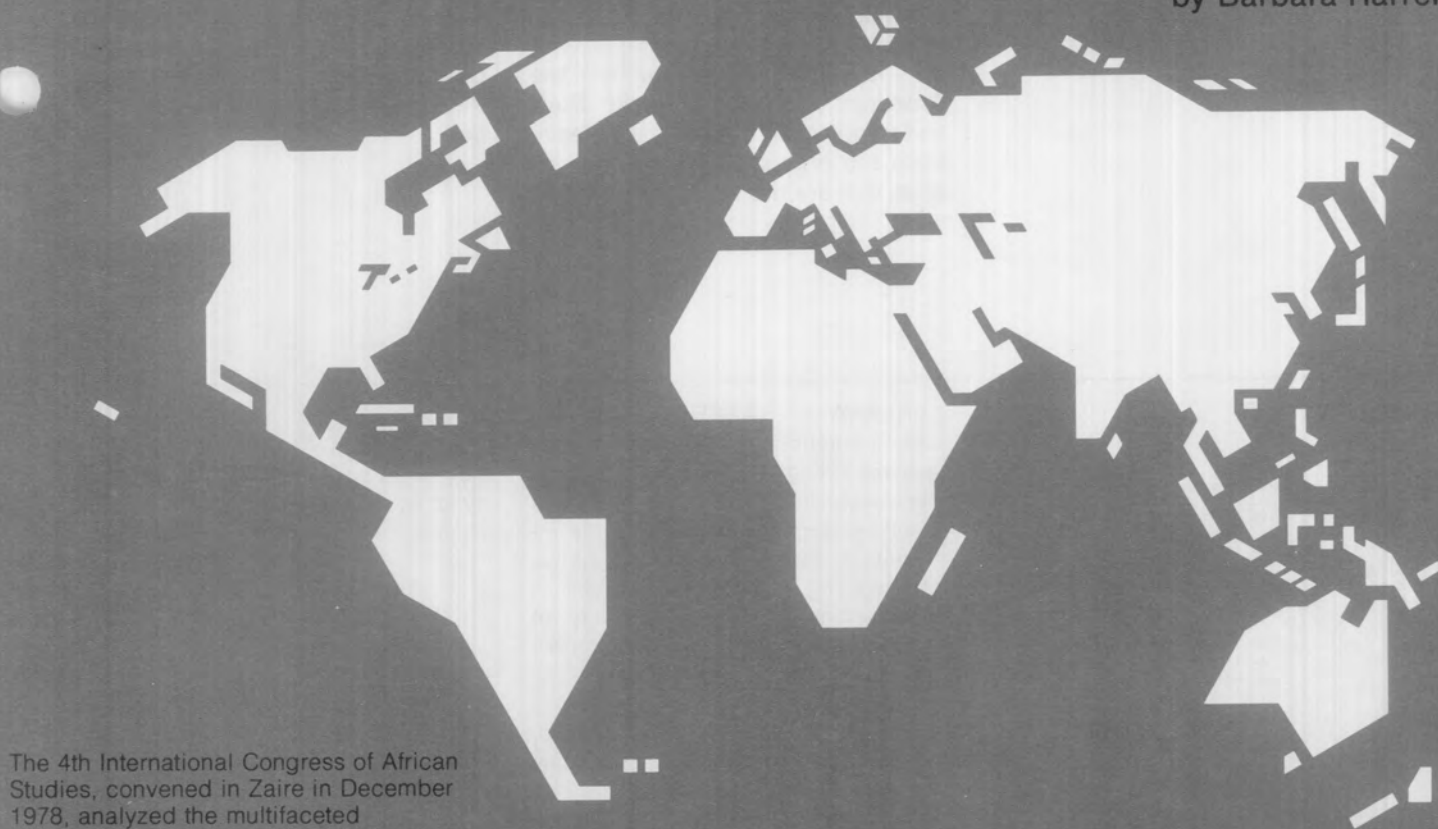


"Africa's Dependency and the Remedies"
The 4th International Congress of
African Studies

by Barbara Harrell-Bond



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.

[BHB-2-'79]

ISSN 0161-0724

American Universities Field Staff

The American Universities Field Staff, Inc., founded in 1951, is a non-profit, membership corporation of American educational institutions. It employs a full-time staff of foreign area specialists who write from abroad and make periodic visits to member institutions. AUFS serves the public through its seminar programs, films, and wide-ranging publications on significant developments in foreign societies.

INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS

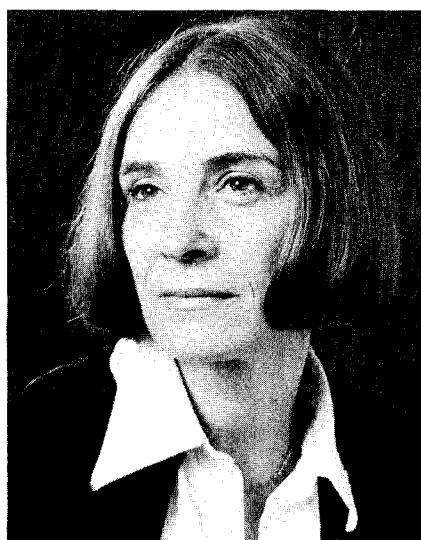
University of Alabama
Brown University
Dartmouth College
Indiana University
University of Connecticut
University of Kansas
Michigan State University
Ramapo College of New Jersey
University of Pittsburgh
University of Wisconsin

Reports

AUFS Reports are a continuing series on international affairs and major global issues of our time. Reports have for almost three decades reached a group of readers—both academic and non-academic—who find them a useful source of firsthand observation of political, economic, and social trends in foreign countries. Reports in the series are prepared by writers who are full-time Associates of the American Universities Field Staff and occasionally by persons on leave from the organizations and universities that are the Field Staff's sponsors.

Associates of the Field Staff are chosen for their ability to cut across the boundaries of the academic disciplines in order to study societies in their totality, and for their skill in collecting, reporting, and evaluating data. They combine long residence abroad with scholarly studies relating to their geographic areas of interest. Each Field Staff Associate returns to the United States periodically to lecture on the campuses of the consortium's member institutions.

THE AUTHOR



BARBARA E. HARRELL-BOND is a social anthropologist who has conducted research in England and in West Africa. Her special interests are family, urban problems, law, and the history of the imposition of alien law in colonial Africa. She received a B. Litt. and D. Phil. in anthropology from the University of Oxford. Her publications include *Modern Marriage in Sierra Leone: A Study of the Professional Group and Community Leadership and the Transformation of Freetown (1801-1976)*, the latter being co-researched and written with two historians, Dr. Allan Howard and Dr. David Skinner. She has also published widely in academic journals, lectured in a number of universities including the University of Illinois (Urbana), the University of Helsinki, and the University of Warsaw, and was a Visiting Scholar at

the Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden. Appointed a Senior Research Fellow at the School of Law, University of Warwick, in 1976, Dr. Harrell-Bond joined the Field Staff in 1978 to report on West Africa.

© 1979, American Universities Field Staff, Hanover, NH

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 Zaïre, 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 Zaïre, 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.

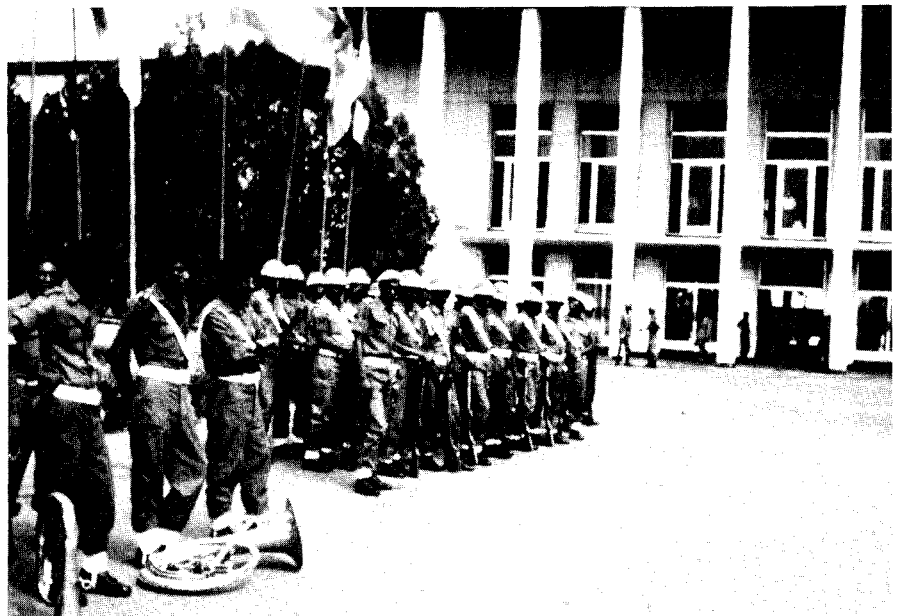
The Third International Congress of African Studies met in 1973 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and the theme marked a definite shift in viewpoint concerning the proper approach to understanding the problems of African societies. The theme was "The Development of Africa" and many of the papers presented, and 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

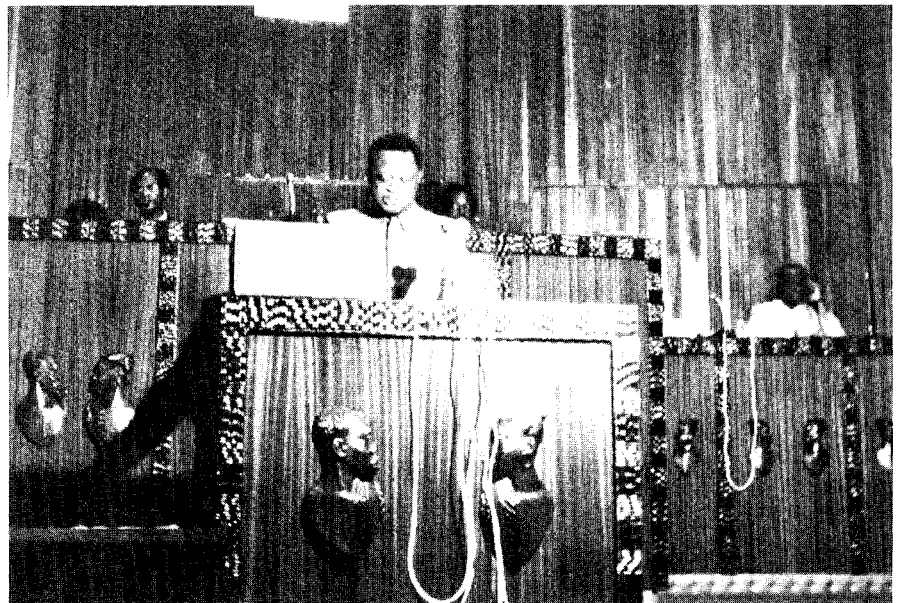
consideration at the Addis Ababa Congress. Scholars argued that the "message" of these Western-based theories is the inevitability of the capitalist mode of development and the promise to the underdeveloped world of achieving development by similar methods. It was noted that it had taken decades for 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 Zaïre, 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



Outside the House of Parliament at the opening of the International Congress of African Studies.



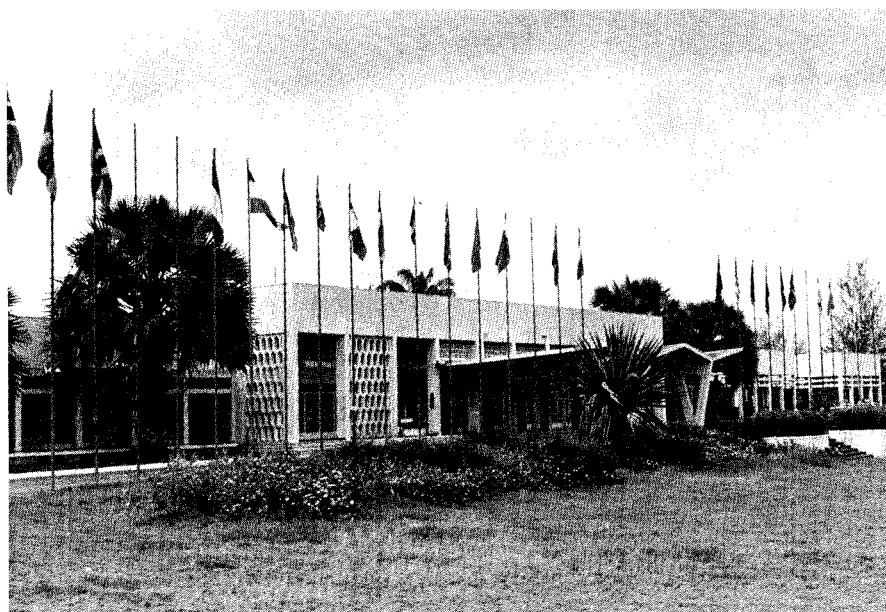
The Congress President, Monseigneur Tshibangu Tshishika, giving the closing address of the Congress.

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.



The main entrance to the OAU village where some delegates at the conference were housed.

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.

The Problem of Cultural Dependency

Because "culture" is a particularly comprehensive and wide-ranging concept, resolutions regarding dependency in cultural terms were subdivided.

Linguistic Dependency

1. That African countries should more systematically inaugurate feasibility studies to reduce the role of foreign languages in national life.

2. That African countries should seek to strengthen the capabilities of indigenous African languages in a modern context.

3. That African governments should be more conscious of the need for a language policy within each country with full awareness of the dialectic between dependency and autonomy.

4. That African countries should explore the feasibility of promoting indigenous languages for regional, transnational, and continental uses—with special reference to the potentialities of Swahili and Hausa as major media of transnational communication.

5. That the claims of Arabic as the most widely spoken single language in the African continent (having more speakers within the continent than any other) should be given serious consideration as a third medium in such organizations as the International Congress of African Studies.

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 revindicated 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.

* * * * *

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 Zaïre. Zaïre 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 Zaïre 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 Zaïre, 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.

Zaïre, whose ruler, Mobutu 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



Inflation in the major cities is between 60 and 80 percent and the monthly salary of the average worker is not even enough to buy a bag of cassava to feed a family of five for one month.



Queues for petrol were three hours long and outside Kinshasa it was almost impossible to buy.

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 Zaïreanization 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 Zaïrois within 5 years. While some hope that their return will halt the decline in production, the attraction of Zaïre 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 Zaïre afloat. For one thing, there is the hope of recovering some of the huge debts on which Zaïre 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.

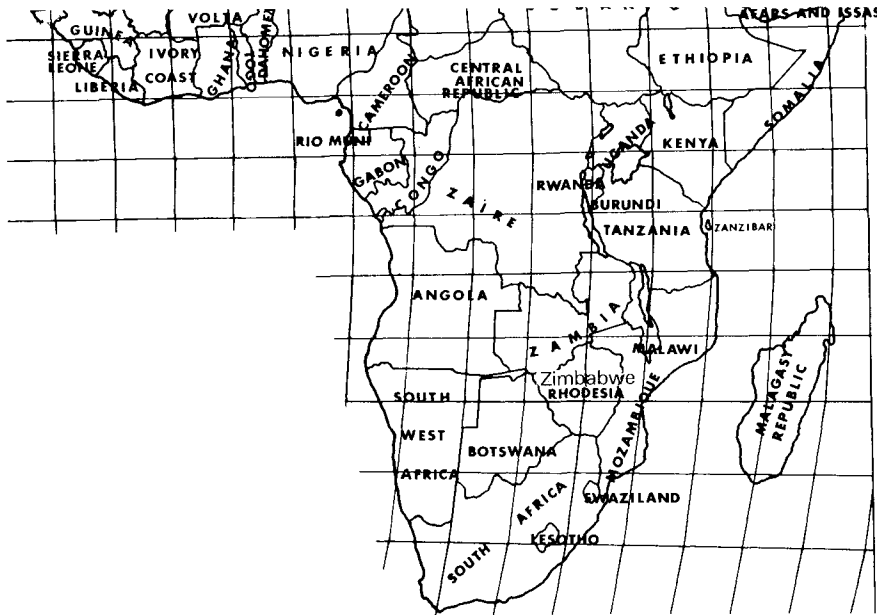
Mobutu is regarded as the only viable alternative to expanded communist influence and a glance at a map of the African continent indicates just how strategic Zaïre is in terms of the southern African situation.

Politics and the International Congress of African Studies (ICAS)
Events such as the ICAS meeting in Zaïre 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 Zaïrois 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



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 Zaïre. Among African countries, Zaïre 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

Bystanders observing the arrival of government dignitaries who attended the opening ceremonies of the ICAS meeting.

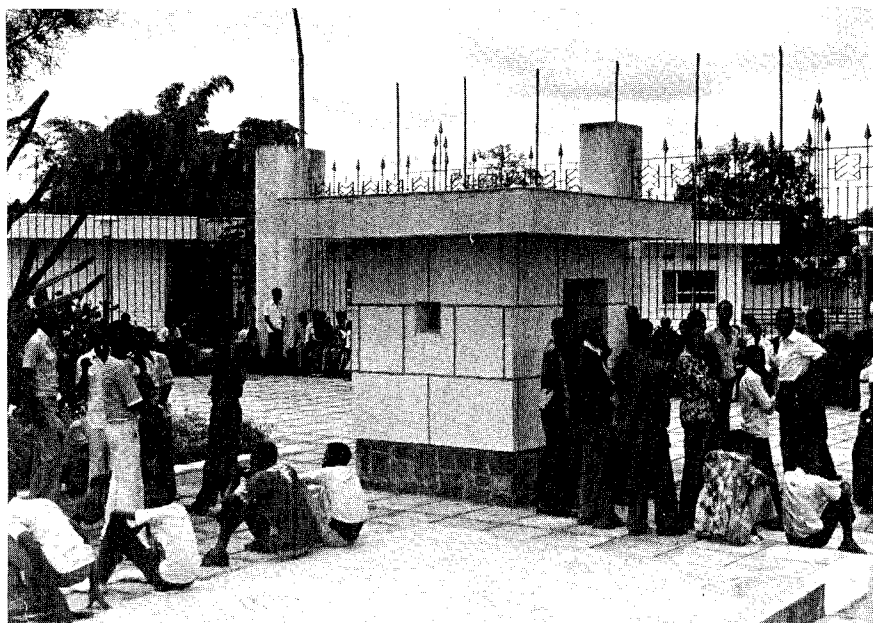
threat of Catholic-Protestant cooperation is his retraction of an order that Christmas should not be celebrated in Zaïre.

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 Zaïre, 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





"The Dependency of Africa"—what are the remedies?

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)