

AFRICAN MARXIST MILITARY REGIMES, RISE AND FALL: INTERNAL CONDITIONERS AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

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Introduction

The historical dimension is used in a limited or selective way in the analysis of contemporary international relations, and it needs to be developed. Recovering the theme and the period from 1970-1980 means, therefore, both a historical and a theoretical matter. International Relations, as an area dominated by political science, has been a field of study marked by theorizations with little empirical basis and instrumental character. Without the State building, of ruling elites and social transformations promoted by revolutionary processes, the situation of Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia, for example, would not have allowed their current international prominence.

Halliday (1983) remarks that during the 1970s there were fourteen revolutions in the Third World. However, for these revolutions it can be added the negotiated transitions to independence and, paradoxically, *Military Coups* led by low and medium militaries, which have entailed a radical change of political regime, giving rise to the *African Marxist Military Regimes* (Markakis and Waller 1986; *The Journal of Communist Studies* 1992). In this case, the number exceeds twenty between 1968 and 1983. The Revolutions and Revolutionary Regimes implemented had a significant regional impact, producing trends and countertrends, as well as violent internationalized conflicts and civil wars.

Throughout previous studies, in addition to the Revolutions resulting from long anti-colonial wars such as Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Zimbabwe, an innovative element was identified, the *Military Coups of a*

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new type, which introduced *revolutionary regimes self-declared Marxist-Leninist*. This is the case of Somalia (1969) and Ethiopia (1974), the most emblematic case, but also of four french-speaking countries: Congo-Brazzaville (1968), Daomey/Benin (1972-74), Madagascar (1975) and Alto Volta/Burkina Faso (1983). The original and controversial revolutionary experiences proposed here for reflection, the *Marxist Military Regimes*, are different from the first States governed by the so-called “African Socialism” soon after independence, in the passage from 1950s to 1960s: Ghana (1957), Guinea (1958), Mali (1960), Tanzania (1961), Zambia (1964) and Algeria (1962).

Revolutionary processes and regimes and their international impact

For both theoretical and methodological purposes of this study, revolution means an abrupt political change, generally violent (but not always), with the overthrow of one regime and the strive to build a new one. This rupture with the current order aims to effect structural changes in the legal-political and socioeconomic order. The triggering element of such an event could be a popular uprising, an armed insurrection, a *coup d'état*, or even a relatively peaceful political transition. However, for these conjunctural elements to be effective, there must be favourable domestic and external objective political conditions.

Besides the bourgeois revolutions, the bourgeois-democratic revolutions (with active participation of the population) and the socialist revolutions themselves, during the second half of the 20th century, the popular-democratic revolutions developed, especially in peripheral countries. It concerns the national liberation revolutions, the democratic, anti-imperialist and “anti-feudal” revolutions of the Third World, generally linked to decolonisation and nationalism. In these revolutions, the trigger elements were popular uprisings, reformist mobilizations, *coups d'état* (including military ones) and guerrilla combats like the theorized ones in China, Vietnam, Cuba and Lusophone Africa with Amilcar Cabral (Silva 2004). In them, there was an alliance between segments of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry, as well as sectors of the working class.

The theories of revolution and socialism are still heavily focused on European cases, with limited knowledge and reflection on Third World experiences, generally more recent and less documented. It is commonly insisted that peripheral countries “would not be prepared” for the Revolution and for

the socialism, according to a restrictive interpretation. During the phase of European imperialism, the most acute social contradictions moved from the center to the periphery, where the process of proletarianisation became more accentuated, with the rural exodus and the establishment of market-oriented agriculture. It is important to point out that the international dimension, already significant in the classical revolutions, becomes even more decisive in the framework of the growing internationalization deepened by capitalism in the periphery (Davis 1985).

The Revolutions have two meanings: the first, more restricted, refers to the conquest of political power, through the conquest of the State; the second consists in the use of the former to unleash a longer process of transformation of social, political and economic structures. In the Marxist philosophical and strategic conception the two were brought together in a single concept. For theoretical and methodological purposes of this study, Revolution means a sudden political change, generally violent (but not always), with the overthrow of one regime and the struggle to build a new one. This rupture with the current order seeks to effect structural changes in the legal-political and socioeconomic order.

The triggering element of such an event could be a popular uprising, an armed insurrection, a *coup d'état*, or even a relatively peaceful political transition. However, for these conjunctural elements to be effective, there must be favourable objective political conditions. In the case that interests us, the formation of the *African Marxist Military Regimes*, the fact that they have their origin in coups d'état usually set off by soldiers of medium and low rank (from Captain to lower ranks) does not invalidate the concept, therefore. Nor does it make any difference that young and radical military personnel were unaware of Marxism, for just as many leftist groups withdrew from revolutionary transformations after coming to power, several "conservative" or just nationalist groups embarked on Marxism and revolutionary changes after achieving power.

Revolutions are always related to both internal and external factors and, following their materialization, inevitably generate an international impact as far as they affect the internal rules on which the (capitalist) international order is based. "Revolutions are international events in their causes and effects", as Fred Halliday (2007, 148) recalls. In this sense, they inspire political forces in other countries, both sympathizers and opponents. Revolutions usually give rise to external wars, generally associated with or resulting from internal civil wars.

The place of the African Marxist Military Regimes in the Revolutions of the 20th Century

Marxist-oriented socialism has succeeded, throughout the 20th century, in driving a series of victorious revolutions in successive waves. The first of these revolutions took place in the debut of the World War I, with the triumph of the Russian Revolution and the establishment of socialism in the USSR. The second, as an outcome from the anti-fascist movements and the results of World War II, affected Eastern Europe, both through the “revolutions from above” supported by Moscow, which would constitute the Popular Democracies, and through the autonomous revolutions of Yugoslavia and Albania.

The third, which had been developing in parallel with the previous one, had as its epicentre the Chinese Revolution, which had already begun in the 1920s, characterized by the rural issue. After a quarter of a century of guerrillas and wars, the most populous nation on the planet became a socialist regime. The Korean Revolution and the first stage of Indochinese are part of this phase. The Marxist revolutions and regimes engendered in the first half of the 20th century occurred on the “periphery of the center”; the capitalist industrial powers, the center of the system, entered into open conflict in the World Wars. Thus the victory of two revolutions and structuring regimes of a new world reality, the Soviet and the Chinese, which were on the periphery of the geopolitical space affected by the gigantic confrontation and transformation, was possible.

Finally, in the fourth and last, the decolonization movement and Third World nationalism led to the triumph of several revolutions of socialist orientation, such as the Cuban, the Vietnamese, the Afghan, the South-Yemeni and the African revolutions of the 1970s (Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia). They occurred in the second half of the twentieth century “in the center of the periphery,” that is, in the southern region of the planet not yet industrialized, where the expansion of the *asymmetrical and combined development of capitalism* occurred (Westad 2007; Davis 1985).

In contrast to Angola and Mozambique, where the Marxist component was associated with *National Liberation Movements*, those in Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as the four Francophone States, had Marxist Military Revolutions/Regimes after more than a decade of independence. Ethiopia never became a colony and Somalia brought two colonial territories together with no structural element of external dependence. Ethiopia had a previous Imperial State (though archaic), different from the others who had recently

strived to edify one, but none of the six countries had formed the Nation and built stable institutions (Visentini; Ribeiro and Pereira 2012).

The neo-colonial regimes, replicated from the metropolises, proved to be tremendously unstable and were soon succeeded by traditional military coups, which could not maintain internal cohesion and economic development either. The tempered attempt by the populist regimes referred to as “African Socialism” in Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Tanzania and Zambia also failed, toppled by coups d’état or drifting towards authoritarian personalist regimes. In their failure, a space was opened for trends of “African Marxism”, driven by intellectuals, students and unionists, in the face of the failure of the two previous paths. However, an important player in this process was a segment of the state, the Armed Forces, which imposed itself through *coups d’état* in Somalia (1969), Ethiopia (1974), Congo-Brazzaville (1968), Daomey/Benin (1972-74), Madagascar (1975) and Alto Volta/Burkina Faso (1983) (Markakis 1986).

The military, who had no Marxist influence, admired the performance of the Soviet Union and Cuba, as well as the socialist tools used in centralizing the State, nation building, sovereignty via military defense and economic and social development. They found in the small civilian Marxist groups (influenced by the PCF and CGT, in the case of the french-speaking) important interlocutors and allies, but also challengers. These groups were gradually absorbed or dispersed for the most part, but their program was incorporated by the military, who had the organization and instruments of power to implement them. Marxism merged with nationalism in these regimes in an attempt to overcome national fragmentation, political apathy, socioeconomic backwardness and international subservience (Hughes 1992).

It is our central hypothesis that such processes had indigenous roots and that the link with the Soviet camp was a later (though indispensable) instrumental element, with Moscow’s interest being limited, except in Ethiopia, for geopolitical reasons. The reasons are listed below, but the military *ethos* found in Marxist-Leninist court socialism elements that were familiar to it (centralization, discipline) and useful for the accomplishment of the program they proposed to do. The army, in turn, was one of the few truly national institutions in terms of regional and social extraction. It is also observed that internal fragmentation did not concern tribal or cultural elements, as some historiography insists, but with the distribution of resources and power of the State to different regions, groups and economic activities.

Many successes have been achieved in the social, political, educational, health, women’s emancipation and, more restrictedly, economic fields. Internal difficulties, external economic pressures, and changes in the degree

of Soviet commitment made it complicated for such regimes to perform. In the mid-1980s they had to adopt liberal economic reforms (appealing to the IMF) and, when Gorbachev came to power in the USSR, also political ones. The end of the Cold War left them orphans in ideological, external support and political terms. Nonetheless, Cuban aid was different from Soviet aid and should be considered separately. According to Margot Light (The Journal 1992), Moscow felt the weight of the involvement in a strategically secondary scenario like Africa and resented the strong limitations of what its scholars called the *Socialist Oriented State* or *Non-Capitalist Way of Development*. About the legacy of such regimes, it is curiously observable that their leaders and parties have remained in power or, later, returned to it by electoral means (See below).

To what extent were revolutions and socialist regimes based on Marxism?

One relevant question is why the African military that came to power through a *coup d'état* in the 1970s adopted Marxist-Leninist references. Marxism, and then the practice of Marxism-Leninism, represented a doctrine that offered a series of attractive solutions to the great challenges to countries that followed the path of revolutionary rupture and the attempt to build a post-capitalist society, according to Clapham (1996). Ethiopia, for example, was an ancient empire, with feudal structures, dominated by the Orthodox Church, which had gone through a period of expansion, which led it to control a very large territory with great ethnic diversity.

In this sense, the first appeal Marxism offered was obviously that of a revolutionary doctrine of conquest and maintenance of power. Unlike most colonial or semi-colonial states – which made revolution primarily through nationalist and anti-colonialist ideologies, seeking liberation in the first place – revolutionaries who embraced Marxism (with greater or lesser sincerity) considered it a radical and progressive alternative to the current status quo. This was true as much for the organization of political and/or armed movements for the conquest of power and the mobilization of popular support, or even after conquering power in a confused framework of balance of forces. In the case of the Marxist Military Regimes, which rise to power through a *coup d'état*, “the usurpation of power requires legitimacy through a credible alternative to the overthrown regime. (...) The radical soldiers shared the illusion that socialism could be achieved quickly and by decree” (Markakis 1986, 4). More than that, it was necessary to occupy the space of the civilian far left, an ally that challenged the new holders of power.

Secondly, Marxism also offered them a *doctrine of development*. This preached the destruction of the oligarchic power that had controlled the country until then, which was seen as an obstruction to the well-being of the people, and its replacement by a more efficient State combined with free peasantry. This development strategy sought alternative paradigms to neo-colonial liberalism and the purely moralistic and voluntaristic experience and was therefore based on Marxist development premises, rooted on a central planning structure, socialist distribution and, when possible, industrialization.

A third and fourth appeal from Marxism-Leninism to the revolutionary government was *Nation building*, whether *unitary or multi-ethnic*, and *State building*. How to deal with the internal divisions arising from the low level of development, the historical legacy, and the manipulations of colonists or external agents? It was necessary to forge a nation on new foundations. Certainly, the USSR, which combined an effective central government with respect for the cultural identities of diverse nationalities and a considerable level of autonomy, was an attractive model. In a dialectic relationship with this factor, the new egresses of colonialism or neocolonialism relied on internally limited administrative apparatuses and addicted to external domination, direct or indirect. It was necessary to organize an apparatus capable of dealing with the enormous transformation and conflicts that were approaching, a new type of State. Thus, Marxism-Leninism was also an *ideology of state control*.

Finally, Marxism-Leninism's fifth appeal for a revolutionary government was its use as a *source of international support* in a Cold War context. The USSR, China and the socialist community in general therefore represented the only consistent source of military supplies, legitimization, political and economic support. The need to gain foreign support was a necessary condition for the survival of many of the Marxist regimes. However, Soviet aid, besides creating certain ties of dependence, was generally restricted to the military field, leaving much to be desired in the economic and financial field. In this regard, Arnold Hughes (1992) adds that it also represents a *guarantee of national sovereignty*.

Hughes adds three additional elements that have a connection with African political culture. Marxism was perceived as a *superior ideology*, as an alternative to Western capitalism and African Socialism, considered in the 1970s as inoperative projects for the continent. Through Marxism the ruling groups felt as part of the world's socialist modernity because it brought a sense of security through an ideological speech that allowed the problems to be identified and policies and strategies to be formulated to solve them.

For the radical African military, Marxism, besides being a rational strategy, would also have the properties of a “*political amulet*”, with “an almost magical charm to prevent political diseases such as neo-colonialism and underdevelopment” (Hughes). According to Zolberg (apud Hughes 1992, p. 13), Planning was not only an objective instrument, “but also *symbols* of rationality, control and order. Political ideology becomes an enchantment that genuinely transforms reality, and even if nothing happens, it changes men’s view of it”. For him, the “amulet” would enable the intelligent elites to control the future.

Finally, especially for the middle classes, the Marxist regime represented a possibility of *social self-promotion*. The State was the main provider of formal jobs and the model of socializing development largely expanded the jobs in this sector. But it was not only about economic profits, for vast segments of the youth and the middle class believed that the Marxist could offer hope for a better future. By removing most of the elites linked to the former colonizer, the regime opened space for the social and political rise of new players.

African Marxist Military Regimes: domestic and international dimensions

The decolonisation of Africa in the early 1960s led to the establishment of neo-colonial regimes that reproduced the institutions of the former metropolises, but left out the so-called *white bastions* from the south of the continent. The result was the radicalization of national liberation movements through guerrillas supported by socialist countries and, after the collapse of the Portuguese Empire, a long regional civil and conventional war in Southern Africa. This war had the active participation of South Africa, Cuba and the USSR, which lasted from 1975 to 1992.

In Somalia and Ethiopia, military coups in 1969 and 1974, respectively, evolved into socialist-oriented Marxist Military Regimes, which did not prevent the outbreak of a war between both states in 1977-78. In Somalia, the conflict complicated the strategy of socialist transformation, but in Ethiopia the opposite happened, with its deepening. In parallel, Congo-Brazzaville, Benin, Madagascar and Alto Volta (Burkina Faso), four former French colonies, suffered military coups that took the same path. And these six countries, with their unusual trajectories, constitute the case studies proposed here.

The Socialist Republic of Ethiopia

Ethiopia is located in the Horn of Africa (northeast) and its geography has always been an important element. Many regions of the country were inaccessible, making central control difficult, allowing provincial or local centers of authority to dominate the local peasantry. The surface of the country was 1.2 million km² and the population 45 million in 1985. With the separation from Eritrea in 1993, the surface area is now 1.1 million km². The history of Ethiopia has a continuity of more than three millennia, passing through great ancient empires and having maintained the Christian Empire of Abyssinia. It has resisted Islam, which controlled the coast, and the European colonizers (the only non-dominated country in Africa) in isolation.

Punished by misery, drought, feudal socio-political archaism and the Muslim and leftist guerrillas in Eritrea, the regime did not resist. The old pro-American emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in 1974 by a military coup, when there were major urban popular protests and rural uprisings. The military junta (DERG) expressed an ill-defined populism, while opposition, chaos and centrifugal tendencies threatened the existence of the new regime. This, while the faction clash within the ruling group grew, increasingly linked to the program of the civil left schools of thoughts (which critically supported it) and implemented broad agrarian reform, mobilized the population in the *Kebeles* (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution), severed ties with the United States and faced opposition movements (Schwab 1985).

In 1977, Colonel Mengistu Haile Marian ascended to the leadership of the Derg. While defining himself as socialist, the rebellions of the far left (PRPE and Meison), separatists or autonomists and conservative counterrevolutionaries agitated almost all provinces and Somalia attacked Ethiopia in support of the Somali guerrillas in Ogaden. The country was on the brink of disintegration and *White Terror* was countered by *Red Terror*. The army's own upper hierarchy, shaped by the monarchy, was harshly purged. Peasant militias were incorporated into the new "*Red Army*".

The Somali invasion had been encouraged by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United States, while the USSR and Cuba welcomed Mengistu's request for assistance. Fidel Castro visited the two countries in dispute, trying to mediate the conflict by proposing the formation of a confederation, but stumbled upon the Somali negative, which expelled all Soviet advisors from the country (LeoGrande 1980). At that time, Moscow established an air-bridge, sending weapons, Soviet and East German advisers, and ten thousand Cuban soldiers. The 1977-78 war ended with the victory of Ethiopia, which consolidated its ties with the socialist side, while Somalia allied itself with the United States and Arab petro-monarchies.

But the wars against the Eritreans (also Marxists), Somalis and separatists/autonomists (some conservatives and other Marxists) continued to consume the country's scarce resources. Despite the soviet recommendations to establish a mass party (delayed until the consolidation of the regime) and the adoption of a federal structure, Mengistu maintained its refusal and autonomy. They were not "pawns" of the Cold War. In 1984-5 a new drought produced widespread starvation, with refugees that the government was removing from conflict areas in the North and setting up in cooperatives in the South. Still, agrarian reform and urban reform radically changed the nation's socio-economic profile and public health had a significant development. But the most important was the educational campaign, which literate the vast majority of the population, receiving a UNESCO prize (Clapham 1996).

The difficulties increased with Gorbachev's arrival in power and the gradual reduction of Soviet aid. In 1988-89 the weakened Red Army suffered defeats in Eritrea and Tigris province against Marxist insurgents (those of the Tigris declared themselves "Albanian line"). The two groups associated themselves in a front and, with the US's blessing, were authorized to conquer power after a formal transition to political and economic liberalism. In 1991 they advanced to the capital and the regime fell, with Mengistu's escape to Zimbabwe (Hughes 1992). In 1993 Eritrea became independent and, despite a border war between the two former allies, the power structures of both changed little. Ethiopia became a regional power and, with Chinese support, developed its economy from starvation.

Somali Democratic Republic

Somalia is a desert country of 637 thousand km², located in a strategic position in the Horn of Africa, facing the Arabian Peninsula. The eastern part of its territory was an Italian colony, while the northern part was an English possession, but a large part of the Somali people live in Ethiopia (Ogaden region), Kenya and Djibouti, in an extension almost equivalent to the surface of the independent country (which in 1983 had 6.3 million inhabitants). Independent in 1960 with the reunion of the former British and Italian Somalias, the new state had an unstable and incompetent regime.

On October 21, 1969 Major General Mohamed Siad Bare led a military coup almost without bloodshed and established the Supreme Revolutionary Council. The composition of the governmental body was 25 military above the rank of captain and 6 chiefs of police, where clans and regions were represented, and called *Jaalle* (Comrade). The cabinet included several civilians of the *intelligentsia*, graduated in Italy and the USSR. Formally the

regime sought legitimacy in the fight against corruption, nepotism, bribery, theft, and also criticized the clan system. Many officers were trained abroad, especially in Nasser's Egypt, and several were placed in the administration to watch over civilians (Ottaway 1982).

In May 1970 the regime nationalized banks, oil distributors, energy and sugar producers (almost all foreign) and in October proclaimed adherence to "scientific socialism", and "not Arab, African or Islamic ". It needed to produce a credible alternative to the ousted regime and, in fact, most of its members believed that this was the path to development and sovereignty. In 1976 the Revolutionary Socialist Party was created, and in 1979 the country was renamed the Democratic Republic of Somalia. However, in a society characterized by the predominance of illiteracy and nomadism, intellectuals had to seek an equivalent concept, *Handiwadaag* ("sharing the wealth").

In a atmosphere of popular excitement, socialist songs and poems were spread to the illiterate. The Latin alphabet was adopted, a Somali national language (which had no written representation), and alphabetization brigades were sent throughout the country. Local political committees watched over the traditional bureaucracy and comrades were set up against tribalism, corruption, laziness and gossiping and in favour of hygiene, scientific socialism and gender equality (Markakis 1992). The great drought of 1972-74 caused 20,000 deaths, the loss of a third of the herds and 250,000 refugees. Half of them were sedentary or became fishermen through government programmes.

Between 1970 and 1978 Somalia approached the Soviet and Cuban sphere, receiving technical assistance, military aid and diplomatic support. Somalia found support and a model, while the USSR found a geopolitical ally against pro-U.S Ethiopia, when it was losing influence in Egypt. As a consequence, Washington opposed the regime and the Peace Corps was expelled from the country, but Barre never even confronted the petro-monarchies, from which he also received some financial support for his miserable country. The establishment of Marxist-Leninist political and socialist institutions and practices was intense, together with the assembly of a modern army. However, history was preparing another of its ironies (Coker 1985).

In 1974 the Ethiopian monarchy was overthrown by the military, as seen above, followed by a confusing period of internal fights and separatist guerrillas. One of them was the Western Somali Liberation Front of the Ogaden region, which was supported by Somalia, and in April 1976 attacked the Ethiopian army. Both the Soviets and Fidel Castro himself visited Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea seeking to prevent the conflict between three nations of Marxist regime and proposing a socialist federation. But nationalism spoke

louder and everyone rejected the mediation and the proposal. This was followed by the Somali invasion in support of the guerrillas and the 1977-78 war, in which the Ethiopians were saved by the Soviet air-bridge and the dispatch of 10,000 Cuban fighters.

Barre broke off with Cuba and exposed the military agreement with the USSR, which had formed its army, but hardly got any help from the US or Arab petromonarchies as compensation. The effects of the war (more than half a million refugees, with their flocks), of a new drought, growing opposition and coup attempts, as well as an increase in the price of oil and food on the world market, generated a serious crisis. Curiously, despite having to appeal to the IMF in the 1980s and being pressured by the West and the Arabs to give up their “socialist way”, the regime did not give in. But in the face of internal difficulties and world changes at the end of the decade, Barre left power in January 1991. The nationalist temptation to create a “Great Somalia” destroyed the regime and left the country divided among 14 “warlords,” immersed in terrorism and suffering international intervention for almost three decades. No regime succeeded Somali socialism (Harper 2012).

People's Republic of Congo

The Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville) is one of the most urbanised African countries (61%) and it had a population of 1.8 million in 1986. It gained independence in August 1960. Fights between rival groups erupted in the government of the first president, Fulbert Youlou, with neo-colonial characteristics. Popular uprisings justified the military takeover, which established a provisional government led by Alphonse Massamba-Débat. After being elected in 1963, he established a regime called “scientific-socialism” (Marxist-Leninist), with the adoption of five-year plans and the convergence with USSR, China, North Korea and North Vietnam. The Congo became the first popular and socialist republic of Africa. However, with the inability to reconcile different internal political factions, and with growing friction between government and army, in 1968 Major Marien Ngouabi staged a new *coup d'état* and assumed power, without, however, deviating from the socialist path – proclaiming Congo as the first popular republic of Africa, based on the Congolese Labour Party. The country's name was changed to the People's Republic of Congo (Radu 1989).

Congolese politics remained unstable. The assassination of Marien Ngouabi in 1977 led to Denis Sassou Nguesso's ascension to power in 1979 (until 1992). Maintaining the socialist line that had been adopted since independence, Sassou Nguesso aligned himself with the Soviet bloc until the end

of the Cold War. With the fall of the socialist bloc, Nguesso began a process of opening up, with the Congolese Labor Party flexibilizing the socialist profile and adopting the multiparty system in the country in 1990. Nguesso returned to power in a civil war in 1997 and was elected president in 2002.

During the Cold War, Congo adopted a socialist stance, maintaining extensive relations with the socialist bloc and the Soviet Union. The Cuban presence was important in the country and, from it, important support was given to the revolutionaries of the MPLA in Angola. Surrounded by two neo-colonial and pro-French States, Gabon and Zaire, the small country lived under intense pressure.

People's Republic of Benin

The little Benin had a population of 4 million in 1986, 40% urban, and became independent from France in August 1960. The first president of the then Daomé, Hubert Maga, was ousted three years later, beginning an era of instability with the succession of six military coups. In 1972, a new coup brought young soldiers to power and in 1974 the country adopted the Marxist-Leninist ideology under the leadership of Mathieu Kérékou. His government lasted until 1990. During this period, private companies were nationalized and popular programs were implemented. The regime established the Benin People's Revolutionary Party (PRPB) as the only party. In 1975, the country was renamed the People's Republic of Benin and remained so until 1990 (Allen 1989).

The adoption of Marxism-Leninism was accompanied by the construction of the State, the nation and mass organizations, supported by left-wing nationalism of segments of the urban population. Efforts were made in the area of education and health, with some improvements, as well as attempts to introduce new forms of cooperative rural property and modernization for export and food self-sufficiency. But the patronage policy continued and the political and economic management wasn't enough, while the support of socialist countries was not substantial either. Relations with Nigeria were important, but subject to constant exchanges of government in the powerful neighbour.

The establishment of socialism produced several conflicts: an invasion of mercenaries in 1977, financed by France, Morocco and Gabon, which was defeated by the army and the militias of the PRPB, as well as several coup attempts with external support. In 1980, a direct vote for the Popular Assembly was instituted and a more pragmatic diplomacy was adopted, and contacts

with France were re-established. But despite the discovery of oil, generating self-sufficiency, the fall in prices of agricultural products and desertification generated a serious supply crisis and the request for international aid in 1984. To make matters worse, Nigeria expelled thousands of foreign workers because of the fall in the price of oil, which affected remittances, increased unemployment and reduced the activities of the port of Cotonou.

Faced with the economic situation, the regime went into crisis in the 1980s when Benin resorted to foreign loans. In 1989, an uprising forced Kérékou to carry out a political and economic openness. At the National Conference of Cotonou in 1990, the Marxist ideology was abolished, the old flag was used again and the multiparty system returned. With the institution of multipartyism, elections took place in 1991, but former President Kérékou returned to the presidency in the 1996 and 2001 elections.

Malagasy Democratic Republic

Madagascar had a population of 10 million in 1986 during the Marxist phase. The island is ethnically divided, with the West populated by Africans and the East by Malay-indonesians and the urban population was only 21%. In 1883, France invaded Madagascar, converting it into a colony. In 1942, during World War II, the Anglo-Americans occupied it and received the status of self-government in 1946, but France did not recognize the nationalist Malagasy Democratic Renewal Movement (MDRM). There was a general uprising in 1947 and the massive repression of the French caused 80,000 deaths, but in 1960 it became independent under the presidency of Philibert Tsiranana, who maintained a parliamentary and neo-colonial regime.

There were riots in 1972, which led to the removal of the government and the establishment of a military regime (led by Gen. Ramanantsoa) and the withdrawal of French troops the following year. The instability lasted until 1975, when Frigate Captain Didier Ratsiraka took power and established a socialist-oriented regime supported by a coalition of parties, the National Front for the Revolution. Ratsiraka drafted and submitted to plebiscite the *Red Book*, a kind of Charter of the Socialist Revolution, which gave rise to the new Constitution in December and the nation was renamed the Malagasy Democratic Republic. The French bases were closed, as well as a NASA station. The parties that supported the Revolution formed the National Front of the Revolution (with groups ranging from Marxism-Leninism to Christian democracy), where Ratsiraka's Vanguard of the Malagasy Revolution was dominant, with 11 of the 19 seats on the Supreme Council of the Revolution (Covell 1987).

In foreign policy, he practiced an active non-alignment, condemning Apartheid and advocating the demilitarization of the Indian Ocean. In 1982, he made a major acquisition of Soviet armaments, especially MIG-21 fighters, because he feared for destabilization actions, such as those South Africa unleashed against Comoros and Seychelles. The country is surrounded by islands where French bases are located: Réunion and Mayotte. Cooperation with socialist countries was important, especially in technical, political and military areas, but smaller in economic terms, which forced the nation to maintain contacts with the West.

There have been advances in industry and a broad agrarian reform has been implemented, creating the *focolononas*, similar to the *Ujamaa* villages of Tanzania, and important investments in health and education. But the economic crisis of the 1980s, with falling *commodity* prices, forced the country to turn to the IMF and resume commercial ties with France, as well as the adoption of austerity policies, generating disturbances. Extreme left-wing groups, non-participants of the FNR, as well as the conservative Council of Christian Churches clashed with the police, who decreed a curfew. With the support of the FNR and the military the political crisis was overcome and the president won the 1983 elections with 80% of the votes, in 1989 he was re-elected with 67% of the votes.

But since the mid-1980s, Ratsiraka has had to adopt economic reforms that moved away from the socialist orientation and, by the end of the decade, political liberalization measures. In 1991, faced with protest movements, he resigned. The opposition's election victory in 1992 consolidated the adoption of a market economy in the impoverished and isolated country, but in 1997 Ratsiraka would return to power through elections.

Democratic People's Republic of Burkina Faso

The Alto Volta, a former French colony, was an unstable and unpopular neo-colonial regime since independence in 1960, which had to cope with poverty, aggravated by the great drought in the Sahel in the early 1980s. Its population was 6.7 millions in 1986. A poor country, landlocked and a victim of drought, it has experienced a succession of military coups since the first (neo-colonial) president was overthrown in 1966. The military coup governments were marked by a rift between the high ranks, linked to the economic elites, and the young officers, who criticized corruption and incompetence. In January 1983, Captain Thomas Sankara was appointed prime minister and, based on his experience as a former garrison commander in the hinterland, created brigades in which the military assisted the peasants (Baxter 1989).

This earned him his resignation in May, but in August, at the head of a group of young officers, he obtained power through a military coup. The popular Sankara proclaimed a socialist regime with a Marxist-Leninist profile, which carried out an agrarian reform and established Committees for the Defense of the Revolution throughout the country, following the Cuban model. In 1984 he changed the name of the country to Burkina Faso, a composition of terms which, in the local languages, means “Homeland of worthy men”. What draws attention is the explicit adoption of the Cuban model as an explicit reference (Otayek and Sankara in Markakis 1986).

On the diplomatic level, it approached Libya, the USSR, Cuba, Benin, the P.R. of Congo and Ghana, then governed by left-wing nationalist military man Jerry Rawlings. Popular mobilization and enthusiasm were intense, but in October 1987 Sankara (who was returning from Libya with financial support) was overthrown and shot by Captain Blaise Campaoré, the regime’s number two. Rivalries between the military, radicalism and popular support for the revolution and French politics were certainly behind the coup. Campaoré initially gave some continuity to the policies of his predecessor. Later, in a context of economic difficulties, he sought the help of international financial organizations and drifted into economic liberalism, maintaining an authoritarian regime and a populist discourse. Despite the short duration of the government, social mobilization and achievements were intense.

Conclusion

An analysis of the experiences above leads to brief conclusions. Firstly, the original African Revolutions are post-colonial African events which resulted from the establishment of Marxist Military Regimes can be considered *Revolutions*, even though they were implemented through *coups d'état* by military personnel without an initiation into Marxism. Secondly, the motivation for the adoption of such regimes is based primarily on the domestic and African sphere instead of on Cold War alliances and geopolitical factors. Thirdly, these original and unusual revolutionary processes were not gaps in the history of the respective countries, but an important step in state and nation building, which left an important legacy. Lastly, they represent an attempt to overcome the limitations and failures of the previous phase of so-called (non-Marxist) *African Socialism*.

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Visentini, P. G. F.; Ribeiro, Luís Dario; Pereira, Analucia D. 2014. *História da África e dos Africanos*. Petrópolis: Vozes.

ABSTRACT

Alongside the Revolutions resulting from long anti-colonial wars such as Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Zimbabwe, an innovative element has developed, the *Military Coups of a new kind*, which have introduced *revolutionary regimes called Marxist-Leninist*. This is the case of Somalia (1969) and Ethiopia (1974), the most emblematic case, but also of four French-speaking countries: Congo-Brazzaville (1968), Daomey/Benin (1972-74), Madagascar (1975) and Alto Volta/Burkina Faso (1983), which established Regimes throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The original and controversial revolutionary experiences presented here, the *Marxist Military Regimes*, are different from the first states ruled by the so-called “African Socialism” just after independence, in the passage from 1950 to 1960: Ghana (1957), Guinea (1958), Mali (1960), Tanzania (1961), Zambia (1964) and Algeria (1962).

KEYWORDS

African coups d'état; African military regimes; African Marxism.

Received on September 30, 2019

Accepted on January 19, 2020

Translated by Pietra Ribeiro Studzinski