

Céléstin Monga. Linda L. Fleck and Céléstin Monga, trans. *The Anthropology of Anger: Civil Society and Democracy in Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996).

Céléstin Monga, a Cameroonian scholar living in the United States, is angry—and his recent work, *The Anthropology of Anger*, is born out of that anger. He argues that the plethora of studies on civil society and democracy in Africa miss the point with their careful analyses of the “determinants” of successful democratization, the role of civil society in the process, and the “political behavior of African people” (p. viii). Whether they be academics or journalists, they have failed to describe “the determination of people at the grassroots level to engage in the political arena, at any cost, in order to bring about some positive changes in the way they had been ruled for several centuries” (p. viii). Thus begins Monga’s ambitious study in which he argues that the systematic oppression of people leads to anger at the grassroots and therefore, in Africa, “civil disobedience tends to be the order of the day, and public policies are invalidated by collective indiscipline” (p. 11).

*The Anthropology of Anger* was originally published in 1994 in France, and the English version was released in 1996. Monga begins by presenting his argument in Chapter One in which he emphasizes the need for alternative ideas in order to better analyze politics in Africa today. He follows with a chapter added to the English addition on “How Africa Fits into Democratic Theory.” Chapters Three through Five discuss insubordination as it relates to culture, the arts, “new patterns of free expression” and finally, the sacred. Chapter Six turns to a discussion of civil society and the public sphere, and he concludes the work with a chapter in which he presents his “Theory of Disenchantment and Violence.”

Monga’s work displays his broad knowledge of the history of West Africa and the transition movements throughout the region. In addition, his depth of knowledge of both Francophone and Anglophone literature on anthropology and political science is remarkable. Monga runs through a list of well-known theories of African states and development, attacking them one by one. The urban rural dichotomy is a cliché (p. 29), he argues, and the ideological differences that exist in rural areas make it impossible to talk of the rural population as a political monolith (p. 28). He adds that indeed it was in the rural areas

where much of the widespread unrest that led to democracy's "second wave" began. Ethnic analyses of Africa fail because they do not acknowledge the complexities of identity throughout the continent. Ultimately he wonders why there is "a collective blindness of the political science community" with respect to Africa (p. 37). He continues:

How is it that Africa, which does not have a monopoly on complexity, remains so opaque to scholars, so very resistant to their methods of analysis that it makes the theoretical models that have issued from centuries of political thought appear ridiculous? Why do Africanists continue to confuse the subject and object of knowledge? (p. 37)

We must turn to the everyday lives of Africans in order to truly understand how they relate to the state and thus to democracy. In his conclusion he presents his theory of grassroots disenchantment and anger as a form of protest. Monga emphasizes that Africans may have an altogether different interpretation of democracy. This point of view often raises fears that the definition of democracy will become too broad and, therefore, meaningless. Yet, as Monga illustrates by using the low voter turnout rate in the United States as just one example, there is global disenchantment with democracy. In Africa people have different ways of expressing this disenchantment, and out of these may flow new interpretations of democracy. If we are faced with a global disenchantment with democracy, who is to say that African experiments will not be beneficial to us all?

Certainly Monga cannot avoid the game of attempting to define civil society and his proposed definition describes civil society as "the new spaces for communication and discussion over which the state has no control." (p. 4) Thus, it includes "...only those groups, organizations, and personalities that pursue freedom, justice and the rights of citizenship against authoritarian states." (p. 4) This definition aids Monga in his endeavor as it displays the active anger against the authoritarian regimes. However, by relying on such a particularly narrow definition in which civil society exists only in opposition to authoritarian states, he effectively excludes organizations that exist

outside of the state but are not clearly always acting *in opposition to* the state.

His argument rests on a cyclical idea of opposition and anger, as he writes, "the anthropology of anger derives from civil society, but civil society is defined by the anthropology of anger" (p. 12-13). Monga argues that Africa's social capital is dwindling in some regions because of a *civic deficit*, or lack of spiritual capital in civil society, which is the product of collective anger (p. 5). He notes, "given that life is one long fight against the state, inventiveness has gradually conspired to craftily defy everything that symbolizes public authority" (p. 148). While his argument is useful for analyzing democratic transitions, it is unclear how his approach will help us better understand the following stages of political transition. Similarly, if we are resigned to considering civil society as an antagonistic force, must we reconsider how we analyze the political participation of associations and other sorts of organizations in a liberalized state?

Unfortunately, Monga's discussion of culture and art as a medium of protest does not flow with the rest of the analysis and serves merely as a reminder to political scientists, who are less likely to analyze music and art, that these are important mediums of resistance. In addition, Monga is dismissive of scholars whose work has been heralded as instrumental in broadening the debate on African politics, economics and ethnicity (scholars such as Robert H. Bates and Donald L. Horowitz). This approach I found to be more distracting than useful. While it is clearly time to move forward from theories that do not adequately address today's complexities, each theory has made a significant contribution to how scholars debate the dynamics of politics in Africa.

Ultimately, *The Anthropology of Anger* will become an important tool for researchers of political transitions. As scholars have turned increasingly towards analyses of civil society and its role in democratic transitions, Monga successfully brings into focus the importance of grassroots anger and action in the democratization of African states. His shift away from institutions and elites, towards communities and their activities, is refreshing and welcome. In academe as well as in politics, sometimes a little anger is all we need to shake things up.

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