

By the same author

Military Organisation and Society
(ROUTLEDGE & KEGAN PAUL
CALIFORNIA U.P.)

Elements of Comparative Sociology
(WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON)

Also published by the California University Press under the title of
Uses of Comparative Sociology

Parasitism and Subversion: The Case of Latin America
(WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON
PANTHEON BOOKS N.Y.)

A
STANISLAV ANDRESKI

The African Predicament

A STUDY IN THE PATHOLOGY OF MODERNISATION

~~BASICALLY RACIST & TELL-TALE~~

~~DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME.~~

INTRODUCTION

1970



NEW YORK
ATHERTON PRESS

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	11
INTRODUCTION	13
<i>Chapter 1</i> Towards Starvation	21
<i>Chapter 2</i> Exploitation, Parasitism and Strife	28
<i>Chapter 3</i> Urban Jungles	39
<i>Chapter 4</i> Still-born Nationalisms	57
<i>Chapter 5</i> Moral Disorientation	78
<i>Chapter 6</i> Television without Sanitation	85
<i>Chapter 7</i> Kleptocracy or Corruption as a System of Government	92
<i>Chapter 8</i> From Colonial to Post-colonial Authoritarianism	110
<i>Chapter 9</i> The Emergent Class Structures	134
<i>Chapter 10</i> Circulation of Elites	152
<i>Chapter 11</i> Economic and Political Consequences of Polygamy	159
<i>Chapter 12</i> The Hidden Aspects of Foreign Aid	165
<i>Chapter 13</i> Neo-colonialism	175
<i>Chapter 14</i> African Socialism	193

<i>Chapter 15</i>	The Shibboleth of Education	204
<i>Chapter 16</i>	Is There a Way Out?	212
INDEX		231

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my African friends, assistants and informants for helping me to understand their problems. I prefer, however, not to mention any of them by name in order not to implicate them in responsibility for controversial views. I should also like to thank Mrs Audrey Savin and Mrs Audrey Yates for their work on the typescript.

As my wife has collaborated in collecting the information on which the reflections presented here are based, and has discussed almost every issue dealt with on the pages which follow, she has a very large share in whatever merit resides in the present work.

I should also like to use this opportunity to thank Mrs Jean Floud and Professors Max Beloff, Sir Isaiah Berlin, Peter W. Campbell, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Ernest Gellner, A. H. Halsey, H. A. L. Hart, George Lehmann, Hugh Seton-Watson, Edward Shils and Dr Michael Young for their help in various matters not directly related to the present book but without which I might not have been able to write it.

I am obliged to Ernest Gellner, Peter J. Rollings and Alexander Lopasic for numerous helpful suggestions although this does not mean that they agree with all my views.

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FOREWORD

The purpose of the present book is to analyse the obstacles facing the new African states on the road to prosperity, internal peace and elementary freedoms. The treatment is on the whole confined to tropical Africa, and even here the Portuguese colonies and Ethiopia are mostly left out, as Ethiopia in virtue of being an old kingdom, and the Portuguese territories in virtue of being dependencies, differ markedly from the post-colonial states. As the same is even truer of North and South Africa, the remarks about these areas are made only to highlight certain points of argument from a comparative perspective.

Naturally, even within the confines of the new states of tropical Africa, the circumstances vary greatly. Nonetheless, they do exhibit certain important similarities, and it is these common features—or analogous social mechanisms, if you like—which constitute the object of the present inquiry.

I must stress that I have not attempted to give a well-rounded picture of African societies and cultures, but have focussed on the network of vicious circles which are perpetuating misery and strife. I have left out the more attractive aspects of African cultures not because I am not acquainted with them or think that they are not worth writing about; but simply because I prefer to concentrate on a topic on which I may have something important to say that has not been said before. Furthermore, the treatment is deliberately slanted towards the problems which seem to me to have been either unnoticed or glossed over or under-estimated by other authors and towards phenomena which are spoken of privately often enough but seldom written about. I see no point in repeating all the basic information about African traditional societies, political history, economics or demography which has already been competently provided by numerous publications. My aim has

been to map out the crucial factors (and the causal relations between them) which can explain the sorry plight of the new African states. For this reason the present book must be regarded as an interpretative essay which assumes some knowledge of the basic facts rather than a self-contained introduction, let alone a systematic survey of the constellations of circumstances and forces which can be found in Africa.

Though perfectly understandable alone, the present book is in many ways a companion volume to my *Parasitism and Subversion: the Case of Latin America* which also deals with the social mechanisms perpetuating misery and strife. In addition to their primary concern with explaining the actual situation in the respective areas, both studies are intended as contributions to a theory of progress indicating the conditions under which poverty, oppression and strife may be eliminated.

By putting the word 'pathology' into the title of the present book, I do not wish to suggest that I have succeeded in establishing objective and ethically neutral (or value-free) criteria for assessing the health or goodness of a social order. By pathology I mean a systematic study of social phenomena which must be judged as evil from the standpoint of humanitarian ethics because they cause suffering and degradation.

University of Reading
January 1968

INTRODUCTION

The vast flood of literature on modern Africa contains few works which do not shun the less pleasant aspects of modernisation.* Recoiling from attitudes of racial contempt or imperial high-handedness, writers of pink race do not dare to mention (or even to think about) the less laudable deeds of brown men. Outside southern Africa there are very few blatant racials, and even unrepentant addicts to racial animosity conceal their sentiments under hypocritical assurances of friendship and admiration for the sake of business: as they can no longer be simply ordered about, the Africans must now be cajoled. Moreover, as during the colonial era the Africans had no power and were often humiliated and exploited, they have acquired in the eyes of the liberals and humanitarians an aura of martyrdom, while the fact that they were neither oppressing nor humiliating the Europeans was taken to be proof of their moral superiority. The error which underlay this idealisation of the Africans is analogous to that involved in the cult of the proletariat: the lack of power to do much harm was

* This, incidentally, is the reason why the present book is based to a much larger extent on seeing, talking to people and travelling, and less on the literature than my previous works. Whereas the most pungent exposures of the evils of the Latin American social order have come from under the pen of the indigenous writers—produced either during the periods of respite from repression or in exile—the publications of the African writers on politics and sociology are characterised by an apologetic rather than a critical attitude, which is understandable in view of their lack of self-assurance engendered by the scorn in which their race has been held for so long, and by the humiliations to which they are themselves often exposed when they live outside Africa. Perhaps the educated class is also of too recent an origin and still insufficiently numerous even in the most modernised countries to produce thinkers capable of sufficient detachment, although censorship and repression alone suffice to stultify critical commenting on anything touching politics. Truly realistic pictures of the African social and political scene can be found only in the novels of certain African authors; some of whom are very good indeed, but whose names I prefer not to mention in this context lest this might get them into trouble.

taken as evidence of virtue. Moreover, as in the case of the cult of the peasant in some countries of Europe, numerous intellectuals, who were bored or disgusted with the urban way of life, admired the peoples seemingly unspoiled by commercialism and industrialism, and hoped that they would create a better civilisation if given a chance. Thus the dogma that an African can do no wrong has gained an acceptance among European intellectuals.

As far as practical effects are concerned, this indulgence affects only the privileged Africans, without taking cognizance of what they do to their less fortunate compatriots, especially to women. In this way European and American intellectuals take the credit for chivalry to the underdogs while being on the side of the potentates who (though very weak on the scale of international power politics) are nevertheless in a position to offer to their foreign friends lavish entertainment.

There is another important point which, incidentally, illustrates one of the insuperable limitations in the study of human affairs: namely, that many touchy governments—and almost all dictatorships—ban foreigners who reveal what they would like to conceal. In consequence, those who wish to specialise in studying such areas, and pay further visits, have to be discreet in public utterances. Therefore, only somebody who does not particularly care whether he will be admitted to the countries he is writing about—in this case only somebody who has no vested interest in maintaining his position as an Africanist—can afford to be perfectly frank.

The students of communist affairs, to mention a parallel example, are divided into those who have written truthfully without dodging and those who have visited the homelands of socialism regularly; up till now nobody has been able to do both. Only countries with a fairly liberal government can be repeatedly visited as well as criticised.

The inverted racialism of the European and American intellectuals does their African counterparts little good, as it undermines their powers of self-criticism. It amounts, moreover, to a covert insult because it tacitly assumes that the Africans must be judged by less demanding standards than other men.

Whatever might be their deeper feelings, the African politicians find this dogma very useful, and promptly accuse of racialism anybody who dares to criticise them or the systems which they have

created. Quite often however, their accusations are not without foundations, as there are many people whose carping on the shortcomings of the African states is undoubtedly prompted by racial animosity. For this reason, therefore, I must emphasise that I do not attribute the undesirable aspects of modern Africa to innate propensities genetically linked to pigmentation. On the contrary, the main purpose of the present work is to explain the present predicament of the African states in terms of historical antecedents and general social mechanisms. In any case, if we want to discuss the question of who is to be blamed for creating the present predicament, we must attribute the major part of the guilt to those who had most power and who arrogated to themselves the role of teachers . . . that is to the imperial nations. I do not think, however, that the apportionment of collective guilt is a very important topic. What really matters is how to improve the lot of suffering humanity, and the study of evil actions committed in the past is worth pursuing only in so far as it helps us to avoid repetition. True, improved understanding is of no avail against evil intentions or callous indifference, but it offers a chance of preventing misfortunes being brought about by misguided good intentions.

As this book is mainly about the Africans it must contain more references to their deplorable deeds than to follies and crimes committed in other parts of the world; but this does not mean that I regard them as more addicted to evil doing than other races. Anybody who has any preconceptions on this point should recall that only twenty-three years ago millions of human beings were being starved, tortured and murdered in the heart of Europe. The Roman arenas, the burning of heretics and witches, the treating of executions as a form of public entertainment, preferably on Sundays, the chaining of slaves for life to the oars on the galleys, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the impalements of refractory serfs, the frightful treatment of small children in early factories and mines, the concentration camps, the monstrous despotisms from Nero to Stalin—all these and innumerable other atrocities amply testify to the evil propensities of the Europeans. The record of other races, however, is no better. It was the Africans themselves who hunted the slaves and sold them to the European traders for trinkets and weapons—often believing that the latter ate them up. They also practised head-hunting, infanticide, human sacrifice, cannibalism and a host of other cruel customs.

Regardless of continent or race, all the large states of the past have been based on exploitation and oppression, and nearly all of them were despotic. Though equally plagued by warfare, only small tribes were relatively free from exploitation and internal oppression—although even here the female class often played the role of the proletariat. Large societies without much violence and oppression have arisen only very recently, and remain very fragile and in constant danger of slipping back into the normal condition of mankind. This we must never forget when discussing African affairs; particularly as it is impossible to talk about the phenomena which contradict our professed ethics without using words loaded with moral condemnation.

For the readers who are interested in theory and methodology (the others can skip it) I should like to add two points. The first is that the traditional social systems rested upon an elaborate and steady equilibration of rights, duties and loyalties, sanctified by usage and religion, whereas the urbanised, commercialised and bureaucratised conglomerates contain no such intricate self-regulating mechanism, and their functioning is determined by unstable constellations of power and shifting avenues towards gain within the framework of constantly changing interplay between the remainders of the traditional cultures—some rapidly decaying, others curiously and vigorously surviving—and the new intrusive and corrosive forces. The organic analogy beloved of the anthropologists no longer holds and the Hobbesian model of a war of all against all is closer to the fluid reality. It might be of interest to mention incidentally that Peter J. Rollings, who has taught in Ghana for several years, tells me that the social theorist who always aroused greatest interest among his students was Hobbes.

The fluidity of the situation and the inchoateness of the elements which compose it place great obstacles in the path of anyone who tries to describe the circumstances with any precision or attempt any predictions of specific nature. No wonder then—and this is the second point—that the over-schematic 'theory of modernisation' does not carry us very far, particularly as it is based on the crudest imaginable version of the concept of unilinear evolution.

The introduction of mathematical formulae into economic theory has produced among economists a tendency towards splendid isolation, based on the belief that their discipline dealt with autonomous and measurable variables. This belief, however,

appeared plausible only because the sociological assumptions of economic theory were more or less modelled on the dominant characteristics of the societies in the midst of which this theory grew, and to which it was most commonly applied. The evolution towards diffuse pluralistic collectivism, involving growing interpenetration of government, pressure groups and the organs of economic control, has considerably enlarged the discrepancy between the current reality and the tacit sociological assumptions of economic theory (including even such recent additions thereto as the Keynesian models); but the arbitrary nature of these assumptions has been fully revealed only when conclusions about the affairs of underdeveloped countries, drawn on the basis of conventional economic theory, have proved to be manifestly false. The perplexity engendered by the failures of their predictions has given rise to an extensive literature supplying modifications of economic theories designed to fit them for dealing with pre-industrial economic structures. So far, however, only ad hoc qualifications have been proposed, without attempting to treat the fundamental problem of institutional limits to the validity of various parts of economic theory, let alone to erect a system of generalised economics like those adumbrated without much success several decades ago by Othmar Spann and Werner Sombart.

It is not surprising therefore that the plans worked out by the economic experts sent out to advise the governments of these unfortunate countries cannot be carried out. Economic theory will remain a steel construction built on foundations of sand until our understanding of non-economic factors is brought to the same level of generality and sophistication as the study of the strictly economic matters, so that economic and sociological theory form a continuum. That we are still very far from this goal is not only the fault of the isolationist economists but also the consequence of the sterility of the contemporary sociological theory which (as I have tried to show in a previous book) is being turned into a meaningless jargon by the most influential of its present exponents.

Everybody who has often been snubbed will remain touchy and suspicious, and therefore it is not surprising that many Africans are easily offended. But let us leave to the diplomats and public relations men the task of soothing their susceptibilities. A sociologist merits a place in the sun only if he tells people the

truth about the nature and the consequences of their collective behaviour regardless of whether they like it or not: for correct understanding is a prerequisite of improvement. True, even among the best educated nations we can find enough examples of obdurate obscurantism to shake our faith in the efficacy of knowledge; nonetheless, whereas it is quite possible that better understanding will do little good, it is practically certain that action based on errors and illusions will produce no improvement if not lead to disaster.

Dealing briefly with a vast subject one cannot avoid being schematic with the consequence that the statements are only approximately true. However, as absolute exactitude cannot be attained even in cartography, we have to accept the degree of approximation which is the most useful for the given purpose. From a longer distance we can see the trees worse but the contours of the wood better; and although a large scale map will contain many more details than a small scale one, the latter will nonetheless provide us with the information which we could not find in the former. As with the proportions on the maps based on Mercator's projection, the statements made in the pages which follow are more exactly true about certain areas of Africa than about others. I have put qualifying statements wherever the discrepancies between the areas are so glaring that straight assertion would be palpably untrue, but to hedge every sentence with a string of reservations would make the book indigestible. For this reason some compromise was necessary, and the reader can take as the general guiding line that, unless stated to the contrary, my descriptions apply most directly to the most highly urbanised parts of Africa which are to be found on the West Coast. This is not merely because I happen to know this area (especially Nigeria) best but also because the present study is focussed on the factors and consequences of modernisation, and this process has advanced furthest precisely on the West Coast. It seems more likely that in twenty years' time Dar es Salaam will be like Lagos today than the other way round, although important regional differences will persist or even arise. Some areas, especially those inhabited by Moslem nomads, will probably remain unchanged for a long time to come. Other parts of Africa may fall again under a colonial rule or have a communist system imposed upon them. Nonetheless, the present trend of change throughout most of Africa appears to

be in the direction of the type of life found around the bigger urban centres of the West Coast.

If you put rabbits and chickens through a mincing machine the resulting meats will differ less than did the animals (even when dead) while their structure was still intact. Likewise, the traditional African societies exhibited a greater variety than do the social agglomerates undergoing the process known as modernisation; largely because the external forces which are grinding them are the same: foreign big business, the mass media, the contacts with foreign models, the pressures of big powers, the enticements of international organisations, air transport and imported goods.