from Soviet biases versus Africa for sure.

Brutents saw such theoretical and programmatic weakness in Africa that he approvingly quotes a US Political Science professor on the notion that Africa’s parties have no programs because programs would create cleavages.<sup>115</sup> The only parties that Brutents classifies as Marxist-Leninist were: Guinea’s Democratic Party, the Sudanese Union, and the Workers Party of

Congo Brazzaville—the pro-Soviet allies!<sup>116</sup> He puts the blame for ideological impurities all over the developing world squarely on religion, noting that “Marxism is a total *Weltanschauung*, and if its theses are connected with theses from other, alien ones, it disturbs its ideological content.”<sup>117</sup> Not at all by coincidence, Brutents leaves Cuba almost entirely out of the discussion, not only on USSR foreign policy in Africa but also on account of the respectful relationship between Cuba’s government and religion in that country. Brutents leaves no stone unturned to attack China and Maoists for their alleged crimes, while Maoism had been constitutive of African Marxism in a variety of ways.<sup>118</sup>

A state socialist Hungarian textbook, I am ashamed to say, on socialist orientation in the Global South goes even further in disrespecting African theory when it claims that

The experience of the 1970s shows that this kind of development happens exactly where capitalist relations are least developed, and even dominant are pre-feudal and tribal formations, and where socio-economic as well as cultural *niveaux* are strikingly low (sic!) (Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Democratic Yemen, People’s Republic of the Congo, Benin).<sup>119</sup>

Authors contradict Samir Amin on delinking and opine that without foreign direct investment, African states of a socialist orientation would simply sink.<sup>120</sup> But even more disconcertingly, A. M. Babu and Ali Mazrui, Basil Davidson, and other Marxists and radicals appear on Brutents’s pages as representatives of bourgeois science and sensibilities: a crude and deeply unjust classification.

*African political thought, genuinely continental African political philosophy has more often than not been Marxist in the second half of the 20th century, as we shall see in this volume.* Historians have opted to ignore this even as African philosophy gained recognition as a discipline. This spacious and yawning lacuna is responsible for a major misunderstanding on what followed: of African liberation movements, especially of the radical variety. This lack of focus and the resulting militarized history, often written from the point of view of *Africa’s enemies* falsely present Africans as if they were mere followers of Soviet, Chinese, North African Arab, and Cuban state socialist demands and ideological instruction. All this leaves us with a picture *as if Africans had no ownership of their own radical movements*, and as if they had lacked their own Marxist and radical theory. *The hypersexualized image of the jungle fighter in need of foreign ideas is an offensive, racist, and historically erroneous one*, as well as patriarchal.

Lamine Senghor had practiced Afro-Marxist theory as early as the 1920s in Senegal. Since the 1950s and Amílcar Cabral, Afro-Marxist theory was

already going strong in West Africa (Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau). The period from 1968 onward was only the highest peak of the phenomenon under study. I start my own analysis with 1957 as a starting point because of Nkrumah's own oeuvre and how important I think it was for Africa. The current state of knowledge as present in publications leaves us with another erroneous impression, *as if Communist and radical intellectuals simply disappeared without a trace in the early 1990s*. The very opposite is the truth: most of those thinkers went to America and left many traces in writing, much of it Marxist!

### AFRICAN MARXISM IS AFRICAN

Authors as pointedly non-Marxist as Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz state that "It has also been recognized that, left to its own devices, the market will not bring about serious economic growth in Africa."<sup>121</sup> The criminal undertones behind Africa's version of neoliberalism are today such that *Financial Times* correspondent Tom Burgis gave the title *The Looting Machine* to his own account of African economies.<sup>122</sup>

Post-Marxist "autocracies," especially the military-run variety in Africa's people's republics (Angola, Mozambique, Benin, Congo Brazzaville, Madagascar, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia), have garnered some attention, albeit not the friendly kind, lately.<sup>123</sup> How did Afro-Marxist theory reflect on these dangers back then, and how did it color the thinkers' views before and after 1989? Discontinuities where thinkers opted to turn away from Marxism altogether (such as Claude Ake in the late seventies) will be disregarded from analysis in this study *on account of that turn*. Claude Ake, ostensibly major African Marxist, abandoned Marxism as early as the late 1970s<sup>124</sup> in his very own telling. Much love and celebratory recognition followed him after that. I am uninterested in exactly these kinds of stories, even as he has an European African Studies program named after him.<sup>125</sup> They support the empire alone, not Africa.

Positive political legacies of bona fide Marxist politics such as in the case of Jerry Rawlings in Ghana—also relevant for the UN turn in radicalism's trajectory, will figure however. Links between Marxism and "national liberation" in the early postcolonial era and beyond, as well as Marxism and ethnicity, Marxism, and Islam, African church radicalism (Bishops Desmond Tutu and Matthew Kukah), will be relevant.

The thinkers that this monograph will focus on are from sub-Saharan regions of Africa including South Africa but *not* including Arab North Africa. This is a technical matter: Arab socialist influence was actually very important, but I had space constraints to deal with. Relevant authors