Research Report No. 81

Carlos Lopes & Lars Rudebeck

The Socialist Ideal in Africa

A debate

Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala
Research Report No. 81
Carlos Lopes & Lars Rudebeck
The Socialist Ideal in Africa
A debate
Contents

Preface

 Carlos Lopes
 The erosion of a socialist ideal in African national movements 7
 Visual and Methodological Horizon 7
 Space 8
 Time 9
 Object 9
 Marxism in Africa Today 10
 Current Socialist Theory 11
 African Specificities 13
 Stereotyped Speech 14
 Ideological Mutations 16
 Present Justifications 17
 Conclusions 18

 Lars Rudebeck
 Erosion - and conditions of regeneration 21
 Comments on Carlos Lopes’ text 21
 Points of Debate 21
 No Chain Reaction Whatsoever? 22
 The Most Appropriate Strategy? 22
 Democracy and People’s Power 23
 Democracy as a Strategic Priority 25

 Bibliographic Note 27
The Authors

Carlos Lopes is a sociologist from Guinea-Bissau, who trained at the University of Geneva and then specialized in African Studies at the Sorbonne University, Paris. Since 1984 he is the director of the National Institute of Studies and Research (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa, INEP) in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau.

Some relevant publications:


Lars Rudebeck is a Swedish social scientist, associate professor of political science at the University of Uppsala, Sweden, since 1967 and chairman of the Seminar for Development Studies of the Faculty of Social Science of the same university since 1981. In 1970 and 1972 he visited the liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau and has returned several times to that country since independence. In 1983 he also did research in Mozambique.

Some relevant publications:
* “Political development. Towards a coherent and relevant theoretical formulation of the concept,” Scandinavian Political Studies (Oslo), vol. 5, 1970.
* Poder popular e desagregação nas aldeias comunais do planalto de Mueda (with Yussuf Adam, Aquino de Bragança, Jacques Depelchin, Bertil Egerö, Gary Littlejohn), Centro de Estudos Africanos, Maputo 1986.

Preface

It is a great pleasure for the two of us — a Guinean (Bissau) and a Swedish social scientist united by old ties of friendship and common research interests — to be able to present this joint publication on a theme which we consider highly significant. We hope it will contribute to a serious discussion of the difficult problems of transition now facing those African countries whose victorious struggles for national liberation once aroused such hopes for the future.

We want to sincerely thank the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies for making it possible for us to publish this beginning of a debate, thus initiating also what we hope will turn out to be a fruitful tradition of academic cooperation between Guinea-Bissau and Sweden.

Bissau and Uppsala, October 1987

Carlos Lopes and Lars Rudebeck
The erosion of a socialist ideal in African national movements

Carlos Lopes

Introduction

These thoughts were initially written for a Portuguese journal *Economia e Socialismo* during the autumn of 1986 and then presented in public conferences in Uppsala (Sweden) and in Helsinki (Finland). The article in the journal appeared in no 69-70, December 1986. The emotional reactions of support and confirmation of the ideas presented showed the necessity to provoke this debate.

Earlier, in a preface he wrote for one of my books, Samir Amin pointed to the need to situate oneself in the midst of the principal contradiction in which post-capitalist regimes are located. In fact, these societies are confronted with the demand for substantial development of their productive forces. Indeed, it is illusory to think, says Amin, of "another development" if this is to be based on misery, scarcity and hunger.

Even rejecting the consumption motives and models produced by capitalism in its advanced centers, measuring its real waste and inhumanity, the necessity to increase food production, to establish or complete industrial capacities, to open schools and hospitals, to build houses, roads, etc. continues to be verified. For all these tasks, the technologies which capitalism has now produced appear to be unrivalled. If they provoke a certain class relation, a certain social structure, we must not necessarily react with alternative proposals.

But do, in fact, alternatives exist or do they not?

The following contribution is offered within a perspective shared with other thinkers of our times, conventionally called "left", Marxist, or neo-Marxist. The cold feelings of those who experience the described transformations are far from showing through in the statements summarized below.

In a period when all agree that there are great ideological crises, the African continent is perhaps the one that suffers most from the weakness of the alternatives in which many had placed their hopes. We are experiencing the end of a great myth: that of the possibility of a rapid attainment of socialism; and the construction of socialism in conditions specific to the countries studied here.

Visual and Methodological Horizon

Not only is socialism questioned, but the Third World also as a vision and concept, and third-worldists, including all they want and represent. The possibility of carrying the dreams of Europe to the Third World has been revealed as a mere illusion and the right wing attacks on all fronts. As geographer Yves Lacoste writes, third-worldism, that is "this vision of the world which, essentially, considers fundamental and unjust the enormous economic contrast between two
large groups of countries, rich countries which dominate and poor countries which are dominated”, third-worldism in this sense exists in two versions, depending on whether the analysis is made from the point of view of the North or the South (Lacoste, p. 22).

The perspective of the South, declared at Bandung, caused a great uproar thirty years ago when heads of state from Asia and Africa called for the economic independence of their countries and the liberation of still colonized peoples. This vision was expanded with ideas of tricontinentiality and it was at the origin of all the major associations of countries of the periphery, such as the Movement of Non-Aligned States and the Group of 77.

To define the focus of this essay, we must delimit the field of observation. Definitions of national liberation movements, born from these great schools of thought, may have been inoffensive in that epoch, but no longer. Is this designation applicable to Nicaraguan Contras, União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), and Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana (RNM)? Are these movements fighting for national liberation?

The African National Congress (ANC) itself is today contested as a national liberation movement and some, such as the late Samora Machel, consider it to be a movement for the civil rights of the black population. Joe Slovo, member of the leadership of the ANC and the Communist Party of South Africa, considers South Africa to be subject to a special type of colonialism against which a struggle for true national liberation may be necessary (Slovo, p. 41).

With each consecutive usage and generalization, notions of the state, the nation, etc. become more controversial. Thus, it becomes indispensable to define the limited scanty parameters of our demonstration of the erosion of the socialist ideal.

**Space**

The purpose of the present contribution is to analyze the specific cases of some of the national liberation movements that marked the African continent with their intense struggles of the 1960s and the conquest of power of the 1970s. These concrete cases are the Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC), the Movimento Popular de Libertar;io de Angola (MPLA), Zimbabwe African Nationalist Union (ZAMU-PF), and the Frente de Libertar;io de Mocambique (FRELIMO).

The fact that still colonized territories, since the second World War, suffered successive turmoil with independence of other colonies and other changes provoked by the international political system, should not be neglected. These events caused geo-strategical readjustments that were, once again, shaken by the independence of the former Portuguese colonies and of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.

The installation of the Reagan Administration in the White House in 1981, the world economic recession, the drastic fall in the prices of raw materials (not only of petrol), and the spectacular increase in the value of foreign debts, substantially transformed the panorama of international relations and the very ideological values that governed them.

These were the conditions which welcomed the independence of Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. If today it is easy to imagine that this was not one of the most favourable climates, only ten years ago, who would have had the strength to destroy the myths they had created? These movements even had illusions about the role that South Africa would play.
Time

As stated above, the last ten years have been decisive for the liberation of the African continent. The impetus following the liberation of the Portuguese colonies and the black majority’s accession to power in Zimbabwe, placed Namibia in the centre of the United Nation’s attention and made South Africa a raging fire, which Botha’s regime is having a hard time extinguishing.

The rapid succession of these events should not obstruct the perception of the problems which appeared in the meantime: alarming confrontations in Angola and Mozambique, difficulties in creating national stability, and a climate of ideological crisis. The last ten years have been a permanent test of the disseminated myths. And now?

Object

The history of contemporary African regimes frequently refers to “African Socialism” which, according to Entralgo, “would be a mixture of utopian, Marxist, pre-Marxist and even anti-Marxist concepts with many varied and complex origins and manifestations. ‘African Socialism’ (or ‘African Socialisms’) proposes, thus, the road which is equidistant between capitalism and scientific socialism (Marxist-Leninist), at a historical moment in which the clear choice of capitalism would have hardly been repudiated instinctively by people recently disengaged from the colonial system of monopolist capitalism” (Entralgo, p. 56).

These scientific conceptions were meant to accompany a justification of power — ideology — in accordance with interests that had very little to do with any political or economic rupture with the capitalist system.

In fact, this type of “socialism”, which at times claimed equidistance between blocs or quite simply formal independence, was actually a form of nationalism.

The ambivalent behaviour of the petty bourgeoisie, the class that assumed power in almost all of these countries, was responsible for some of the deviations from socialist ideals. Their ambivalent behaviour ended by showing its true dimension: populism.

When there is no clear structural or organizational base and as class alliances are not easily discerned, recourse to populism is almost inevitable. After populism comes a lack of ideological definition, an autocracy based on personal charisma as the only means of direction and an infinite elasticity in concepts and actions.

Now, as Entralgo warns, there is no inevitable correlation between popular and progressive. The diverse interpretations of “popular” are well known. So for even better reasons, there is no interconnection between popular and socialist. And if populism can be left-wing or right-wing, it is more frequent for the left-wing to move towards the right than the other way around.

The struggles of dominated peoples are almost always animated by nationalist ideology, a condition which, it is said, is inherent in the colonial situation itself. But are social inequality, economic exploitation, and political oppression only expressed in the domination of one nation over another? If so, where do African nations fit? If one were to use the criterion of exclusion, those that are not dominator nations must surely be dominated. This would explain why social claims are first expressed through a nationalist course. Would thus the anti-nationalism of Western progressives contradict the nationalism of Third World progressives?

But be careful! The criterion of exclusion is not applicable to the socialist ideal. Movements which use exclusion to reject other ideologies of national construction
are not socialist. And, in fact, states are not necessarily socialist even if they proclaim themselves as such.

Marxism in Africa Today

Issa Shivji, in his analysis of the class problem in Tanzania in 1975, questioned the applicability of Marxist theory in Africa. His response was “yes”, Marxism is applicable, given the class character of historical relations in the continent. He discarded “elites” and other notions which Marxists question (Shivji, 1976). But, without underestimating the importance it had for African intellectuals, Shivji’s reading is no more than an extension of the theoretical notions of Amilcar Cabral and other thinkers connected with national liberation movements. Soviet historiography classifies Cabral as Marxist-Leninist, as the following citations show:

— Uljanovski: “In his theoretical and practical work, he was directed by principles of scientific socialism, and all his life was devoted to the struggle for the happiness of his people, thus undoubtedly situated within ‘Marxist-Leninism’”;

— Solodovnikov: “It can be added that A. Cabral arrived at a comprehension and recognition of the vivacity of Marxist-Leninism not through books, but through his own life and struggle against colonialism and imperialism” (Solodovnikov, p. 97).

Cabral himself repudiated this designation, saying that one should be judged by one’s own acts and not by what one might be said to be. This controversy is interesting for placing the role of Marxism in Africa in perspective. Often, those who advance their claims rapidly are not those who are closest to the true socialist ideal.

Socialism is above all else a voluntary choice, or self-imposed, we might say. And because it is a choice, it must be deeply desired, on the subjective level. Objectively, certain economic conditions are also necessary for it to be realized.

Chaliand says that “in Africa and in Asia the term socialism has been widely abused, in such a way that...the objective of an egalitarian society has become one of the means by which teams that reach power opt for popular support” (Chaliand, p. 17). The real social rupture that this ideology would impose is, however, difficult to realize under current conditions.

The weaknesses of more or less “scientific” socialisms abound, and this suffices to diminish the image of “socialism” itself.

The political struggle for socialism developed in a context marked by new contradictions. These contradictions put in question the traditional Marxist discussion, centered on class struggle and on the analysis of the economic contradictions of capitalism. New political groups now exist that do not easily perceive themselves in terms of class struggle, such as, for example, women, national, racial, and sexual minorities, pacifist and anti-nuclear and anti-institutional movements. The so-called “guarantees of history” become more diffuse and it is in this context that the ideological crisis of Marxism may be discussed.

In fact, there is no real reason for this crisis to exist. There is indeed a crisis of bourgeois domination which, according to Laclau and Mouffe, is reflected in the alleged crises of socialist and popular movements (Laclau & Mouffe, 1981).
Laws which guarantee *a priori* a certain type of development are theoretical obstacles. As Cabral tells us, the class struggle must be presented in its historical specificity.

Another obstacle to analysis is the hegemonic concept attributed to the working class, a concept which politicians capable of expressing popular-democratic claims have already questioned. Thus a new idea of social unity is introduced, which breaks with the excessively economistic vision prevailing in Marxist interpretations.

Samir Amin, in his turn, tells of the need to combat Marxist "fundamentalism" that comes from orthodox, Marxist-Leninist interpretations. Historical materialism should not be considered a doctrine, but rather an open method capable of assimilating new elements.

Only thus can one arrive at the true debate at hand here: Is it possible to construct socialism on the basis of inherited underdevelopment? Or could it be that capitalism is more appropriate for solving the problems of "underdevelopment"?

*Current Socialist Theory*

There are many opinions about what socialism is or should be. For Marxists, however, there are two constants: socialism is a stage of transition from capitalism to communism, and the first condition for the socialist stage is the seizure of political power, of the state, by the working class.

It was on these principles that the socialist experiences of Eastern Europe were built, and later those of China, Cuba, Vietnam, and more recently Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.

Meanwhile, in the centre of the capitalist economy, Marxism is in a state of "crisis". As Marlene Dixon implored, we cannot continue to have our cake and eat it too, criticizing existing socialism (be it Russian, Vietnamese, Cuban, Yugoslavian or some other) of failure to make up for our idealistic fantasies, and refusing simultaneously to recognize the impossibility of constructing the socialist ideal in a modern capitalist world economy (Dixon, p. 1).

In fact, this is the dilemma of a good number of Western Marxists, leading Samir Amin to speak of a current Asian and African vocation of Marxism. For Western Marxists there are, thus, two principal theses that condition the applicability of Marxism: (1) classes will not be abolished in the foreseeable future because the preliminary phase of capitalist accumulation has not yet terminated; (2) the struggle for socialism must be based on strategies and tactics different from those implemented since 1917. Thus, the old controversies are reopened: reform or revolution?; socialism in one country alone or at the world level? Amin concludes that perhaps the reformist road is the only one in keeping with current realities (Amin, 1984). We agree fully with Amin’s main conclusions.

Can socialism be constructed before capitalism has finished its historical tasks and reduced social contradictions to the bourgeoisie-proletariat duality, or is it possible to introduce gradually the characteristics of a socialist society while developing productive forces? Can stages be jumped or not?

In Africa, politicians have tried to prove the second possibility, but until now with what success? Africa has at least one advantage in relation to Western Marxism, which, in Anderson’s opinion, supported by Amin, is theory without practice. We return anew to the question of the possibility of constructing socialism from a heritage of underdevelopment.
According to James Petras, four notions merit the attention of Third World Marxists:

a) the possibility of capitalist cooperation incorporated over a long period of time in order to regularize internal and external distortions;
b) the notion that capitalist development lays the ground for socialist transformation;
c) the idea that capitalist-type production simplifies productive tasks and gives rise to greater specialization;
d) and, finally, the notion that it is the mass organizations involved in anti-capitalist struggle that create the bases for worker’s political capabilities (Petras, p. 18).

None of Africa’s experiences have produced a satisfactory response to these notions.

National liberation movements, the precursors of socialist choice, were of a transclassist nature. A frontist character was predominant in these movements and the directive hegemony always belonged to the petite bourgeoisie rather than to the proletariat, which was in many cases non-existent. The petite bourgeoisie, confronted as it was with the four dilemmas described by Petras, was unable to conceal its class interests. A noted fighter of the MPLA, today considered a national hero, stated in 1971:

A class undergoes two phases: one, embryonic, the phase of ‘class in itself’, in which its members are not yet aware of the solidarity of their economic interests in opposition to other groups, and the phase of ‘class for itself’, in which ‘class consciousness’ is manifested, the instruments of struggle and conquest of political power are forged, ideologies are managed, bureaucratic and intellectual elites are crystallized, and political and partisan organizations are constructed (Texeira da Silva, p. 50).

What if the petite bourgeoisie of national liberation movements had attained this degree of class maturity and was then unable to betray its intrinsic interests, as Amilcar Cabral without much conviction appealed to it to do? The theorist of the Cuban Communist Party, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, is more optimistic. He believes that the absence of the proletariat in national liberation movements and the preponderance of the petite bourgeoisie does not imply the loss of revolutionary character, since radical sectors of that class can ensure an anti-imperialist battle and the transition to socialism (Rodriguez, p. 338). But the class struggle engendered in an anti-imperialist context does not always encompass a true defense of the socialist ideal.

President José Eduardo dos Santos (MPLA) states:

The experience of other peoples shows that socialism only triumphs in a given country when socialist relations of production become predominant in the city as well as the countryside. If socialist relations of production triumph, however, in factories and enterprises located in urban areas, the petite bourgeoisie and later the bourgeoisie will seize the countryside, from where the development of capitalist relations of production will threaten the future of the socialist revolution (dos Santos, p. 25).

This rhetorical statement may be correct, but one should be reminded of the first of Petras’ preoccupations. Now if the MPLA were conscious of this difficulty and informed of class relations within its organization, it would conduct itself
with greater caution. This would not be necessary, if the socialist ideal were put to practice rather than merely emphasized rhetorically.

African Specificities

The evolution of the international division of labour has obliged Marxism to renew itself constantly in order to adapt to new contexts and realities. The role of national liberation movements in recentering this new division reveals a dislocation of the principal contradiction, from the duality of capital/work to one of capital/dominated peoples. African peoples, being an integral part of the dominated periphery, have proven to be one of the potential reserves for revolutionary transformation.

The first generation of African regimes offered some examples of *comprador bourgeoisies* opting for a rupture in keeping with the ideological concept known as national revolutionary democracy. This concept of Soviet origin, still used today by the PAIGC, has already demonstrated its weaknesses in the experiences of Nkrumah and Nasser, not to mention the case of Sekou Touré.

Meanwhile, a new strategy appears to have been put into action: purely and simply, the declaration of the adoption of Marxist-Leninism and of the passage to a stage of socialist transition, as in the cases of Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia.

Only a few regimes claim to be Marxist. It is much more common that this label is rejected and we find it usually in small intellectual minorities. But these minorities are not impotent here as they are in the West, because they influence, at least partially, national liberation movements and, through them, induce alliances that mobilize at times thousands or millions of followers.

In this sense, the Asiatic and African vocation of Marxism, described by Amin, appears to be a reality that even startles bourgeois and imperialist theorists in their geo-strategical readings.

There are two views regarding the real possibilities of socialist construction.

a) Soviet theorists tell us of a certain number of premises that are faithfully followed by Marxist-Leninist parties in power in Africa. These premises are: the creation of a vanguard guided by scientific socialism; the liberation of countries from the oppression of capitalist monopolies and the conquest of economic independence; the elimination of exploitation of man by man; the establishment of social property; the enlargement of a public sector to which other sectors are subordinated; the realization of agrarian transformations on a cooperative basis; the democratization of the state apparatus; the participation of worker’s representatives in management; the promotion of cultural revolution.

"These are the social processes that are observed this very day in socialist-oriented African countries", Soviet specialist Gromyko assures us (Gromyko, pp. 16-17). These principles are, however, inapplicable for example on present-day Angolan and Mozambican society, for reasons which are too numerous to detail here. Rather than distorting certain socialist objectives, these principles constitute a “distinct” interpretation of Marxism.

b) The principal contradiction to resolve, and the only one capable of allowing a socialist transition in Africa is summarized thus by Samir Amin; "In the socialist model, the law of value operates in the framework of the nation state, while in the capitalist system it operates on a world scale. This is due
to the fact that the division of labour, which commands capitalist accumulation, is world-wide, while necessarily, in the absence of the impossible and mythical ‘world revolution’, socialism is, above all, a national project guided by the political will to privilege the national social division of labour and submit its foreign relations to the imperatives of this project” (Amin, no date, p. 14).

No African experience of socialism can occur without this attempt to disconnect itself from the capitalist system. Angola and Mozambique, with their difficult military situation, would have had a hard time finding a strategy capable of creating a law of internal value, before appealing to foreign capital as a life saver. Zimbabwe has little room for manoeuvre, being one of the most industrialized countries in Africa and almost entirely dependent on transnational industry, while simultaneously lacking a strategic consensus and a defined class option on the part of ZANU-PF. As for Guinea-Bissau, the precarious state of development of its productive forces and its relative self-subsistence might allow this type of strategy. But instead, a growing foreign debt has been accumulated in order to satisfy urban consumption and to readjust economic structures in the new interests of a petit bourgeois class struggling for its development.

To the realities of socialist construction in Africa must be added more specific factors, such as the necessity of displaying power through archaic forms of populist representation based on a leader’s charisma and a tendency towards autocratic eminence, as well as the nationalist character of the political debate.

Thus, socialist experiments in Africa have not managed to avoid the characteristics of African independence in general, i.e. the reproduction of the conditions of economic underdevelopment (increased dependency), the increased marginalization and demobilization of parts of the population, the proliferation of social categories fascinated by the consumer model of developed countries, and the recrudescence of the repressive function of the state. Negotiations for the reintegration of these countries into the international division of labour exacerbated economic difficulties in countries declared as socialist — such as Angola, and Mozambique — and others which are supposed to be socialist — such as Guinea-Bissau. Zimbabwe constitutes an exception, given the specific characteristics of its passage to power. The poverty of these countries’ populations contributed to the erosion of what they considered to be the socialist ideal and this fact, in turn, contributed to the reactivation of UNITA and RNM. However, in Guinea-Bissau, the caution assumed in its Marxist language — the country declares itself as neither socialist, nor on the road to... — has provoked the rebirth, among the younger generation, of the initial myth of the easy construction of socialism.

Stereotyped Speech

Almost all of the national liberation movements adopt as their own the Soviet theses about national liberation and the construction of socialism. Almost all believe that the liberation struggle leads to a social revolution and attribute a chain reaction to these two components of political contest. Almost all speak of a new man born from the struggle for national liberation, without providing any idea of what this might mean. Almost all believe that “only the existence of a vanguard which has undergone a revolutionization of petite bourgeoisie consciousness can guarantee that the struggle will be carried to its consequences”, as commandant Jika of the MPLA affirmed (Teixeira da Silva, p. 59).
Nonetheless, after independence, the main preoccupation was to develop social wealth and only varying circumstances caused this goal to be baptized either "socialism", "capitalism", or simply "third road". The class structure installed in countries which have undergone armed national liberation struggles is, then, not so different from that of other neighbouring countries, but it is of a different political nature.

If it is true that Lenin claimed that in the twentieth century there would be no revolutionary democrat afraid of the road to socialism, and if Guinea-Bissau and Zimbabwe consider themselves revolutionary-democracies and Angola and Mozambique popular-democracies, it is also true that the stages of revolutionary democracy and socialist transition were never clearly defined in this same Leninist thought.

Now if class is not clearly distinguishable and the concepts are unclear, we are left without knowing the true political nature of these regimes, unless we accept Nikolai Kossukhin’s proposal to divide revolutionary-democrats into three groups:

a) the liberation fighters who have undergone Marxist-Leninist influence;
b) those who initiated their political activities or rose to power through an evolution from anti-imperialist nationalism; and
c) those conventionally designated “second generation revolutionaries” who came in contact with Marxist-Leninism in progressive countries and climates, and/or university settings (Kossukhin, p. 41).

All believe in the postulate, often without knowing that its patron is Lenin, that it is possible to construct socialism in economically-backward countries with their known social characteristics. But, mere declarations of loyalty to socialist principles remain postulates, principles and methods, cut off from Marxist theory.

For example, the PAIGC does not claim to be socialist, but in its general program and documents it closely reflects national democratic principles, to which the adjective “revolutionary” is added. Within its structure we find the three afore-mentioned groups, each one with a different vision of the socialist ideal. The first group has gradually strayed from the socialist ideal, while the second group was furthest from the ideal at the beginning of independence, and only the third has maintained its claim to it.

These processes can now be understood because of a profound restructuring at the macro-economic level in the last five years, which has shed light on the nature of the class struggle. As mentioned, the socialist ideal of second generation revolutionary democrats is, however, imbued with the myth that constructing socialism is easy.

In Angola, as in Mozambique and Zimbabwe, the official declarations of MPLA, FRELIMO, and ZANU to opt for socialism and Marxist-Leninism when their movements became parties (MPLA — Labour Party, FRELIMO party, and ZANU — Patriotic Front) did not definitively resolve the question of ideal vs. practice, but rather placed it in a new context.

If Eduardo dos Santos affirmed:

“In my opinion, with the gaining of national independence, the Angolan people under MPLA’s direction, obtained a resounding historical victory over Portuguese colonialism and the imperialism that sustained it, and the working masses seized political power, acclaimed the continuation of the Angolan Revolution, and the definition of socialism as its strategic object.”
...and added:

“We have initiated, thus, a period of transition which begins with the heritage of a colonial society that must be transformed until a socialist society is attained” (dos Santos, p. 19).

...with such caution, it was because he meant this affirmation to be rhetorical since the frontist character of the MPLA could not disappear at independence. In addition, this frontist character is the only guarantee of mobilization in the so-called “second war of liberation” — the terminology cannot have been incidental — and even today it is necessary in the struggle against UNITA. Then, how does one reconcile this transclassist character with the characteristics of a vanguard labour party? How does one reconcile the role of revolutionary, anti-imperialist, with the role of a state wishing to occupy an acceptable position in the world economic system, complete with transnational investments, the signature of Lomé accords, and negotiations with the IMF in the cases of Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau (and lately also Angola, it appears), etc.?

In these situations, it can be said that the first of Kossukhin’s groups shares the childishness of the third group, or rather is conscious that use of the socialist ideal could be prejudicial to the construction of the socialist transition’s true objective. One finds it difficult to believe that the working masses have claimed socialism as their strategic objective. It is the dynamizing nucleus of a party, in this case fundamentally petit bourgeois which creates these strategic definitions. It is not the class origin or situation of this class that diminishes the strategic objective’s legitimacy, but it is instead the impossibility of proceeding towards a socialist transition without the delinking which would imply a much more important political transformation. If this is not the hypothetical social revolution, it is not far from it, as the Chinese experience demonstrates.

**Ideological Mutations**

Socialism is often confused with the passage to a new mode of production, qualitatively new, capable of eliminating the consequences of colonialism and of provoking a social and economic rebirth fortifying the construction of a nation.

These objectives, however, could just as well be those of the bourgeois revolution. The participant classes in “national democracy” are capable of organizing a distinctly new mode of production or of supporting a relation of new forces and a type of regime different from the socialist type, James Petras tells us. These actors can define a succession of measures tending to the socialization of the means of production given their socio-political origin. Their objectives can very quickly be questioned, however (Petras, 1984).

In fact, two phases of political evolution are present in the countries discussed here. One that takes place before 1977 in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique (and a little later in Zimbabwe) in which the dynamics of the national liberation struggle conceals many conceptual weaknesses and myths are not yet destroyed. In this period, the structure of the movement is consolidated in a vanguard party following the Leninist model adapted to local conditions. The Congresses of 1977 optimistically declared an end to underdevelopment in the following decade, an end to the enemy, and the defeat of illiteracy, etc. (Bouillon, 1982). From 1980 onwards, the consciousness of an eminent catastrophe and a search for the means to fight it, become evident. This process became clearest in Guinea-Bissau in the coup of November 14, 1980.
The second phase is the recognition of the impossibility of constructing socialism and transforming ideologies in discursive and intentional socialism, while seeking at the same time greater integration in the world market. (See, for example, the resolutions of FRELIMO’s last congress). In this phase, the petit bourgeois classes in power are conscious that a complete class analysis might perturb the stability necessary for “national reconstruction”, still defined in frontist terms.

In Angola, the first phase was illustrated by military disputes between different movements and by the difficult imposition of the MPLA’s ideology (i.e. conflicts with groups like the Angolan Communist Organization, Amilcar Cabral Committees, and later the case of February 17th). The second phase was that of the consolidation of a state apparatus, largely attributed to the war and dependent on the Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola (FAPLA) for its activities.

In 1975, Mozambique was already thought to have created the foundations of revolutionary power in the former liberated regions. Samora Machel defended the idea that it was necessary to pass from national unity to ideological unity. National unity, present during the national liberation, was characterized by great conflicts within FRELIMO after the crises of 1968/70. Ideological unity would lead to the creation of a Party and the proclamation of popular democracy. The staff of FRELIMO was called to adopt Marxist-Leninism, although one must admit that its principles were never sufficiently assimilated. FRELIMO felt that the conditions for socialist transition had already been created, as is clearly reflected in the Congress of 1977. The country’s economic decline and FRELIMO’s loss of control of extensive rural zones, in favour of RNM armed bandits, would facilitate the rise to power of pragmatism. This led to the signing of the N’Komati agreement, which need not be analyzed here.

We are experiencing, thus, the end of a great myth, that of the socialist ideal, that of the easy construction of socialism.

Present Justifications

If permitted to yield to subjectivism, one might argue that one of these cases is closer to the socialist transition. In reality, all are equally distant, although with different effective potentials as a result of regional and economic specificities.

Liberal discourse has begun to tempt Guinea-Bissau’s bourgeoisie and has already met with an echo from the PAIGC. FRELIMO is obliged to make incredible manoeuvres to justify the Reagan administration’s support of its politics and Angola courts the multinationals with all the charm it possesses.

Zimbabwe is a case apart. In this country, there is a powerful middle class, possessor of the important means of production and of a secondary sector with a certain weight. ZANU-PF dominates the country, but with a pluripartisan regime (until the end of the Lancaster House Agreement’s validity) and with disagreements expressed in institutional form (although also armed in certain cases). Zimbabwe’s middle class supports ZANU-PF’s political project, which means that the party does not try to deprive the middle class of its means of production. ZANU-PF aspires to control certain key sectors of the economy in order to augment the state margin for bargaining and in this way transform its political strength into something greater. Could this be the road to socialist transition? If so, Zimbabwe would be the most advanced of the four countries. But in reality this conception of state intervention is not very different from that of the Ivory Coast and Kenya. Then what is the difference? (Lefort, 1980 and Yates, 1981).
For fundamentalist Marxists, the dilemma would be easy to resolve if workers controlled ZANU-PF, but this is not the case.

For the time being, it will be very difficult to distinguish to what extent African states with inherited "underdevelopment" will be able to accomplish a direct passage to socialism and carry out the specific tasks of the bourgeois revolution.

Will we continue eternally to justify socialism's observed weaknesses with existing crises and the colonial heritage? Or will we be obliged to demonstrate theoretically how the alternative might be constructed? Even the hypothesis of delinking which Samir Amin has developed, does not really show how it applies to the socialist transition. We believe it does not...

Conclusions

On the basis of my studies of the historical transition from national liberation movements to state construction, I am prepared to suggest that the following conclusions may be drawn from these processes:

1. No chain reaction whatsoever exists between national liberation and socialist construction. National liberation exhausts its principle objectives with independence. The social revolution is not conditioned by attaining independence through a process of rupture, but rather by the nature of existing class contradictions.

2. The national liberation movements that most marked the last twenty years, by way of their armed struggles, did not give serious consideration to the nature of the state apparatus they came to control, nor to the construction of a society capable of permitting the transition to socialism.

3. With or without declared alignment with Marxist-Leninism, these movements, which have more recently become parties, have been profoundly marked by Marxist-Leninist postulates, namely in respect to the forms and characteristics of national democracy. The Soviet vision of the socialist transition is the only one used by the ideological structures of the PAIGC, MPLA-PT, FRELIMO Party and ZANU-PF.

4. The socialist ideal, given that it consists of a real aspiration to construct a society that functions by a logic distinct from capitalism and to create a better and more equitable distribution of income, is increasingly absent in the applied measures of each of the four parties, despite the continued existence of discursive and intentional "socialism".

5. Marxism's role in these countries appears to be difficult in that the political practice of the last ten years may be identified with the "socialist transition" and so provoke an erosion of the real will to construct socialism.

In a very recent work, Samir Amin tells us of three contradictory tendencies which are simultaneously present in post-colonial social formations: socialism, capitalism and the state. The substantial content of such formations (or societies) would be that of popular, national construction, but in its midst capitalist forces would be dominant. As Amin reiterates upon these conditions is imposed a popular national revolution which excludes the bourgeoisie.

If this is the alternative, it is still limited at least by its lack of historical concreteness, since economic processes in African countries have demonstrated a
tendency towards “compradorization” and a capacity to use the state as an instrument of integration into the world market, even if we could classify the liberalism of “our capitalism” as immature.

Beyond these conclusions, it may be said that the USSR, with Gorbachov’s recently introduced reforms, is the first to recognize the slightly aged character of national democratic theories. According to the latest observations made by attentive followers of Soviet foreign policy, we may shortly be witnessing an accentuated denial by Soviet leaders and theoreticians of socialism in certain African countries. But not in the sense of considering these countries as fleeing from orthodoxy, but rather in the sense of recognizing that after all, the construction of socialism in these realities is doubtful.

As Iuri Afanassiev, distinguished director of the Historical Institute of Moscow, stated in 1987, “one must recognize that many problems of the historical experience of the proletariat’s acquisition of power have not yet been studied by us”. Thus it is comprehensible that he says: “Stereotypes about the current state of our society, that were formed under the sign of excessive bureaucratic optimism, exercised and, unfortunately, continue to exercise a measure of influence on our historical studies” (Afanassiev, 1987).

The unalterable truths have become alterable and scientific truths display all the subjectivity with which they could be charged.

If this is the case, how does one provide a new response to the question of alternative strategy?
Erosion — and conditions of regeneration

Comments on Carlos Lopes' text by

_Lars Rudebeck_

Using the historical and present experiences of his own country Guinea-Bissau (PAIGC) and of Mozambique (FRELIMO), Angola (MPLA) and Rhodesia-Zimbabwe (ZANU-PF) as his examples, Carlos Lopes courageously challenges what he regards as the “myth” of a natural transition from armed struggle for national liberation to socialist-oriented transformation under independent state power. He demonstrates the ideological character of the official brand of marxism or marxist inspired jargon used to legitimize petit bourgeois class power and he critically discusses the actual political practices of the movements and parties in power. These central parts of Lopes' exposition are, as far as I can see, on the whole indisputable. What he says is basically true. His critical analysis is valid and consistent. The exercise is thus both useful and necessary. It brings out truths which have to be faced.

Who can honestly deny that along with the overall political and socio-economic crisis of Africa today, there is also a specific crisis of marxist/socialist/revolutionary ideology, politics, and development? But what are the implications of this crisis? What kinds of conclusions can be drawn? In this regard there is no indisputability to be expected.

Asked by Carlos Lopes himself to comment upon his text, I have chosen to focus upon a few of his points which I think are especially pregnant with significant implications for the continued debate that is necessary.

Points of Debate

1. The overriding conclusion at which Lopes arrives is that “no chain reaction whatsoever exists between national liberation and socialist construction” (p. 18).

2. This is linked to the proposition that there is nothing specifically socialist implied in the goal of “passage to a new mode of production...capable of eliminating the consequences of colonialism and of provoking a social and economic rebirth fortifying the construction of a nation...these objectives could just as well be those of the bourgeois revolution” (p.16).

3. Capitalism may even be “more appropriate” than socialism for such tasks of national construction, considering that the point of departure is “inherited underdevelopment” (p. 11).

4. Is it at all possible, anyway, to jump the stage of capitalist development (p. 11)?

Let us try to carry the discussion a little further using these conclusions and questions as our points of departure.
No Chain Reaction Whatsoever?

The struggle for national liberation in the countries discussed by Lopes was fought basically by an alliance of leaders from the intermediate strata of the colonial society, the petite bourgeoisie, and the peasant agricultural producers. The common goal of putting an end to colonialism united people and leaders, it made them mutually dependent upon each other. This necessitated among other things a measure of democracy within the liberation movements as well as in the liberated areas of the countries. Through their common struggle, both the “petty bourgeois” leaders and the more or less traditional farming people who had been mobilized for the struggle were radicalized. People’s power came to be wielded against colonialism. Democracy and even socialism were put on the political agenda.

Although the external ideological influence, emphasized by Lopes, from the Soviet Union and allied countries supporting the armed struggle certainly had its importance, I think it is essential not to overlook the basically internal dynamics of the radicalization of the liberation movements brought about through the process now indicated. No slogans imported from Moscow could have caused the peasants to rise against colonialism. Their reasons were rooted in the African soil.

In this political sense, thus, there was in fact a real link – a “chain reaction” – between national liberation and revolutionary socialist goals of societal transformation, contrary to what Lopes maintains.

In the post-colonial situation, however, the basis is shattered for the previous alliance between those who are now the wielders of state power on the one hand and the potential producers of agricultural surplus on the other. New class contradictions are brought to the fore, exacerbating existing regional and cultural divisions. The “chain reaction” is broken. The problem is thus more complex than shown by Lopes in his analysis.

The socialist rhetoric of the present wielders of state power is not only an ideological importation, superficially used to legitimize weakly based power. It is rooted also in the historical reality of the independence struggle and the internal processes of transformation then set in motion, however disconnected from today’s political practice. The seeds of hope for a life in dignity then sown in people’s minds may appear irrelevant in today’s contexts of IMF austerity programs. It would be rash, however, to conclude that they have lost their long term historical significance.

The Most Appropriate Strategy?

As for the difference or lack of difference between socialist and capitalist projects of national construction in post-colonial Africa, it is of course true that the historical model of nation-states is linked with capitalism. It is, more specifically, a result of European capitalist development, i.e. the very same development that brought about colonialism and the arbitrary splitting up of Africa across existing regional and cultural lines of division. But what good reasons do we have to believe that Africans today would need to, or indeed could, repeat the earlier stages of European
history in order to develop their forces of production and raise their levels of living? Why this historical determinism, whether bourgeois or marxist?*

We know that economic development in Africa today is subjected to the conditions of the world market, mediated to producers and consumers by way of fragile states. So far, the effects have not been very “appropriate” for solving the problems of underdevelopment either under capitalist or socialist-oriented regimes. It is for instance impossible to trace any systematic difference between capitalist and socialist-oriented regimes in Africa with regard to such a basic statistical indicator of “development” as life expectancy at birth (see World Development Report 1986, The World Bank). This, in my view, is basically because in post-colonial Africa, under the conditions of the already existing periphery capitalism, regardless of regime orientation, relations of economic and political power are heavily skewed to the disadvantage of ordinary working people – rather than because “capitalism” has not “finished its historical tasks” (p. 11).

My point is not to disagree with criticisms made by Lopes and others of the stifling character of state power as wielded by the former liberation movements – on the contrary. But I see little reason to believe that capitalism as such would provide any real solution under the conditions at hand in Africa today. What is needed is rather “people’s power” in the literal sense once called for by the liberation movements, which goes to show that the experience of those years may after all be more relevant than often assumed under present conjunctures. Growing slowly through people’s daily resistance and struggles for a better life, such power may in the long run be able to force both market and state structures to function more equitably.

Democracy and People’s Power

In the ideological and theoretical documents of the liberation movements, the democratic goal was more often expressed through the concept of people’s power (poder popular in Portuguese) than through that of democracy, although the two were used interchangeably without any serious efforts being made to distinguish them carefully from each other. Trying to do exactly that may, however, still be a worthwhile exercise in the context of our present discussion.

* Democracy is about the regulation and organization of the power apparatus of the state and the participation of the citizens in that apparatus. There is no need to confuse the concept beyond the conventional type of definition accepted by most political scientists: rule based on universal suffrage, guarantees for free discussion and opposition for everybody, the right to associate and organize freely, and safeguards against the arbitrary exercise of power.

We know that democracy, defined in this way, in reality exists primarily in certain highly developed capitalist societies, where the citizens accept the rule of the

---

* There is in fact a similarity in this regard between the arguments developed by Carlos Lopes and those developed by Göran Hydén in his much discussed book No shortcuts to progress. African development management in perspective (1983). Both authors bend abstractly to an assumed necessity of a “capitalist stage” – as if periphery capitalism were not already a reality – rather than locating the lack of development for the people in the people’s lack of economic and political power.
market in the economic realm, although having equal rights to vote as well as the right to speak, associate, and organize without being prevented by the state. We also know that democracy in this strict sense gives no guarantees against poverty, misery, social inequality, squandering of resources, war, although making it more possible than under dictatorship to struggle against such ills.

Thus we need concepts also for other types of relations of power than those covered by the strict political science concept of democracy.

*People's power* is a central such concept, genetically rooted in socialist theory, adopted and developed i.e. by the liberation movements discussed by Carlos Lopes. It is defined theoretically by these movements as an integral part of development for the people, simultaneously a necessary goal and, a necessary condition of such development. The gaps between theory and practice are known.

The following is a simple working definition of people's power, an attempt to sum up the substance of that concept as developed by the liberation movements in the former Portuguese colonies in Africa: *power exercised in close connection with the working people and being legitimized by the fact of meeting concrete and fundamental interests of the people, as experienced by themselves.* Elements of such people's power did develop in practice during the independence struggles, as necessary and natural components of the process of unification against the colonial enemy.

This means that *people's power and democracy* ("people's rule" in English) are closely related but not identical concepts, both at the analytical level and at the level of concrete, historical practice. They condition each other mutually, at the same time as they overlap.

In actual historical situations, people's power and democracy do not always appear simultaneously, but still condition each other strongly. It is for instance a good hypothesis, that non-democratic rulers (for example, the former colonial rulers of Africa) only rarely yield to demands for democracy without being forced to do so by mounting people's power at the class level. On the other hand, it is also a good hypothesis that people's power cannot survive for long without being institutionalized as democracy – after the defeat of undemocratic state power through the mobilization of people's power, as during the liberation struggles.

People's power – when translated into scientific language – turns out to be a wider, more sociological concept than democracy. It includes, in the longer run, democracy, without which it cannot survive. But it is not defined institutionally and formally as democracy is, but through its social contents, with regard to actual participation in the exercise of power in society and with regard to actual policies and social relations.

In terms of political structure, democracy can be conceived of under varying degrees of power equality/inequality – representative democracy being quite compatible with considerable hierarchy. People's power requires, on the other hand, more equal distribution of political power.

The other major difference between the two concepts is that democracy is primarily political. People's power, on the other hand, is both social, political, and economic, thus not limited to the level of political structure. We may think of people's power as emerging, when or if people jointly assume control of their own living situations. The concrete beginnings are local. The extension of people's power beyond more local levels is, however, inconceivable except in connection with democratization.
In concluding the report on a field study of people’s power in northern Mozambique in which I took part in 1983, the collaborating researchers made a point which carries implications far beyond that particular study. Wherever people’s power became a reality during the armed struggle, we point out, this resulted from a social process in which the people took active part in discussing and resolving their own problems. Such social relations (relations of power) do not come from the sky, but arise from common goals and common interests. They require concrete efforts on the part of the leadership to listen and act together with the people in order to resolve the various problems of development. The real difficulties come at the moment when party and state officials no longer share the problems of development with the people or when they find ways of resolving them only for themselves.*

Democracy as a Strategic Priority

It cannot be excluded that the combination of economic stagnation for the people and political and cultural repression will create strong pressure in many African countries for other kinds of power structures than those provided by the inherited straight-jackets of the post-colonial states: simultaneously more democratic and pluralist and more supra-state.

Under such more democratic conditions, the people would themselves be more able than today to build and extend people’s power as discussed above. They would then also be more able than today to influence the choice of policies for their own development, thus moving the choice between capitalist and socialist policies from the levels of ideological rhetoric and academic analysis to the levels of concrete action by those concerned. The market itself being an expression of power relations, it does not make sense to analyze such choices without taking power relations into account.

In trying to give a very concise answer to the final question put by Carlos Lopes, I would therefore say that democracy as a necessary long term condition of people’s power stands out as the strategic developmental priority in Africa today. Freedom, however relative, is after all a necessary condition of choice.

* Yussuf Adam, Aquino de Bragança, Jacques Depelchin, Bertil Egerö, Gary Littlejohn, and Lars Rudebeck, Poder popular e desagregação nas aldeias comunais do planalto de Mueda, CEA Relatório no. 86/1, Oficina de História, Centro de Estudos Africanos, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Maputo, 1986, pp. 60-61.
Bibliographic Note

For this work, a good part of the ideas come from my own experience in the countries I have mentioned. References are given only when quoting. The following works have been quoted:

Afanassiev, Iuri, “A historiografia soviética em tempo de viragem” (translation into Portuguese of a speech given in Moscow at the meeting of the seventh Council of the USSR Institute for History), Jornal de Letras (Lisbon), 2.2. 1987.
Amin, Samir, “Expansion or crisis of capitalism (are the USSR and China capitalist?)”, Contemporary Marxism, (San Fransisco), 9, 1984, pp. 3-17.
Amin, Samir, Le marxisme en Asie et en Afrique (la vocation asiatique et africaine du marxisme), unpublished text, no date.
Petras, James, “Marxism and world-historical transformations”, Contemporary Marxism, 9, 1984, pp. 18-34.
dos Santos, Eduardo José, “Discurso de abertura na I conferência nacional do partido”, Trabalho (Luanda), 17, January 1985, pp. 17-76.

ERRATUM:

This bibliographic note refers to Carlos Lopes' contribution
Below you will find a list of Research Reports published by the institute. Some of the reports are unfortunately out of print. Xero-copies of these reports can be obtained at a cost of SEK 0.50,- per page.

1. Meyer-Heiselberg, R., Notes from Liberated African Department in the Archives at Freetown Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone. 61 pp. Uppsala 1967. (OUT-OF-PRINT)
2. Not published.


The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies
in Uppsala was started in 1962 as an element in a Scandinavian effort to improve the information about Africa and to promote exchanges of ideas on topics of central concern to the developing countries. The Institute’s task is fourfold: To encourage and initiate research on Africa, to establish a documentation centre for research, to disseminate information about Africa through courses, lectures and seminars, and to assist in the training of personnel for tasks in developing countries.

Research activities
One of the Institute’s principal tasks is to stimulate and support Scandinavian research on Africa. This goal is partly achieved through research at the Institute. There are also research workers associated to the institute. Travel grants are given annually to researchers in Scandinavia to promote research in Africa and to support African scholars’ visit to the Institute.

The library
The library specializes mainly in material on modern Africa. Endeavours are made to stock the current literature on the social sciences, modern history and modern biography. One of the prime goals is to have a good coverage of periodicals. There are complete card catalogues, both of the Institute’s own book stock and of the stocks of Africana in all the major Scandinavian scientific libraries.

Seminar and courses
The Institute organizes conferences on the international level and for different categories of the Scandinavian communities. Proceedings are normally published in one of the Institute’s publication series. The Institute does not provide any instruction for those aiming at academic degrees.

Publications
The Institute has published more than 300 different titles, most of them are written in English for an international readership. Further details about the Institute’s publications can be found in the List of Publications which can be obtained free of charge. For more information about the Institute, we recommend the reading of the annual Newsletter which can be ordered from the Institute free of charge.