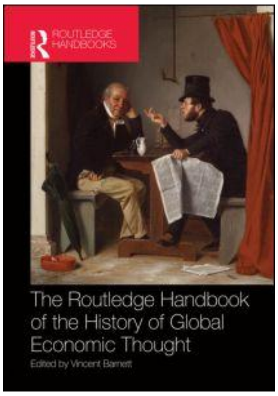

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Marxist or market?

Steven Kyle

Many of the most important differences and similarities between Angola and Mozambique predate the arrival of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. When we put the question of Marxist economic orientation in this context, the two decades of so-called Marxist development seems rather a small issue when compared to half a millennium of colonial history. The pre-existing conditions in each country had much more influence on their development prospects than did their years of Marxist economic policy. In fact, in many ways it is difficult to pinpoint actual "Marxist" policies distinct from those followed by other similar countries at the same level of development.

In terms of broad similarities, both countries contain within their borders a variety of African ethnic groups, many of which had no sense of common identity prior to the arrival of the Europeans. Both countries also contained substantial kingdoms, with well-defined borders and centralized political control: most notably the Kongo kingdom on the west coast of Africa, which had its capital in what is now Angola (though it extended northward into what is now Zaire and the Congo), and the kingdoms of Sofala and Muenemutapa in Mozambique.

The goals of the Portuguese were not primarily ones of conquest and settlement. Rather, the principal aim of the early explorers was to open routes for extraction of commodities, among which were spices, gold, ivory, and slaves. This had important implications for the local populations, as it meant that there was no overriding need for the Portuguese to control territory or to rule directly. Rather, it was more convenient for them to reach accommodations with local political leaders in order to develop trading relationships which would allow them to extract the desired export commodities. For the most part, there was no concerted effort to promote economic development, or to settle Portuguese colonists on these lands, and this remained the case until the twentieth century (Issacman and Isaacman, 1983; Newitt, 1995).

Until the partition of Africa by European powers in the late 1800s there was little effort by the Portuguese to settle or directly control the interior of either country. However, at that time it became clear that the main criterion for colonial borders was to follow the dictum "possession is 9/10 of the law" – or 100 percent in this case. Accordingly, the Portuguese began to push into the interior of both Mozambique and Angola, an effort that picked up speed in the 1930s when Portugal sought among other things to alleviate its own unemployment problems by exporting large numbers of settlers and peasant farmers abroad.

This massive influx of Europeans resulted in a situation in which virtually every formal sector job in the economies of both countries was dominated by whites. Every salaried job, including taxi drivers, waiters, ticket takers, etc. was held by the Portuguese, leaving no role whatsoever for Africans in the formal sector. Agriculture, too, became heavily Europeanized, with a large smallholder African peasant sector coexisting with a commercialized sector of medium-sized European farms and large plantations. Equally important was a virtual monopoly by the Portuguese on the network of rural traders who linked all agricultural producers to the market. These bush traders and shopkeepers provided an outlet for peasant production and in return served as providers of agricultural inputs, consumer goods and informal credit.

This chapter will argue that "Marxist" economic ideology as practiced in the Lusophone African context is virtually indistinguishable from general justifications for authoritarian extractive regimes of any political stripe, and that the extractive regimes of post-independence Angola and Mozambique are in many ways simply extensions of the old colonial regimes under new management. Though the newly independent governments in Angola and Mozambique were openly and avowedly "Marxist" in their economic convictions, this was more of a label of convenience than a real indicator of ideological conviction. The true conviction in each case was a determination to replace colonial hegemony and control with that of the ruling party, a goal which is shared by many political persuasions in Africa and around the world.

Marxist economics in Africa

What did it mean economically to be a Marxist state in the immediate post-colonial era of the 1970s in the former Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique? If Marxist economics necessitates state ownership of the means of production, then we are in something of a definitional quandary because there simply *wasn't* very much in the way of "means of production" in either of these countries at independence in 1975. Nevertheless, to be avowedly Marxist certainly meant something to the governments in question so it is worth looking at exactly what it meant and how it evolved as time went on. By 2013 it is safe to say that Mozambique has taken a decided turn toward a market economy not just in rhetoric but in fact. Angola has taken a similar turn in rhetoric and to some extent in reality but lags behind Mozambique in its market reforms.

The stories of how these countries became "Marxist" economies in the first place was strongly influenced by the fact that their colonial occupiers were Portuguese, and were therefore members of NATO. When the predictable and necessary independence movements began to coalesce in the 1960s, there was no way they were going to get any assistance or encouragement from other NATO allies – their only viable sources of support were the communist bloc countries, particularly the USSR, East Germany and to some extent Cuba. Getting assistance and advice from these sources carried with it the Marxist economic mindset and developmental prejudices – a bias toward state control of the economy and a deep conviction that the political primacy of the party was more important than anything else. Accordingly, FRELIMO in Mozambique and the MPLA in Angola took control over all aspects of the polity and economy from top to bottom (Messiant, 1998).

To a very great extent this was forced on them. It is estimated that 95 percent of Portuguese settlers evacuated from both countries in the year during which Portugal relinquished power (Kyle, 1990, 2005). Some of them were reluctant to lose their Portuguese citizenship while many were frightened by the Marxist rhetoric of the incoming government and were unwilling to stay if all of their assets (farms, factories, etc) were to be nationalized. Given the extreme socio-economic segregation along racial lines enforced by the colonial rulers, this meant that managers and owners of virtually every economic entity, from large plantation down to rural convenience store, departed and in many cases destroyed their assets, rather than leave them to whoever was to come next. While both FRELIMO and the MPLA tried to continue established companies and plantations as going concerns, they quickly ran into a bottleneck. The racial laws preventing education or assimilation of most Africans meant that there was an extreme dearth of experienced managers after independence. Indeed, one observer in Mozambique stated that there were only 33 college graduates in the entire country after 1975 (Personal communication, Minister of Finance, 1988).

Another colonial legacy that is equally important is the fact that the Fascist Salazar regime exercised state control over the economy scarcely less comprehensively than what existed in many communist countries. Though large corporations did indeed control the "commanding heights" of the economy, the extent to which these were intertwined with government regulation and personnel should not be underestimated. Colonies were run with an eye toward extraction of surplus value and to the extent that corporations could assist in this they were encouraged and licensed by the government. Ownership of land and other productive assets was reserved for white settlers with the indigenous population relegated to less favorable zones where they were readily able to be called on for forced labor. Immigration was tightly controlled and the labor market explicitly segmented between occupations that were considered to be "white" (all formal sector jobs) or "black" (menial jobs).

Accordingly, it was no great leap to go from authoritarian "Fascist" control of the economy to authoritarian "Marxist" control. Neither regime countenanced political rivals and both employed police tactics to suppress opposition, and neither countenanced free-market economies. Both vested ownership of major productive assets in the ruling class (or state if we choose the Marxist nomenclature). All that was required in the first instance was a political "decapitation" of the old colonial regime and its replacement with new leaders. But it would be difficult to distinguish major differences between an exploitative centralizing regime run by Portuguese colonialists, and an exploitative centralizing regime run by a small indigenous ruling clique (Government of Angola, 1997, 2000 and 2006).

The degree of control and the institutional apparatus to enforce it were in some cases a holdover from the colonial era but also showed the influence of Eastern bloc economic advisors as in the formation of the "Economic Police," whose job was (putatively) to enforce pricing and distribution of goods, but whose actual function was to serve as merely one more point at which surplus value could be extracted from productive activities via bribes or other forms of corruption.

A vacuum of ideas – economic thinking in the early post-colonial era

When thinking about economic ideas and ideological biases in the early post-colonial era it is imperative to realize that there really were few or no trained economists (in the academic sense) who were part of the ruling parties or who were resident in Mozambique, apart from a very few foreigners. Of the "33 university graduates in the whole country" at independence, none were PhD economists. Angola's ruling MPLA was similarly bereft of internal debate of economic ideas at this level. This means that economic thought as typically conceived in Western universities simply did not exist, at least not in written form.

What did exist was a small cadre of revolutionary intellectuals who were schooled in Marxist economic ideology but who really did not participate in wider philosophical discussions of economic theory. Eduardo Mondlane, the father of Mozambican independence, was a sociology professor in the USA before joining the independence struggle in Africa and, before his assassination in 1969, could reasonably claim to be the most educated social scientist of the revolutionary era. Agostinho Neto, the father of Angolan independence was trained in medicine.

Insofar as these leaders and their successors followed standard Marxist economic doctrine from their Eastern Bloc supporters, they equated Portuguese colonialists with capitalists and oppressed African masses with the working class. Certainly, this was a reasonable interpretation of the facts on the ground but did not generate any question as to an appropriate course of action beyond defeating the Portuguese militarily. Sudden victory and independence in 1975 led to a situation where the victorious independence movements were thrust into *de facto* control of the economy and its consequent day to day emergencies, leaving theoretical debates over economics on the sidelines.

The economic vacuum created by the departure of the Portuguese settlers and the ensuing chaos left the newly minted states little option but to take over major production units such as plantations and factories. Managing such enterprises proved more difficult given the near total collapse of economic value chains, the inexperience of new managers, and the disappearance of the old forced labor arrangements that supported the profit margins of many of these concerns. Externally funded insurrections – RENAMO in Mozambique, funded by the white Rhodesian secret police and South Africa/the USA; and UNITA in Angola, funded by South Africa and the USA as well as their own diamond mines – reduced the actual governable space to a mere fraction of the national territory in both cases with a consequent crash in economic activity (Kyle, 1990; Andersson, 1992).

It could certainly be argued that the crash was a direct result not just of the civil conflict, though that would have been quite sufficient for the result, but also from the misguided attempt to exercise total economic control down to the micro level, as taken from traditional Marxist economic doctrine. Evidence for this could be seen in the virtual emptying of government-controlled marketing and distribution channels in favor of large informal markets which carried on outside of the regulatory regime. However, it was obvious in Mozambique by the early 1980s that not only was the government attempt at control failing to produce positive results, but external aid from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other agencies was conditional on a turn toward a market economy. In Angola the economic results of state control were no less obvious but impinged on the lives of the ruling elite far less due to their access to huge flows of oil revenue derived from newly exploited offshore oil fields.

The subsequent turn to the market in the 1980s/90s in Mozambique and to a lesser extent in Angola post-2002, definitely did have an intellectual basis in economic theory but this was more imposed from the outside than arising as the result of an economic debate in the countries themselves. FRELIMO in Mozambique saw clearly that their economy was suffering and that their control apparatus was not up to the task of promoting development or growth. The World Bank and the IMF had a clear alternative: they strongly promoted the "Washington Consensus" as laid out in John Williamson (1989). In many cases the turn to the market was simply an official recognition of ongoing commercial activity – simply allowing the "shadow economy" to be sanctioned by the government. But overall Mozambique clearly accepted the economic doctrines espoused by the donor community because there was little choice – if they wanted the aid, they needed to accept the policy changes and the ideology that underlay them. In short, they needed the money.

This meant in effect a massive retreat from government control of the economy. Reduction of government barriers to international trade were very much in line with research such as that by Anne Krueger (Krueger, 1997) and others at the World Bank extolling the virtues of neo-liberal market solutions to development issues. Subsequent high rates of growth in the

Mozambican economy served to justify and cement the "new thinking" in both the donor community and within Mozambique itself, at least for a time. Recently, some questions along the lines of those elaborated by Dani Rodrik (Rodrik, 2003) and others have arisen due to the very unequal distribution of growth across both space and class in Mozambique. In essence, some have benefited massively while others remain mired in poverty just as they were prior to the turn to the market in the 1990s. This remains as yet unresolved.

In Angola very similar (indeed indistinguishable) policy prescriptions were promoted with identical neo-liberal economics underpinnings. However, one major difference prevented their wholesale adoption in Angola – the government had massive flows of oil revenue and didn't need money nearly as much as their Mozambican counterparts. Certainly some degree of market opening did indeed take place at the micro level, but overall government policy has remained fundamentally unchanged – Angola is a resource-extraction-based regime and focuses its efforts on maintaining and increasing its mineral revenue.

Indeed, these oil fields contributed to Angolan elite cynicism about the motives of "development assistance," since the lip-service given to market reforms and good governance was coupled with a willingness to countenance a bloody civil war on the continent so long as oil continued to flow. Not only that, but the ruling elite had little or no direct economic need to reform since their own lifestyle could be amply supported by oil revenues. This promoted a mindset which, unlike almost all other countries in the region, did not see the need to cater to donor wishes. In terms of outside observers, the various explanations of the Resource Curse and Dutch Disease that are associated with W.M. Corden (1984) and Richard Auty (2002), who anchored their writings very much on empirical problems and low growth encountered by oil exporting countries. Angola is often cited as a prime example of how oil money can result in "rent seeking" behavior by favored elites. This strand of the economic literature remains directly relevant in Angola and has gained a new prominence in Mozambique given the discoveries of large deposits of natural gas in the past few years.

Portuguese land law and reform

Perhaps the most contentious economic issue debated in either country over the post-independence era is that of the ownership of land and the laws/regulations through which it is formalized (Bruce and Migot-Adholla, 1994). Both Angola and Mozambique have multiple sets of overlapping claims to land which can be mostly categorized as follows:

- Indigenous claims based on traditional occupancy, usually not formalized but widely recognized in the locality where they are located (Goody, 1969; Gluckman, 1969);
- Colonial-era ownership claims, mostly vacated for those settlers who left in 1975 but which survive in cases where settlers remained;
- Post-independence grants of land, which can be the result of claims or grants made at various levels of government up to and including the Presidency itself (Kloeck-Jenson, 1997, 1998; McGregor, 1995; Myers, 1993).

Of course, "Marxist" economic doctrine states that all land belongs to the "people" and is managed on their behalf by the state. This idea fits well with two important needs of any extractive regime, whether it be European or indigenous. The first is the need to be able to dispose of land as desired in order to reward supporters in a political sense. The second is the need to be able to monopolize extractive rents for mineral or other natural resource based wealth. This was particularly relevant early on in Angola where oil revenues formed the majority of the income of the government. Diamond mines were of secondary importance but are still large in absolute terms in Angola. In Mozambique such extractive goals were manifest in land grants to large farmers but also to foreign extractive companies interested in such things as logging or other extractive activities. It should be noted that many of these land grants simply ignored the fact that there were people already living on the lands involved.

Reform of the inherited Portuguese land law has proceeded in both Angola and Mozambique, and has been the subject of contentious debate both within the country and between the government and donors. Mozambicans and Angolans have taken it as a matter of fixed policy that land belongs to the nation as a whole and cannot be owned by individuals in perpetuity as is the case in most Western industrial countries. Many donors, in contrast, have argued for a land law that would support an active market in land.

While in theory the new land laws (allowing for varying periods of tenure for the purpose of using the land for farming, mining, habitation, etc) are quite specific in how tenancy is granted and held, in fact the resources to actually conduct a cadastral survey with the associated bureaucratic costs has been lacking in either country. Added to this is the problem that in some areas traditional farmers use shifting cultivation methods and so are not always farming the same plot. The result is a hodgepodge in which competing interests in any particular area vie for actual control over land. Peasants are routinely dispossessed in the interest of extractive interests promoted by the central or provincial governments, while large farmers also try to gain direct control over favored parcels.

None of this really resembles a "Marxist" system of land tenure either in economic theory or in terms of its application in existing Marxist countries anywhere in the world. Rather, we are witnessing an ongoing "land grab," in which moneyed or connected players have an advantage over the less well-off.

Mineral wealth and Marx – is there any detectable difference?

The short answer to the question posed above is "no." Both the Angolan and now the Mozambican governments have asserted unambiguously that the right to subsurface mineral wealth belongs to the government. In fact, the Angolan government has demonstrated quite clearly that they are willing to wage war in whatever manner and for however long it is necessary for them to exert control over the entirety of the national area and its offshore economic zones. This includes not only oil production areas but also diamond mines in the northeast part of the country. Extraction of the oil has been done almost exclusively by foreign contractors, including US, European, and other firms experienced in oil exploration and extraction. This might seem "un-Marxist" but was in reality part of a situation so confused that at one point Cuban soldiers were protecting US oil companies from South African mercenaries funded by the US and its allies.

But the question remains – is this Marxist economics in practice? In support of a negative answer we have to recognize that using foreign contractors for extraction is no more a hallmark of a particular ideology than is assertion of control over subsurface mineral rights: in short, everyone does it. The centralizing tendencies that go along with the economics of the Resource Curse may appear at first glance to have some resemblance to Marxist economic philosophy, but in reality they are simply a manifestation of the fact that power follows money – and in a resource rich country that money is located in the capital city (Kyle, 2006a, 2006b).

Marketing, distribution, and agricultural extension

It is in the area of marketing and distribution that Marxist economic thought has had the most pervasive, and arguably the most damaging effects on the economies of Angola and Mozambique. The Marxist glorification of the production worker and the vilification of commercial traders and marketers as "parasites" who produce nothing of value, has had a clear deleterious effect on the rural economy of both Angola and Mozambique (see FRELIMO, 1968 and Frelimo Party documents from 1977/78 for policies in these areas).

First, it is important to bear in mind that as discussed above, the pre-independence marketing system almost completely disappeared with the departure of the Portuguese settlers who had virtually monopolized these activities (Azzam and Faucher, 1988; Hilmarsson, 1995; Strachan, 1997; Arndt et al., 2000). This was particularly important in rural areas where small stores provided a broad spectrum of services including informal rural credit. Lack of capital together with the widespread destruction and chaos of civil war prevented reactivation of these rural markets and many remain not served by marketers to this day.

The problem is that wholesalers and traders were regarded as profiting from the "honest" work of peasants by selling their produce for a far higher price than they paid. The real services they provided – liquidity to peasants, willingness to bear market risk if prices changed, storage and most important, transportation services – were ignored or discounted in this view of the world. All that mattered was that these traders were earning what appeared to be a healthy profit, though even huge margins could be illusory in a highly inflationary economy (Pitcher, 2002).

Some districts in Angola, for example, went five years or more without once seeing a trader willing to purchase output from farmers. Any attempt to service these markets had first to overcome physical constraints of poor roads, land mines, destroyed bridges, etc. Even if these were surmounted, government regulations limited the profits that could legally be earned to a mere 25 percent, far below inflation rates during much of the 30 years following independence.

Indeed, this antipathy to traders extended to urban areas as well, leading to a situation where officially sanctioned retail outlets in the old city centers were virtually deserted, with no stock on their shelves, while bustling, open-air markets thrived on the outskirts of town. The well known "Roque Santeiro" market outside Luanda was one of the largest and most diverse markets on the continent, and though it has now been shut down with the reactivation of retail activity in more permanent facilities it was for many years the go-to place for a wide variety of products from food to consumer durables and even weapons.

This repression of the marketing system helped produce a disconnection between the producers in the countryside and the urban demand centers on the coast. Here, however, there were two big differences between Angola and Mozambique. In Angola, the pre-existing market links between city and hinterland were ruptured by the independence-associated evacuation of Portuguese and further stifled by war and banditry. Official repression prevented any real economic incentive from arising, and this was exacerbated by exchange rate overvaluation which made competing food imports cheap on the coast. Indeed, this situation persists to the present day, with command economy adherents in the government reactivating entities such as MECANAGRO, a state-run agricultural machinery service provider which is very similar to machinery brigades in the old USSR, but which in the Angolan context serves mainly large and well-connected plantations rather than small farmers.

In Mozambique there is domestic capacity to meet urban demand on the coast, principally in Maputo. However, these market links, unlike the Angolan case, were NOT pre-existing.

Rather, the southern part of the country imported food from abroad and paid for it by exporting labor to South African mines. Building market links for grain between the North and the South is therefore a question of development rather than rehabilitation.

Finally, we must address whether the repression of marketing is truly a "marker" for Marxist economic thought and management. Clearly, it is a characteristic common to many (virtually all) Marxist economies. However, it is not exclusive to these countries – distrust of middlemen runs deep in rural areas and is a routine feature of the rural worldview in many different countries – not just those with Marxist governments. Indeed, the antipathy to profiteering middlemen owes as much to the fact that they were Portuguese colonists in the pre-independence era as it does to any governing economic philosophy.

Agricultural extension services played an important role in promoting the state view of marketing and were also a mechanism for controlling information and political participation in rural areas. Clearly inspired by political goals, rural extension meetings were in some cases run by political appointees with little agricultural knowledge. Suspicion of the motives and/or expertise of such personnel grew to be a problem in some areas, though general under-funding of extension limited the role it could actually play in many areas (Gemo and Rivera, 2001; Eicher, 2002).

Conclusion

What are we to make of all of this? It appears that even in areas where "Marxist" economic thought appears to provide explanatory power there are equally good alternatives to explain what happened in Angolan and Mozambican economic policy. To declare one's party to be "Marxist" may well have been more of an artifact of shifting alliances and supporters than it was of any real ideological convictions. Another indicator that this might well be the case is the fact that both the MPLA in Angola and FRELIMO in Mozambique have now stated that they no longer consider themselves bound by the tenets of Marxist economic thought and are pursuing market-based approaches to economic development (see World Bank, 1996 or Republic of Mozambique, 1997/98). In Angola this development was somewhat later (see MINPLAN, 2006). This is no doubt at least partly due to the fact that major potential donors wanted them to make such a change – but this is yet another indicator that claims of adherence to particular economic doctrines are, in parts of Africa at least, more situational than ideological in origin.

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