The 4th International Congress of African Studies, convened in Zaire in December 1978, analyzed the multifaceted phenomenon of "dependency." The Congress resolutions reveal Africanists' acute concern with problems of the continent.

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The idea for the founding of the International Congress of African Studies grew out of the meeting of the International Congress of Orientalists which took place in Moscow in August 1960. The “Africa” section of this Congress decided to create a separate association and to set up a committee for its organization. The predominantly European influence in the founding of this body may be seen in the wording of its objectives at that time:

...to develop international co-operation in the field of African Studies through periodic meetings and publications, to organize and promote research on an international basis and to serve as a body which shall encourage Africans to have a growing consciousness of their membership of the human race and to express themselves in all fields of human endeavour.

The first international meeting of this organization, as it is now constituted, was held in 1962 in Accra, Ghana and the themes of its subsequent meetings reflect the changing perspectives of Africanists in their analysis of the problems of the continent and their solution in the contemporary world. As the President of the 1978 Congress, Monseigneur Tshibangu Tshishiku put it, “Every session of ICAS must establish the reorientation of African Studies in the world.”

At this fourth meeting of the Congress in Zaire, delegates traced the inspiration for their organization to Ghana’s first President, Kwame Nkrumah, rather than to the Moscow meeting. At the first meeting in Accra, Nkrumah had encouraged members to promote the development of African studies and to seek to disseminate knowledge about Africa throughout the world. The 1960s was the period when Western scholars were most able to respond to this challenge, particularly in the United States where government funding was in some cases most lavish for the development of study programs and research in Africa. Since that time much of that funding has dried up and the composition of the International Congress meeting in Zaire, at which only a handful of non-African scholars were present, reflected, in part, this financial situation. That the leadership of the Congress has come firmly into the hands of African scholars themselves has had a positive impact on the direction of African studies during this decade.

The second meeting of the Congress of African Studies was held five years later, in 1967, in Dakar, Senegal and the theme was “Scientific Research in the Service of Africa.” President Leopold S. Senghor’s proclamation at the opening session—that scientific research is the essential prerequisite for progress in Africa—reflected the groundswell of postindependence frustration in Africa. The fruits of technological advance enjoyed by the West had been denied to African societies during the colonial period. This situation had to be rectified and it was the responsibility of scientists in every field to promote the transfer of technological “modernity” to the African continent.

The Third International Congress of African Studies met in 1973 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and the theme marked a definite shift in viewpoint concerning the proper approach to understanding the problems of African societies. The theme was “The Development of Africa” and many of the papers presented, and the discussions among participants, reflected the growing disillusionment with the concept of development as it has been applied in Africa. Moreover, there was an explicit rejection of the conditions under which African scholars worked, where research funds and training were concentrated in the hands of non-Africans.

At a more profound level, there was recognition of the consequences of the near-monopoly of any sphere of knowledge by Western academics. Concerning theoretical development, it was noted that there is a tendency for purportedly “universal” propositions, particularly in the social sciences, to be little more than the crystallization of theory and the establishment of categories which reflect Western experience and intellectual traditions, the effect of which is the defense and advancement of the interests of Western capitalism. The prime example may be seen in Western theories of economic development, the very theme under
consideration at the Addis Ababa Congress. Scholars argued that the
"message" of these Western-based theories is the inevitability of the
capitalist mode of development and the promise to the underdeveloped
world of achieving development by similar methods. It was noted that it
had taken decades for the unscientific and objectively self-
-serving nature of these theories to be exposed and for the theories
themselves to be challenged by the experience and interests of
underdeveloped societies.
Nevertheless, it was observed, such
theories of "development" continue
to exercise crucial influence on
policies in underdeveloped countries
and may be seen as one
contributing factor in "the
development of
underdevelopment." "The Dependency of Africa and its
Remedies, the theme for the fourth
Congress which was held in
December 1978 in Zaire, provided a
focus for scholars to examine
Africa's economic and social
problems in relation to the
international order. In his opening
address Monseigneur Tshibangu
Tshishiku observed the need for
independence at all levels, political,
sociocultural, economic, and
industrial, and asserted that, "Now
it is a question of achieving total
liberation." He noted the degree of
discouragement throughout Africa
because of the existing dependence
and urged the Congress participants
to consider the facts of the situation
objectively and to be self-critical
before condemning external factors.
Scholars, he said, must first identify
the areas of dependency and then
devise strategies for breaking this
relationship. Out of the opening
presentations and discussions a
secondary theme emerged — "Aid is
Recolonization."
Papers presented at the Congress
were discussed in different groups
and summarized by rapporteurs.
From these and the debates in the
plenary sessions, a number of
resolutions emerged. Professor Ali
Mazrui, who represented both
Kenya and the U.S. African Studies
Association, presented a summation
of the discussions and debates at
the final meeting of the ICAS.
For analytical purposes, the
phenomenon of dependency was
subcategorized into its economic,
cultural, military, and political
aspects. It was noted, however, that
these different aspects of
dependency are closely
interconnected. Cultural
dependency, for example, is
especially multifaceted since it
covers different areas of values,
rules, and perspectives, and the
fundamental importance of the
economic, military, and political
dimensions of dependency must not
be underestimated.
A review of the resolutions which
were accepted at the final meeting
will give some insight into the
perspective which today dominates
the thinking of Africanists
concerning the problems of the
continent.
Problems of Economic and Technological Dependency

1. That the pursuit of a New International Economic Order be supported as a transitional reformist strategy pending the genuine transformation of the world system in the future.

2. That indigenous techniques and modes of production be examined with a view to making them more effective in modern conditions.

3. That capital-intensive imported technology aggravates dependency structures in Africa, and greater effort should be made to select those technologies that promote the rational use of Africa's human and material sources.

4. That multinational Corporations in Africa be made subject to greater scrutiny and control by Africans themselves.

5. That African countries should pursue policies which promote greater economic cooperation and unity among themselves both as a strategy of maximizing economic progress for their peoples and a strategy of protection against foreign exploitation and manipulation.

6. That cooperation in techniques of food production, and consultation on locally produced proteins, and collaboration in controlling plant disease and environmental decay, be given special priority.

7. That African countries also be sensitized to the implications of the information gap between the North and the South in the world, and seek ways of controlling as well as utilizing the technology of communication without aggravating alien penetration of Africa.

8. That African countries should explore proper and symmetrical structures of interdependence between the North and the South in medical research, and establish within Africa a major institution of research into the most prevalent tropical diseases and ways of preventing them.

Dependency in Philosophy and Ideology

1. That Africans should be forewarned about a new ideological scramble for the continent.

2. That Africa should at the same time be receptive to stimulus from a variety of civilizations, provided foreign perspectives are critically tested against the realities of African experience.

3. That Africa should explore more fully its own philosophical heritage across different societies, and subject the heritage to modern analysis, evaluation, and critique.

4. That the two basic strategies for transcending philosophical and ideological dependency should be a concerted effort to systematize traditional African world views, on the one hand, and to Africanize imported ideologies and systems of thought, on the other hand. As one participant put it, "The beginnings of Africanization of Marxism, for example, may lie in an African's misinterpretation of Marx. Precisely by getting Marx wrong, an African could make the German
revolutionary more relevant to the African condition. This would especially arise if the African’s error was itself influenced by his own material and sociological predicament.”

Dependency in Law
1. That the allocation of rights and duties on the basis of individualism is an alien principle in Africa that should be scrutinized more systematically.

2. That the duality of African law—between indigenous customary law and imported criminal and civil law—manifests a dichotomy of values which need to be reconciled.

3. That the plural differentiation of laws and sanctions between and among ethnic groups in a single country poses jurisprudential problems of equal protection before the law and ought to be examined for possible solutions.

Dependency in Religion
1. That the Congress reminds itself of the dictum of its Founding Father, the late Kwame Nkrumah, that the tripartite heritage of Africa consisted of the indigenous, the Islamic, and the Euro-Christian versions of religious experience.

2. That Africa’s embarrassment about its own traditional religions is a manifestation of a deep-seated spiritual dependency.

3. That both Islam and Christianity should show a greater readiness to adapt themselves to the deeper differentiation of Africa’s cultural experience and historical destiny.

Dependency in the Arts and Literature
1. That the essence of African aesthetics be rediscovered and reindicated as part of the quest for authenticity.

2. That African music and sculpture be rescued from serving the purposes of tourism and foreign museums and be given a new lease of vigor and life.

3. That oral literature be given not merely lip service but concrete support and vindication in education and society.

4. That written literature in African languages be given a new level of dignity from poem to poem, fable to fable, drama to drama.

5. That written literature in European languages be primarily addressed to African readers and Africans themselves rather than oriented toward the applause of metropolitan connoisseurs and enthusiasts in the West.

Dependency in Education
1. That before Europe colonized Africa, education in African societies was primarily a process of socializing each new generation to its own authentic heritage and social systems.

2. That colonially derived educational institutions in Africa currently serve as transmission belts for alien influence and borrowed ideas.

3. That steps be taken to make African schools and universities more responsive to African cultures and more relevant to African needs without abandoning the principle of universalism in science, scholarship, and art.

4. That in pursuit of that universalism, African schools should look beyond Europe and explore also the lessons of other civilizations in different parts of the world.

5. That curriculum development in Africa should address itself to the task of decolonizing the content of education and reducing intellectual imitation.

6. That transcending educational dependency should not be an end in itself but should be a stage toward creating new, authentic, and truly innovative intellectual trends in postcolonial Africa.

The Problems of Political Dependency
1. That the ultimate political influence of Africa in the world system will only be realized when African states succeed in coordinating their political and diplomatic priorities.

2. That such coordination may require steps toward greater African political and economic integration, first subregionally and later continentally.

3. That the liberation of Southern Africa is a precondition of the liberation of the African continent as a whole.

4. That the Organization of African Unity needs teeth and claws to enable it to take a more effective part in the fight against dependency and exploitation.

5. That the final consolidation of African independence will only come when all African institutions are not only liberated from outside forces but are also sensitized to the needs, aspirations, capabilities, rights and human dignity of the African masses, both men and women, in all their diversity, in all their wholeness.

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Delegates at the Congress considered the question of the responsibility of African intellectuals to influence the direction of political events in Africa and challenged them to use radio, television, and publications to denounce existing inequalities in the world. As one speaker put it, “The university must become the bastion of virtue, courage, honesty, justice, solidarity and the creator of conditions for true national and continental unity.”

The International Congress of African Studies was, in 1976, recognized by the Organization of African Unity. The OAU has provided some financial help to ICAS but, more important, the OAU is regarded by the members of the Congress as an opportunity for them to act as a pressure group.

The meeting of the OAU in July in Monrovia, Liberia, was cited as an opportunity for the Congress to attempt to influence the policy of this pan-African organization

The Setting for the Congress

It may appear ironic in some respects that the 4th International Congress of African Studies should have been held in Kinshasa. But it might also be regarded as especially appropriate that the thorny topic of dependency should be the subject
of deliberation in Zaire. Zaire is one of the largest and potentially most prosperous countries in the African continent. Yet it has the world’s highest external debt per inhabitant. It was in this country that foreign military intervention had been solicited only a few months earlier over the Kolwezi Affair, and where foreign troops are still used to maintain a troubled peace. It is in Zaire that OTRAG, a West German company, has unlimited rights over 100,000 square kilometers of the Shaba Province for testing rockets. It is known that in Zaire, through the collusion of the West Germans, many white South Africans are moving into agriculture and business, and during my stay, I frequently heard Afrikaans spoken in the hotels and restaurants.

At the very time the International Congress of African Studies was meeting, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) team was in the country attempting to straighten out the financial affairs and implementing a strategy which involved the imposition of rigid conditions in order to justify another massive aid and credit scheme. One of these rigid conditions was the acceptance of foreign experts to take over the management of certain financial institutions.

Zaire, whose ruler, Mobuto Sese Seku, is said to be one of the richest men in the world, is where in December a bag of cassava to feed a family of five for one month cost 30 zaires, and where today, the same bag sells for 130 zaires, the entire monthly salary of the average worker. During the week of the Congress, cars waiting for petrol were queueing for three hours in Kinshasa and petrol was hardly available outside the city. The country has been racked by cholera epidemics over the past few months, and malnutrition is a widespread and increasingly serious problem in the rural areas. Food riots have broken out in many towns and villages and more recently, military force was used against university students when they demonstrated about their lack of food. Inflation in the major cities is between 60 and 80 percent and unemployment in the shanties surrounding Kinshasa is running at 48 percent.

Foreigners are flocking back to the country to take up where they left off when they were forced to leave during the 1973-74 Zaireanization program. Estimates of their number range between 5 and 15 thousand, mostly Belgians but also Greeks and Lebanese, who are being offered 100 percent of their former holdings with the proviso that they must sell 40 percent back to Zairois within 5 years. While some hope that their return will halt the decline in production, the attraction of Zaire for many foreigners is that it is a suitable place for entrepreneurial wizardry rather than solid, long-term investment. “Quick-kill” experts
flourish in an economy where the "kickback" mentality is deep-rooted and mismanagement and corruption are rife.

Many Western countries have a stake in keeping Zaire afloat. For one thing, there is the hope of recovering some of the huge debts on which Zaire has defaulted and, more important, there are mineral resources which are yet to be fully exploited. Politically, propping up Mobutu’s government is justified in terms of his anticommunist stand.

Mobutu is regarded as the only viable alternative to expanded communist influence and a glance at a map of the African continent indicates just how strategic Zaire is in terms of the southern African situation.

Politics and the International Congress of African Studies (ICAS)

Events such as the ICAS meeting in Zaire are, for host country and the local participants, important and prestigious events. Although Mobutu personally contributed funds for the expenses of the Congress, he was conspicuously absent from the country during the week and his representative gave his speeches at the opening and closing sessions. Government observers attended every session and more than one member of the organizing committee had been arrested in a university strike which had preceded the Congress. Thus one had to admire the courage of the Zairois speakers who used the sessions as a platform from which to make criticisms of their government.

The importance of maintaining such freedoms and protecting ICAS from attempts at national government or other political influence became an issue in discussions concerning the next meeting of the Congress. Nigeria and Sudan were the two possible host country candidates. But when Nigeria was recommended, with Professor J.F. Ade Ajayi to serve as President, the Nigerian delegation asked permission to return home to consult with other Nigerian universities before naming the Secretary General. It would be difficult, they argued, to get cooperation in the organization of the next meeting without wider Nigerian university involvement in the choice of leadership. The Nigerian delegation included four men and one woman, all of the same ethnic group and they also recognized the political dangers of making such an appointment without consultation.

Despite a recommendation from the ICAS Board that Nigeria’s request be approved, the Congress President, Monseigneur Tshibangu Tshishiku, firmly rejected it, indicating that such a procedure contradicted the constitution of the organization. As an alternative, he suggested that Nigeria elect a Secretary General pro tem. This would both fulfill constitutional regulations and also permit the Nigerians to consult, when they returned home, with other officials.

Unemployment in Kinshasa is running at an estimated 48 percent.
universities before appointing the permanent candidate. None of the members of the Nigerian delegation was willing to accept this suggestion and none was willing to serve as a pro tem candidate. There were loud protests from the floor over what appeared to be a flagrant abuse of presidential power. One delegate moved that Nigeria’s candidacy be scrapped altogether and that Sudan be chosen as the site for the next Congress. The delegation from Sudan rejected this idea and grouped themselves with the Nigerians to discuss how the impasse could be resolved. The meeting dissolved as national delegations went into separate caucuses.

After adjournment of the session, Congress President Monseigneur Tshishiku explained to me that he took this seemingly arbitrary decision because of the ubiquitous threat of political influence on such an organization. He pointed out that if the Nigerian delegation was allowed to deviate even to the slightest degree from the constitution, it could become subject to directives from its own government. The next morning the Nigerians returned to announce that Dr. M.A. Johnson, the only woman in their delegation, had agreed to serve as Secretary General pro tem.

The theme for this next Congress, which will probably be held in Lagos, is to be “Education in Africa.”

One may better appreciate the Monseigneur’s scruples in the light of his position as a leader of the Catholic Church in Zaire. Among African countries, Zaire is exceptional in that Christians are said to represent 64 percent of the population, a formidable block of opposition to the present regime should it be mobilized. Mobutu Sese Seku is said to fear the Monseigneur, who has been openly critical of the government. Perhaps one small indication that Mobutu recognizes the potential political threat of Catholic-Protestant cooperation is his retraction of an order that Christmas should not be celebrated in Zaire.

Until fairly recently, most non-African scholars of African studies have been able to remain relatively aloof from the political issues and direct political influence on research and writings has been unthinkable. Within the U.S. African Studies Association (ASA), however, there have been hot debates over the question of the political responsibility of scholars, particularly in relation to the southern African question. The Association of Concerned African Scholars (ACAS) was officially organized in 1977 at the Houston meeting of the ASA and its members have undertaken the specific task of using their research and publications to influence American foreign policy toward Africa. In its statement of principles, it was noted that for practical and political reasons, ACAS members would, for the foreseeable future, place strongest emphasis upon southern Africa and upon supporting liberation movements there.

We are encouraged by the overall direction of events in southern Africa, but we remain skeptical of U.S. government intentions in the area. We remember the crusading rhetoric with which the U.S. began its intervention in Indo-China and the liberal image of the Kennedy administration during the time that intervention was expanded. We both recall and continue to be conscious of U.S. overt and covert intervention in Angola, of U.S. assistance to support Morocco’s aid to Zaire, and of the legacy of U.S. and NATO support for Portugal in its former colonies. We note the de facto support provided for the system of white supremacy in South Africa by United States economic, military and nuclear ties (ACAS Newsletter, No. 1, March 1978).

The political significance of research is well known (only a few would continue to utter protestations which appeal to the notion of “pure scholarship”). For example, a recent issue of Africa Confidential (Vol. 20, No. 12) reports on several new sources for funding in the United States for research on Africa’s “flash points.” Such research will be designed to keep ahead of crises and offer advance advice to government policy-makers. It notes that “The Pentagon has not stayed on the sidelines in this American academic offensive…. This project involves meetings and seminars of
specialists for the writing of study papers." More worrying, however, the report continues by observing that "There is also a new feeling among Foundations that Africa is too important for American interest to be left to Africanists." It describes a major study which has been commissioned to "study the Western Sahara conflict with the aim of proposing guidelines to safeguard American interests in the region." Recruitment for this research is being done outside the body of specialists in African studies.

The very difficult question is to what extent "American interest" will be understood to conflict or converge with the interests of African societies in their struggle to break out of their economic, political, and social dependency and to achieve total liberation in terms of the resolutions passed at the ICAS meeting in Zaire. These resolutions deserve serious consideration by policy-makers throughout the world. Academics who concentrate their research on Africa will be disturbed by the implications of the changing situation as regards funding within the United States. (People still remember "Operation Camelot.") They may even find themselves called upon to exhibit something of the courage of the Zairois intellectuals who risked their jobs (and in some cases, their physical safety) by their frank contributions to discussions during the meetings in Kinshasa in December 1978. (August 1979)