

Colin Clark

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Maputo

Do to Marx what Marx did to Hegel:

a review article.*

Jacques Depelchin

Allessandro Triulzi, Guido Valabrega and Anna Bozzo (eds.), Storia dell' Africa e del Vicino Oriente (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1979). xvii, 521 p. (Il mondo contemporaneo; vol. 4) 20,000 lire.

* An earlier version of this article, in French, and entitled "L'histoire africaine vingt ans après les indépendances" has been submitted to

A major problem for the editors of a collection like this one is the selection of themes, subjects within the themes, and of course the contributors themselves. Given the scope of Triulzi's enterprise, which despite the title on the cover also deals with the history of western Asia (the "Middle East"), an extra effort to ensure coherence at that level might have been expected. It has not, however, been realised. The volume gives off a powerful impression of the immaturity of African history, which has apparently not yet passed fully out of its colonial phase. Two decades after the period in which many African countries achieved independence a major historical collection can appear in which African contributors constitute a small minority, and in which African history alone is evidently not regarded as rich enough to fill up the whole volume.

The contributions themselves, moreover, are strongly marked by a dominant historiography inherited from colonial times. Political history was the main concern of that historiography, and it is the main concern of Triulzi's volume as well. Although the problem of class formation and transformation is mentioned, it does not in itself constitute a central issue except in the articles by Ruth First, Yves Bénot, Anna Maria Gentili and Jean Suret-Canale. Even in these essays, with the exception of Ruth First's, one can see how bourgeois historiography can dominate through the sheer weight of paper and ink. Such domination influences and undermines the construction and the consolidation of a non-bourgeois historiography, which would attempt to link itself organically to revolutionary movements and revolutionary struggles.

Ruth First's contribution, compared to the others, demonstrates the more advanced state of South Africa's class struggles, both at the level of forms of struggle, forms of revolutionary organisation, and also at the level of the theory developed by those movements involved in the struggle. Indeed, looking at this difference, it is tempting to conclude that a given social formation can, in fact, only produce the history of its ruling class or classes, and that consequently it is not surprising that the historiography of the exploited and oppressed classes is still so underdeveloped after twenty years of independence in Africa. The fact that colonial historians regarded the central problem, the central antagonism of their time as the opposition of capital to the working class (or rather to its absence), does not necessarily invalidate this conclusion.

More on the general nature of this collection and how it illustrates certain points which are more than simply "theoretical", at the end of this essay; in the meantime, let us focus on some salient issues in the articles by Jan Vansina, A. G. Hopkins, and especially Terence Ranger, concentrating above all on the question of the problematic which distinguishes Marxist from non-Marxist history. The criticisms which follow are not intended to deny the merit of their work, of course, but rather to point out as clearly as possible where, in each case, its limitations lie.

Historians as well as ethnographers have been very preoccupied with the question of the typology of pre-colonial African states, and Jan Vansina, trained in both disciplines, has made it one of his chosen fields. Triulzi remarks of Vansina's pioneering work that it helped to improve our knowledge of African history. Perhaps. In reading Vansina's article, nonetheless, the main impression is of *déjà vu*, not so much because we are accustomed to his pioneering work, but rather

because he harks back to themes that he has already dealt with, and reproduces his own well-known positions yet again. He makes no attempt to advance the debate over the pre-colonial state in Africa.

Broadly speaking Vansina's text is an amalgam of functionalist and structuralist elements; his analysis, moreover, reduces "history" to an abstraction. For Vansina, the problem does not consist in explaining the processes by which pre-colonial states were formed, but in describing the forms that they took once they were in existence. We learn that there were indeed different forms, but we are never told either what factors led up to the creation of a particular state structure, nor why such structures varied in their forms at various historical periods or within various social formations.

In his second paragraph Vansina explains the absence of pre-colonial state structures in some parts of Africa in purely ideological terms, attributing it to the existence of "egalitarianism [which] had remained a basic value." [p. 15]¹ This formula need only be inverted to be exposed for what it is: the disappearance of egalitarianism, it therefore follows, is a necessary condition for the appearance of state structures. After introducing this ideological "explanation", Vansina adds that conscious choice by the population also played a part:

In many of these cases, the local population was aware of the existence of states, but rejected this form of organization. [p. 15].

This is a little as if the people obtained a state structure in much the same way that one chooses an overcoat in a department store.

The absurdity of these hypotheses, and the fact that such explanations continue to be produced, is attributable to the failure of historians to resolve the problem of the formation of pre-colonial states in Africa. The hypotheses are absurd because they pose this very problem in terms which are historicist in origin. Vansina's work on oral traditions was

conducted for the most part among extremely hierarchical social formations, whose codes of transmission of their traditions had already reached such a level of rigidity, that one of the historian's tasks becomes not only the study, but also the preservation of the traditions. It is not surprising then, that he should pose the question of state formation in historicist terms. This is exactly what Alexis Kagame has done for the pre-colonial dynasties of Rwanda; but in Vansina's critique of Kagame he does not in fact deviate from Kagame's beloved problematic of the "history of the origins of Rwanda".² Thus the debate is reduced to a disagreement over the chronology of the kingdoms of pre-colonial Rwanda. On both sides the problematic is identical, and is determined largely by the form of transmission of evidence: it is to understand a petrified oral tradition, framed by and rooted in the myth of origins. Where does this obsession with the history of origins come from? In Vansina's critique, as in Kagame's texts, the implicit problematic of the traditions is allowed to impose itself.

A glance through the literature shows that the problematic of the origins myth continues to occupy a dominant position. There has, however, been a reaction against one of its by-products, the Nilo-Hamitic theory of the origin of African civilisation. The racist content of this notorious myth makes it such an easy target that even today historians continue to entangle themselves in it every time they try to add another nail to the coffin.³

It is not a question, then, of a historian trying to verify the correctness of this or that myth; he must rather pose questions of the myths of origins, which are not directly given by their contents.

Vansina's article touches on some aspects of the working of the state structure which will be quite familiar to Marxist historians. The

role of exploitation during the period of state formation and in the reproduction of the state apparatus is one of these aspects. Vansina's treatment of this concept is inadequate, not so much because of any specific errors, but because of a glaring contradiction which he does not resolve. He points out, on the one hand, that under a bureaucratic type of administration the central regions were more intensively exploited than the periphery [p. 20]. On the other hand, he concludes the same paragraph by writing that in the centre itself, the capital could be distinguished from the surrounding area because its inhabitants benefited in terms of privilege from the accumulated wealth of the state [p. 21]. This attempt to classify exploitation on the basis of geography reduces the social sciences to the most elementary positivism. But worse is to come.

Vansina asserts that

the main problem which the more extensive states had to confront in order to keep control of their territory was ... a technological one. Rapid means of communication did not exist. [p. 21].

Why pick out the absence of rapid means of communication, rather than, for example, a lack of sophisticated weaponry, or the underdevelopment of medicine? Behind the arbitrary selection of this particular technological factor lies remarkably and excessively ahistorical reasoning. It is ahistorical because Vansina seems to argue that a social formation can develop technologically, independent of any historical or social context, and that technological development holds a determinant position in the movement of history. Vansina has apparently not yet learned the lesson of the US defeat in Vietnam. It is unfortunate that he does not draw attention to the work of Wilks on the 19th century Ashanti kingdoms, which is concerned precisely with these connections between the development of means of communication and the formation and con-

solidation of states.⁴ Wilks has the virtue of attempting, if not quite succeeding in producing an analysis which does not separate technological development from the global social and historical context; his book is limited by a problematic which is dominated by the multiple causalities of history.

Triulzi claims, as we noted above, that Vansina's double training in ethnography and history allows him, logically, to produce books and articles which are both better informed and more informative. Unfortunately the first does not necessarily lead to the second. Cl. Vidal has criticised one of Vansina's earlier books on the grounds that its interdisciplinary approach was inadequate, and the poor quality of this article supports Vidal's argument.⁵ Vansina fails to give us a glimpse of the historical process of state formation, precisely because his description of state structures is the normal one of an ethnologist, and those structures are conceived as unchangable and unchanging.

The article by A. G. Hopkins on "Colonial economic systems" is typical of many similar attempts over the years to draw up a balance sheet of colonialism, with positive effects in one column and negative ones in another.⁶ As here, it is generally a question of saving something from the ruins, of showing that colonialism was, in the final analysis, good for Africa after all, in spite of the criticisms. When it is posed in this way, the colonial question becomes purely and simply an ideological battleground. The historians' task becomes the mere accumulation of proofs of good deeds and bad deeds - always assuming, of course, that it is possible to quantify such things. To his credit, Hopkins is well aware of the dangers of this kind of undertaking.

He chooses to begin with an apparently appropriate metaphor,

describing colonial historiography as a minefield in which some of the mines have already been exploded, and others not [p. 92]. Continuing the military metaphor, Hopkins reminds one a little of those Japanese soldiers, who, cut off from news of the outside world, continued to fight on their tiny atolls as if the Second World War had never finished. Hopkins' minefield presents problems for him because he decided to parachute right into the middle of it.

To produce a colonial history in the form of a balance-sheet is to go beyond colonialism and to produce an apologia for capitalism, the system on which it is based. This is not the first time that such an exercise has been attempted. L. Gann and Peter Duignan, in their well-known work on the white settlers in Rhodesia, actually went so far as to write that the Atlantic slave trade was a good thing for the African population because it saved them from worse horrors at home.⁷ In the United States itself there is an extensive literature devoted to proving that slaves in North America were better treated than those in other slave-holding areas. Even more recently, with the help of difficult mathematical formulae and computers, the American "cliometricians" Fogel and Engermann returned to the task of showing that, on the whole, the slaves imported into North America were rather well treated.⁸ The list can be extended. So far, however, no respectable or well-established academic trend has emerged to suggest the rewriting of the history of Nazism so as to balance the good deeds against the evil ones; there at least it is a question of acknowledging facts, rather than putting motives on trial.

Let us return to Hopkins' article. This is characterised, beyond his own ideological position, by an anti-Marxism taken almost to the point of elementary intellectual dishonesty. For example, in discussing

the economic history of the Atlantic slave trade, Hopkins claims that nationalist historians were not interested in the topic because it would have led them to the embarrassing revelation that Africans themselves had played a part in the export of slaves [p. 94]. This insinuation is completely without foundation as far as Marxist nationalist historians are concerned. It was the late Walter Rodney who was one of the first to draw attention to the necessity of collaboration between European slave traders and African chiefs, especially those in the coastal regions.⁹

Hopkins divides pre-colonial historiography into two trends. One is based on the myth of barbarian Africa, a continent without history or civilization; the other is based on the myth of an Africa at peace under the benevolent rule of tribal chiefs. Such a division, without seeming to, neatly introduces a new myth - that of the non-existence of a Marxist historiography specifically aimed against the other two myths. Not only does Hopkins ignore the work of Rodney, as we have seen, but also and above all he ignores that of Claude Meillasoux, of Jean Suret-Canale,¹⁰ of Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch,¹¹ and P.-Ph. Rey. Seven years after the publication of his own book on West African economic history¹², Hopkins still does not cite L'économie de l'ouest africain edited by Osendé Afana, the Cameroonian intellectual and UPC militant who was beheaded in 1966 by Ahmadou Ahidjo's secret police.¹³ As a result, twenty years after independence, readers who want to learn something about African history are forced to turn to those very academic celebrities, who want to purge African historiography of any element whose political opinions or revolutionary choices break the implicit rules for the production of academic histories.

Of course, Hopkins is unable completely to ignore the Marxist tradition in African history. According to him, however, this tradition

was already dying a natural death, when it was revived by the war in Vietnam [p. 94]. In other words, the interest shown in Marxism by African historians does not spring from an autonomous tradition. Hopkins' style reminds one of those Europeans who "discovered" Africa in the 19th century. Before them, all was darkness; before him, all was ignorance. He is so convinced of his own importance that he goes so far as to suggest that he was the first historian to study the history of the colonial companies, forgetting that even before the publication of his own major work on West Africa, several Marxists had already published material on the multinationals.¹⁴ With all due respect to Hopkins, the revolutionary tradition in African historical studies is growing and will continue to grow, despite his attempts to curb its influence.

It is probable that this review of Triulzi's collection would not have been written, had the book not contained an article by T. O. Ranger of particular personal concern to me. Ranger's piece is his second reaction to a very short article which criticised his conception of the history of African resistance.¹⁵

It is possible that Ranger's insistence on returning to the article is in fact an invitation to continue what is fast becoming a debate; but in making his invitation, the second part of his new piece contains what, in political language, can only be called a provocation. Ranger writes

In the long run it may well be detailed studies of this kind which compel the most profound modifications of our thinking on resistance, but meanwhile it seems more necessary to comment in conclusion on the thrust towards a radical historiography of resistance since this seems likely to exercise a profound influence on research and writing in the next few years. The most sensible comment seems to be that it is still at a very early stage of formulation, which indeed all its advocates themselves stress. There is a tension within it between the more austere demands of a Marxist dialectic and the immediate interactions with revolutionary Socialist African regimes. Depelchin concludes that 'the task of a problematic history is to forge tools of analysis and develop a methodology which leave absolutely no room for subjectivism, idealism or any other form of mystification.' Yet there seems likely to be a

good deal of mystification in FRELIMO assumptions that the Party is to be identified with the peasants and workers and that their earlier struggles flow naturally into its triumph.

And if there is a danger of the new resistance historiography subserving the interests of a new authoritarianism, it also seems to me to be true that the first hypotheses for a radical continuity do not stand up very convincingly [...] In effect [Depelchin] too falls back on a classic mass/elite contrast, and it is only within this very broad contrast that it is possible to accept his contention that Zairean protests from 1904 to 1964-5 were 'waged by the same classes for the same objectives.' Similarly I have recently written at length about what appear to me to be the difficulties with Isaacman's use of the idea of 'peasant' protest within the early resistances to colonial rule; a usage which seems neither adequately to explore precolonial peasant experience in Zambesia nor the considerable modifications that took place within the structure and experience of the 'peasantry' during the twentieth century. An 'instant continuity' between the great majority of the population who can be called in some sense peasants and workers in 1917 and the great mass of the population who have become peasants and workers in much more specific and rather different senses in the 1960s and 1970s is too easy a solution to the problems posed by radical historiography.

He concludes

What this amounts to is saying that the radical programmatic statements have whetted an appetite which they cannot yet satisfy. But there is a great deal of work going on on the nineteenth century 'modes of production'; on 'worker consciousness' in the twentieth century; on the varying types and phases of 'peasant' experience. Within a few years radical resistance historiography will have a much more secure context of theory and data in which to develop. [p. 139-140; emphasis added].

Before criticising this article in detail, it is useful to recall, as we have already pointed out in other writings,¹⁶ that in order to understand the development of African historiography it is necessary to replace it in the context of the continent's history. Thus, in colonial times, colonialist and colonising history enjoyed unchallenged dominance; with the coming of independence, the productions of nationalist historians began to appear, among whom J. A. Ajayi, C. Anta Diop, B. A. Ogot, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Ranger himself, and John Iliffe were among the dominant figures. But after 1975, with the victories of FRELIMO in Mozambique and the MPLA in Angola, the context of the current situation

is no longer defined by nationalist needs alone, but also involves a re-definition of the struggle which places the abolition of capitalism on the agenda. Inevitably, putting socialism on the agenda raises disagreements and conflicts, not only at the level of actual social formations, but also at the level of those who believe themselves better placed than anyone else, because of their academic historical training, to interpret this new period. But it is easy to see that the debate is far from being only academic. It is provoked by and develops from the concrete reality of the confrontations between those regimes which have opted for the construction of a socialist society, and those which, in effect, do not want to understand anything about it. It is necessary to present the current context in this way in order to fully grasp the significance of Ranger's article.

In the passage quoted above, Ranger himself quotes from my article a phrase which seems to have displeased him more than any other. The sentence was intended to encourage the production of a history free of prejudices, of a problematic history, of a history striving to understand social reality through concepts and analytical categories which allow no room for 'subjectivism, idealism or any other form of mystification.' Ranger cannot associate himself with this project, according to him, because FRELIMO's assumptions about the peasants and workers are themselves mystifications, and because FRELIMO's accession to power marked the advent of a new authoritarianism. By arguing in this manner Ranger seeks to shift the ground of the debate. In fact, the text which he criticises was written with the intention merely of suggesting the inability of subjective, idealist history (in Ranger's case characterised by recourse to the notion of resistance), to explain the specific social reality of a given mode of production, or of a given phase in the articulation of

given modes of production.

Ranger is not interested in Marxism as a scientific attempt to conceptualise social relations, but as a source for the ideologies of socialist regimes. By reducing Marxism to this latter sense, it is not difficult, at least superficially, for him to write of tensions between theoretical analysis and reality. But, like other non-Marxist historians, he has only an intellectual interest in Marxism; he is only interested in the new ideas and the new modes of thought which may emerge from Marxist work. So in the end, as well as being anti-Marxist, he comes eventually to the point of treating Marxists as if they were his intellectual confederates, simply by giving them an audience. Ranger and his ilk are ready to listen to Marxist historians, but their interest is the interest of tourists - any self-respecting historian must include in his academic baggage wide reading in Marxist historical writing. The fact that he has no mastery of the basic analytical categories of Marxism (and presumably has never tried to gain it), is clear evidence of this. Moreover, it is precisely this ignorance of basic concepts which allows Ranger to place radical and Marxist historians in the same pigeon-hole.

At this point it is necessary to correct a false impression that may have been given by the quotation above concerning my original text which Ranger criticises. In my article there is no mention of FRELIMO, nor indeed of the workers and peasants of 1917. More seriously, Ranger attributes to me a generic distinction between masses and "elites", but in fact he is the one who has introduced the latter term, so beloved of bourgeois historiography. The word "elites" does not actually appear anywhere in my article, yet this small but important distortion allows Ranger to assume the air of a reasonable Marxist.

Like Vansina, Hopkins, and others in this collection, Ranger is

incapable, through ignorance of the concepts, of discussing the actual gaps and weaknesses in the Marxist problematic. Hence he displaces the debate onto more familiar ideological terrain. The accusation which he levels against FRELIMO of mystification and authoritarianism springs from his interpretation, which is both bourgeois and ideological, of that party's principles and main objectives. And it is precisely because this is his point of departure, that it is not enough simply to prove against Ranger that FRELIMO neither mystifies, nor is it authoritarian.

In this article, as in his earlier response, Ranger does not in fact reply to my criticisms, but prefers to consolidate his own positions. The lines which follow, therefore, are no more than an attempt to clarify what Marxist history should be, freed from the weight of orthodoxy and ideology, freed in short from those of its own traditions which have tended to paralyse rather than to stimulate innovation. It is not enough to say that we must return to a method based on the use of well-defined categories. The appeal is so familiar that it is almost a ritual incantation, and while such a method can lead to innovatory work, it is salutary to remember that it has also produced volumes like Sik's history of Africa, or the collection on the twentieth century by the Soviet Academy of Sciences.¹⁷

In our context, there are at least two deficiencies of Marxist historiography which must be noted, and which we must attempt to repair. The less serious is the lack of empirical studies with a revolutionary perspective. The more serious is the ahistorical use of existing Marxist theory. There is, of course, a connection between these two weaknesses, insofar as the lack of empirical work, which is determined largely by a lack of revolutionary movements, continues to encourage recourse to theory produced by the history of struggles in social formations outside

Africa. It is fundamentally ahistorical, for example, to suppose that Nicos Poulantzas' writings on the state and class relations must necessarily constitute a theoretical starting point for the understanding of the social struggles in contemporary South Africa.¹⁸

It should also be obvious that it is not enough to make a distinction between works based on textual references and those based on method. Given the evident superiority of the second, they still do not necessarily lead to a reformulation of a Marxist problematic. But reformulation is exactly what is needed to develop a problematic which is firmly situated within a revolutionary perspective. The essential objective of such a problematic must be the construction of a theory permanently enriching itself through organic contact with actual struggles. There must be a complete break with the sterile practice of attempting to explain the historical situation of a given epoch by means of analytical concepts belonging to other periods. In short, to use a formula which illustrates very well, if somewhat concisely, the task of such a revolutionary perspective: let us do to Marx what Marx himself did to Hegel.

Although Ranger refuses to adopt the Marxist perspective, he should have the intellectual honesty to specify both theoretically and methodologically what he considers to be wrong with the problematic. Does he do so? On the contrary, like the vulgar ideologists of the international bourgeoisie, he rebels and declares that the project for a problematic history is a mystification - because it lines up ideologically behind the revolutionary political parties.

Because of his deep-rooted anti-Marxism, Ranger cannot even distinguish between the type of state being built in Mozambique today, and the type of state that FRELIMO was struggling against and continues to struggle against. With reason: the idea of resistance so beloved of Ranger and the others

cannot allow them to analyse the contradictions that FRELIMO faced.

What are the main features of these contradictions? At the level of the state, FRELIMO inherited a despotic and colonial apparatus. The profoundly anti-democratic and despotic nature of this colonial state must be understood not only as the result of a long historical process, but also of a short one, as the specific product of the last years of colonialism in an attempt to contain FRELIMO's armed struggle. But with the coup d'etat of 25 April 1974, FRELIMO found itself suddenly confronted with an essentially contradictory task: to continue to destroy the social and class relations of the colonial period, but (and here is the contradiction), no longer through guerrilla warfare but through using the very state structure which had been set up and adapted during the prolonged war against FRELIMO and its basic objectives.

Ranger does not indicate any source for his accusation of authoritarianism against FRELIMO. Such sources do exist: they are printed daily by the South African propaganda machine. They are consistent: during the armed struggle they used to describe FRELIMO fighters as terrorists, and it follows that terrorists-in-power can only develop an authoritarian style. Could it be, then, that for Ranger as well FRELIMO militants used to be "terrorists"? It is a commonplace among certain Marxist historians that certain bourgeois scholars have one strength, namely their capacity to accumulate data. Even supposing that there is sometimes reason for this thinly-veiled admiration, Ranger clearly lacks this capacity, for there is ample evidence to contradict his accusation. There is, indeed, so much of it, that it is probably easiest simply to recommend that he should skim through the issues of the Mozambican weekly Tempo since 1975, where the practices inherited from the colonial state structure are regularly

identified and denounced.¹⁹

Very few parties in the world today can pride themselves on the extended and systematic denunciation, through their own organs of information, press and radio, of state structures which, while obsolescent, are still necessary while the new structures are being developed. The historical breadth of this contradiction is such that in the entire continent, FRELIMO is virtually the only party in power to this day to have eliminated immediately from the ranks of the police and the army, all elements who fought in the colonial police and army.²⁰

FRELIMO's objective is to build a state which will articulate and defend the interests of the workers and the peasants. For Ranger, this is a mystification because the objective has not yet been achieved.

But such a reaction shows quite clearly that Ranger has not yet grasped the difference between problematic history and ideological history. Yet it is the ideological content of his concept of resistance that is gradually bringing Ranger to a realisation of the limitations of this kind of history. The concept of resistance seems adequate enough in the context of the reaction against colonial historiography, but when it is applied to the history of FRELIMO itself its limitations are immediately apparent. Would Ranger argue that Simango or N'Kavandame were heroes of the resistance against FRELIMO's authoritarianism?

Let us leave Ranger's article, and conclude with a discussion of some of the important points raised by this collection as a whole. As we have seen, the kind of analysis which was sufficient to explain the acquisition of independence is inadequate when confronted with what

followed independence. The work of Rey or of Meillassoux and his circle must be seen and evaluated from this perspective. They have attempted to draw attention to the enduring dynamism of pre-capitalist class relations, and their writings are relevant not only to an understanding of pre-capitalist relations of production, but also, and perhaps principally, of the nature of the class relations in colonial and post-colonial states.

In this perspective, proletarianisation, just like the emergence of the petty-bourgeoisie, is not simply a result of European colonisation. The class relations which developed after independence show this very clearly. Their most distinctive characteristic is an intensification of exploitation and oppression of the workers and peasants by the emergent bourgeoisie, seeking through this means to acquire the economic power to constitute itself as a bourgeoisie of the classic type. From the emergent bourgeoisie's point of view, this is a new period of primitive accumulation; for the working class, on the other hand, such a process can no longer take the form of the classic expropriation of the means of production, since this had already been achieved through brute force by the European colonial bourgeoisie. However, despite the forced nature of its proletarianisation, the working class had won certain rights, social, economic and political as much as legal. Minimal though they were, it was to be precisely these working class advances which were the first targets of the omnivorous emergent bourgeoisie. Whichever fraction of this bourgeoisie gains a monopoly of political power, uses it to expropriate the gains won by the working class during the colonial period. As a result of this process, the state apparatus itself is transformed; it no longer acts as an administrative apparatus completely dedicated to the re-

production of capitalist relations of production, but as a plunder-machine pure and simple. Thus, twenty years after independence, many African states are faced with a crisis resulting from the emergence and consolidation of a capitalist bourgeoisie, which no longer wants this state-operating-for-theft, but a state working efficiently in the process of the reproduction of capitalist relations of production as well. The frequent coups d'etat to put an end to waste and corruption are a symptom of this struggle taking place within the bourgeoisie.²¹

Such a perspective on actual contemporary struggles, on the crisis of capitalism in Africa, ought to have influenced the compilers of this collection, but instead the dominant framework is that of what might be termed academic Africanistics. The volume suffers from the beginning from ambiguity of intention, seeking both to inform and to interpret without realising that information is already interpretation. Triulzi does not resolve the ambiguity in the introduction; indeed, he asserts, perhaps frivolously, that the imbalance between the two elements in some of the contributions arises precisely from this anxiety to inform. Nevertheless, if Triulzi sees any difference between the two, one would have liked him to elaborate. Would he argue, for example, that Ranger is separated from Odhiambo or myself only by a question of interpretation?

We have already demonstrated at length with regard to Ranger's article, that Marxists and non-Marxists are separated by much more than differences of interpretation. But let us return to the question, which is important, and which tends to be resolved by the argument that facts are neutral and constitute a common base from which both Marxists and non-Marxists must proceed. Such a viewpoint implicitly reinforces the idea that Marxism is simply one of a number of ideologies, and that

ideological disagreements must be accepted within the framework of an "interdisciplinary" conception of history.

At the moment it is fashionable to be in favour of this idea of interdisciplinarity, to anglicise a French term. It seems, however, that the recourse to interdisciplinary history is at times a ploy to disguise weaknesses in, above all, the posing of correct questions. Interdisciplinary history is not necessarily any advance on straightforward history in this respect. Moreover, to defend interdisciplinarity, as Triulzi does [p. 4], on the grounds that African historiography has an interdisciplinary character does not take us very far for two reasons. In the first place, some of the disciplines in question (notably anthropology, history itself, and ethno-history) have been subject to serious factual criticism, based at least partly on the connections between the development of the disciplines and colonial history itself. This is the case especially with anthropology, but nothing in Triulzi's introduction draws attention to the fact. In the second place, interdisciplinarity in itself does not necessarily improve our knowledge of African historiography.

Triulzi seems to have organised his section of this volume not only around an academic interdisciplinarity, but also around an ideological one. The volume includes, in random order, authors with such different conceptions of history as Vansina, Hopkins, Ranger and Romain Rainero on the one hand, and Suret-Canale, Bénot, First, Gentili, Lionel Cliffe and Luisa Passerini on the other. Such a hodge-podge might have been acceptable if Triulzi had indicated the differences between the Marxists and the non-Marxists in the introduction, above all over the concept of history; unfortunately he glosses over precisely this distinction, reducing it all to a question

interpretation, different to be sure, but all helping to deepen our understanding. So, from the disarming viewpoint of ideological interdisciplinaryity, Odhiambo²² and myself have indeed contributed to a better comprehension of African history, but the importance of our contributions does not, apparently, lie in what we actually discussed, but in our having offered supplementary opinions within that vast enterprise, the construction of an African history.

It is unfortunate that in our epoch, when social and political divisions are more and more clearly defined, and antagonisms more firmly entrenched, there are still academics who are willing to adopt and to serve liberalism. Its liberalism may well boost this book's sales; but at such a high price, the only people who will be able to afford it, will be exactly the ones who still believe in the virtues of liberalism.

The scholasticism, as well as the liberalism, of Triulzi's collection can be neatly grasped in the debate which it has opened over the movement of history in the history of FRELIMO. Here we see yet again the distance between the actual level of revolutionary struggles, and the level of understanding attainable by intellectuals when they are disengaged from those struggles.

Footnotes

1. All quotations in this article are translated from the Italian text, with the exception of T. O. Ranger's piece, which is quoted directly from the English original. We thank Professor Ranger for making the English typescript available to us.
2. For the critique of Kagame, see Jan Vansina, "L'évolution du royaume Rwanda des origines à 1900," Memoires de l'Academie Royale des Sciences d'Outre Mer (Classe des Sciences Morales et Politiques) new series 26 (2) 1962.
3. For a list of references see Jacques Depelchin, "Toward a reconstruction of pre-colonial central African history," Ufahamu 9 (1) 1979.
4. I. Wilks, Asante in the nineteenth century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), especially chapters one and two.
5. Cl. Vidal, review of Vansina's The Tio kingdom (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), in Cahiers d'Études Africaines (61-62) 1976, p. 397-404
6. Africanists may be interested to read how the problem of the impact of colonialism was discussed in India at the end of the 19th century; Bipan Chandra gives an excellent account of this in his The rise and growth of economic nationalism in India: economic policies of Indian national leadership, 1880-1905 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1966). My thanks to Aquino de Bragança for this reference.
7. L. H. Gann and P. Duignan, White settlers in Rhodesia (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977). *Tropical Africa*

8. R. W. Fogel and S. L. Engerman, Time on the cross: the economics of American Negro slavery (London, 1974). The work was extremely controversial at the time and has been largely discredited.
9. "African slavery and other forms of social oppression on the Upper Guinea Coast in the context of the Atlantic slave trade," Journal of African History *vol. 7, no. 3 (1966) p. 431-43.*
10. He does cite volumes 2 and 3 of Suret-Canale's Afrique noire occidentale et centrale (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1964-1972).
11. He cites the 1977 Italian edition of her manual with H. Moniot, L'Afrique noire de 1800 à nos jours (Paris: PUF, 1974), but ignores her remarkable work on the period of the concessionary companies in Congo (Brazzaville),
12. An economic history of West Africa (London: Longmans, 1973)
13. (Paris: Maspero, 1966).
14. *André? Congo-Indonésie? Must be pre-1973. Maastricht multinationals*
15. T. O. Ranger, "Connections between 'primary resistance' movements and modern mass nationalism in East and Central Africa," Journal of African History 9 (3 and 4) 1968; Depelchin, "Toward a problematic history of Africa," Tanzania Zamani (18) 1976, also in Journal of Southern African Affairs 2 (1) 1977; Ranger, "The people in African resistance: a review," Journal of Southern African Studies *vol. 4, no 1 (Oct. 1977) p. 125-46.*
16. See especially Henry Bernstein and Depelchin, "The object of

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- African history: a materialist perspective," History in Africa 5, 1978 and 6, 1979. Also Depelchin, "Inequality and the fetishisation of African history," unpublished article, 1980.
17. Endre Sik, The history of Black Africa, 4 vols. (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1966-1974); Academy of Sciences of the USSR, A history of Africa, 1918-1967 (Moscow: Nauka, 1968). For an extended critique of Sik and his problematic, see Bernstein, "Marxism and African history: Endre Sik and his critics," Kenya Historical Review 5 (1) 1977.
 18. For a detailed critique of Poulantzian ideas applied to South Africa, see Simon Clarke, "Capital, fractions of capital and the state: 'neo-Marxist' analysis of the South African state," Capital and Class (5) 1978; also his earlier general critique, "Marxism, sociology, and Poulantzas' theory of the state," Capital and Class (2) 1977.
 19. Particularly, for example, issues of October 1976 during the first National Seminar on the State Apparatus. Documents from this conference were also published under the title Vamos contruir um estado do Povo ao serviço do Povo (Maputo, 1976).
 20. At least one exception is known to us, of a Portuguese CP member who was readmitted to the police force after he took Mozambican nationality, on the basis of his record during the struggle. There were no such cases in the army. The policy of the MPLA (and of the Algerian FLN) on this question is not known.
 21. The somewhat schematic outline in this paragraph is in part the result of many fruitful discussions with Anna Maria Gentili.

22. E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, The paradox of collaboration and other essays (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974).