

# Dark Continent in a Different Light

*Africa: A Political Travelogue*, by Thomas Molnar (Fleet. 304 pp. \$6.95), rejects as "mass media clichés, stereotypes and myths" current attitudes concerning the Dark Continent's new nations. Hal Lehrman, author and foreign correspondent, reports frequently from Africa.

By HAL LEHRMAN

LIKE news pictures, the quick little anecdote sometimes tells more than a thousand earnest words. Its small point can let the air out of the biggest balloons. Take Thomas Molnar's note on Algerian independence's promise and fulfillment: On the Great Day the shoeshine boys were officially summoned to toss their boxes—symbol of colonial ignominy—onto a Liberation bonfire; next morning they had no boxes, and no work. Or his observation that 200 dignitaries of the Finance Ministry in one new black African republic were jailed for graft, that the president of another young state decreed that all motorists must get out and salute him whenever he drove by, and that the leader of a third had taken the official title of "Savior." Kenya's independence was proclaimed with firecrackers imported from segregationist South Africa with whom the total trade of free Africa (and of Egypt, the Soviet bloc, and Red China) has been rising despite their thunderous calls for a world boycott against the unspeakable white supremacists.

The author of *Africa: A Political Travelogue* is a quiet professor of French employed in Brooklyn whose previous books (on education, philosophy, intellectuals, American foreign policy) did not exactly catch fire; his style of writing is a bit slow, with a tendency to ramble. Just the same, we have a possible blockbuster here or, if not that, certainly a work of intrepid pioneering across the lethal African minefields.

Armed with a year-long foundation grant, Molnar mused and meandered his way counterclockwise around the continental perimeter from Tunisia westward, south and east to the Cape, then north again to Egypt. His comments on the Mediterranean segments of this journey are perfunctory. In fact, the gap between bombastic propaganda and dismal performance in the Unit-

ed Arab Republic seemed so absurd to him that he devotes almost all his pages about that country to a touristic report on the antique splendors of the Pyramids and Sphinx, Luxor and Karnak, mischievously underlining the lack of connection between "present-day Egyptians" and the Nile's "staggering past." The sub-Sahara being his chief concern, it was there—by scrutinizing all factions, interviewing their spokesmen, testing their assertions on the spot—that he checked out what he now rejects as the "mass media clichés, stereotypes and myths" concerning past, present, and future in Africa.

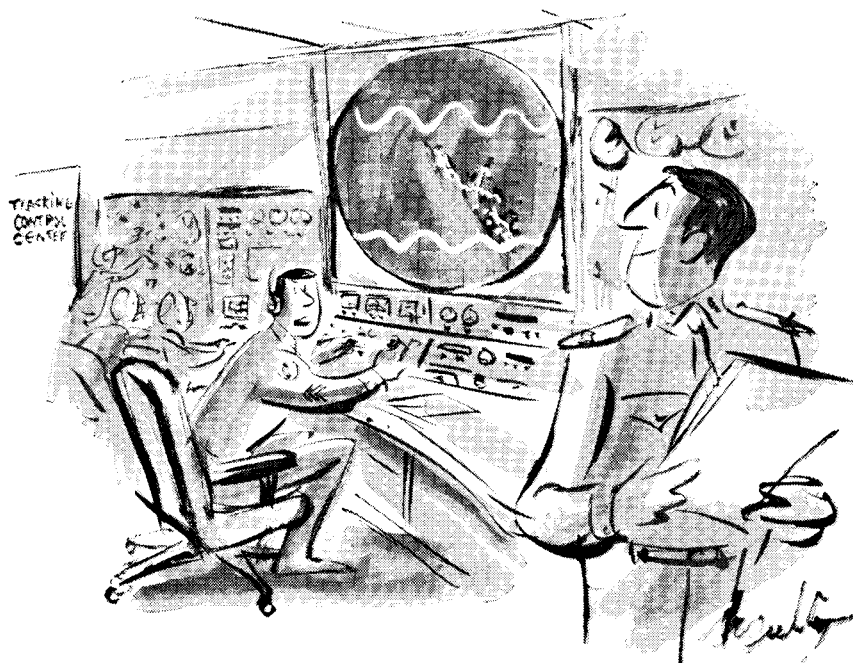
This checking-out process is likely to outrage nearly everybody, even though Molnar keeps his voice down and his arguments polite as he methodically slays a menagerie of liberal dragons.

After all, it's bad enough to be told that African history before the white man came was not an idyl but rather a slough of barbarism, that colonialism took little away from Africa as compared with the vast boons it delivered, that the greatest crime committed by imperialism was the "moral cowardice" of fleeing precipitously from Africa instead of slowly retreating until the continent could manage by itself, and that the jungle is already springing out of the pavement of every European-built

black city whence the whites have departed.

But what is a reader (whose enthusiasm for African independence rests confidently on his own tradition and the unanimous assurances of the respectable American press) to think when Molnar suggests that tribal anarchy, public corruption, private greed, envy, technological incompetence, and plain sloth are endemic in the African states? That expectations of some sort of African democracy based on Western rules are a witless dream? That the black African is just as much a racist as the white—or more—when it comes to butchering Arabs, Indians, mixed breeds, and other assorted colored folk? That Africa's heroic revolutionaries, whom Western newspapers and magazines have idealized, are in the main actually full-time demagogues—half-baked intellectuals allergic to constructive thinking, rational economics, soap, water, brooms, and buckets? That the same publications have whooped up a flea-bite rebellion in a corner of Angola but ignored the solid politico-economic progress in the bulk of that Portuguese territory, a garden-spot of multiracial cooperation? Or that—horror of horrors—stern apartheid and the establishment of physically separate but economically interdependent all-black and all-white regions may make more sense for all races in South Africa than the do-good formulae proposed from every pulpit and editorial office abroad for black dominion (and white submergence)?

Molnar wistfully gropes toward the possibility that racial variety, the spirit of the white pioneer, and European enterprise may survive in Africa. But he



"I'm in contact with a galaxy that wants to defect and come over to our side."

has little real hope. The "many friends" we retain in Africa—among the better native leadership—are mortally threatened by a second generation of aspirants who, with Socialist slogans and no program except "Africanization" of white assets and jobs, scheme for power and dictatorships. Red China and the Soviets are busy buying up these aspirants. Molnar sees U.N. intervention in the Congo as a farce (the Congolese despised its administrators, preferred their own Belgian advisers) and as a malevolence (Molnar gives some appalling detail on loot and rapine in Katanga by United Nations troops).

Let me stress that these impertinent judgments do not froth out of a wild extremist; the author is a scholar and analyst of sobriety. He knows how noxious his conclusions will smell to many. He persists nevertheless, compelled by

evidence—too complex to be summarized here—which to him is irrefutable. Africa, he contends, cannot be discovered by reliance on the legends churned from the popular presses: you have to get up close, with eyes, ears, and mind wide open. He realizes that his views will be as secondhand for armchair observers as the views he castigates. But honest dissent in any unanimous din is always an act of courage, and sometimes it is heard above the uproar.



**Burrowing to Freedom:** Pierre Galante, assistant managing editor of *Paris-Match*, gives in *The Berlin Wall* (Doubleday, \$4.95) a lucid and suspenseful report in which world figures like Kennedy, Khrushchev, Adenauer, Brandt, and General Clay appear on stage but play only peripheral roles. The principal actors are the "little people" whose bravery and cowardice, self-sacrifice and treachery translate a political tragedy into human terms.

The first whispers that the East German rulers might cut the city in two circulated among clerks, chauffeurs, bakers, tradesmen, and students—average citizens with most to lose—who had their ears to the ground listening for the slightest tremor that would warn them of danger. During the summer months of 1961 thousands of men and women "voted with their feet" by leaving East Germany for the West. At a June press conference Walter Ulbricht, dictator of East Germany—"Old Pointy Beard" to most Berliners—denied any intention of dividing the city. At midnight two months later the Wall was an ugly fact.

Mr. Galante's story, written with the assistance of Jack Miller, largely concerns the dramatic efforts of desperate people in the East to escape and of relatives and friends in the West to rescue them. The hero is Harry Seidel, a young bicycle racer and newspaper deliveryman, who, having seen his wife and infant son to safety in the West, helped many other East Germans to get away, crossing and recrossing the Wall both above and below ground. At first the refugees used forged passports or else escaped through sewers. Then "Willy Brandt's moles" dug tunnels under the Wall, until their burrowings were discovered.

Despite warnings from his wife and friends, Seidel continued his rescue mission until his luck ran out and he was captured. A show trial followed, at which he was sentenced to penal servitude for life.

Nevertheless, as one closes this book he feels that Seidel, symbolizing as he does the Berliners' will to freedom, will somehow win out in the end.

—HENRY C. WOLFE.

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## Editorial

*Continued from page 16*

absolutism in government. What gives this issue its razor edge in the case of Cam Ne is that its people are the people we say we have gone into South Vietnam to protect. We are dealing here with the people we say have called upon us to defend them against outside attack.

According to CBS, men wearing the uniform of the United States had orders to destroy entire communities if so much as a single round of sniper fire emanated therefrom. The existence of this order has not been denied. So long as that order stands, so long as the retaliation against Cam Ne is not specifically repudiated, the United States smashes at the essential nature of its own history, which has to do with proportion, with values, with distinctions. It puts the American people in a position of holding to a double standard, carrying out a policy of retaliation and revenge against civilians on the one hand while on the other calling upon nations to maintain humane policies despite all strain and provocation during war.

**T**HE editors invite the support of their readers for a project in Vietnam. This appeal transcends the issue of whether the United States should stay in Vietnam or should get out. It is possible to hold to either view and still feel that some act of responsibility and compassion by the American people themselves is required in the case of Cam Ne.

We propose to make possible the rebuilding of the homes of Cam Ne. No one can compensate the people for their grief and anguish. But we can at least make known our respect for them as human beings and our own sense of incompleteness and failure if we do not do that which it is clearly within our power to do. How will SR do this? We will do it by enlisting the help and facilities of existing relief agencies, such as the American Red Cross, to whatever extent that may be possible. We will initiate on-the-spot measures, as required. (We also urge support for the work of the International Rescue Committee, of 460 Park Avenue South, New York, New York, which has been doing excellent work in its Crisis Fund for Vietnamese Children.)

The editors recognize the extent and depth of the difficulties involved in carrying out this new project. But it will be even more difficult to remain quiescent or seemingly acquiescent in the present situation. Readers who would like to commit themselves to this program are invited to send their contributions to the Cam Ne Fund, Editor's Office, *Saturday Review*, 380 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y., 10017.

—N.C.

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