

Brazil and Black Africa Seek Closer Ties

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BRASILIA, Brazil—Brazil and the nations of black Africa, linked by centuries of colonialism and mutual mistrust of the major world powers, are involved in a subtle courtship that could eventually bring changes within the nonaligned Third World.

The resurgent political and economic contacts have their roots in the lasting link created by Portuguese traders when they set up colonies in the Southern Hemisphere 400 years ago and brought African slaves to Brazil.

Government officials and diplomats in Brasilia, including Africans, acknowledge a concerted effort by Brazil's conservative, military-backed government to improve its relations with even the most socialist-leaning of the black African states. And while commerce has increased significantly in recent years, sources say they believe that the short-term goal of improved relations is political.

African leaders visiting Brazil recently have stressed "the traditional ties" between the two areas. One African diplomat said African leaders like the multiracial attitude in Brazil, even though economic conditions find many dark-skinned persons here living in poverty.

"Brazil has no black ambassadors, and in the *favelas* (urban slums) I see black faces," an African diplomat said. "But on the other hand, I've gone everywhere in this country and have never experienced racial tension."

About 10% of Brazil's 125 million people are officially listed as black, but black organizations maintain that the number of blacks and people of mixed race is much higher—possibly 75%.

Brazilian officials say both Africa and Brazil show a desire to break away from the exclusive dependence on the United States and Western Europe, still the major trading partners of both regions.

"We have been surprised to some extent that we are more important to Africa than we had assumed," said a Brazilian Foreign Ministry official. "And Africa is more important to us. We weren't fully aware of the Africanism of Brazil."

Since a breakthrough government decision in 1975 to recognize the revolutionary socialist regime of Angola—like Brazil a former Portuguese colony—Brazil has been voicing support for the principles of nonalignment. It has also criticized repeatedly the apartheid policies of South Africa and says it is not promoting commercial ties with that country.

Close links between Brazil and black African states could in the long run change the complexion of the

Third World. Brazilian-African cooperation, the theorizing goes, could lessen the dependence of both areas on the major powers—East and West—and thus make them a new force among the nonaligned nations.

For example, Brazil is pursuing friendship with Angola and Mozambique, two nations supported now by the Soviet Union. Yet both countries share a Portuguese heritage with Brazil, and officials here express the belief that they will accept Brazilian political and commercial ties as a substitute for those with Moscow.

Both Brazilians and African diplomats here express uneasiness about economic dependence on the industrialized powers.

One African official here said, "Brazil, like Africa, knew colonization and must fight against underdevelopment." That fight, he added, can be waged as allies because "Brazil and Africa want to preserve their cultures."

Trade between Brazil and the black African states has increased 14-fold in the last 10 years—and 20% in 1979 alone—to an estimated \$750 million. But the commerce, in which exports exceeded imports by more than two to one last year, still only accounted for 3% of Brazil's foreign trade.

Brazil, which has a foreign debt of more than \$50 billion, is searching for major export opportunities to counteract a trade deficit, in large part caused by its dependence on Arab oil.

Brazilian officials like to point out that their country has a natural affinity for trade with Africa. Similar problems and challenges make it easy for Brazilians and Africans to talk about expanding trade, they say.

"We offer them a model of recognizable development," a Brazilian Foreign Ministry official said. "Brazil is the sort of thing African countries could become. All the rest of the developed world is an unreachable goal for them."

African diplomats say their governments like the idea of developing trade with Brazil. They are enthusiastic about opportunities for buying products that the South American nation designs for its tropical climate.

In 1978, for example, Nigeria and Angola bought Brazilian trucks and buses, specially designed with tough suspensions to handle rough, muddy roads.

"We don't need computers and rockets right now," an African diplomat said. "We need intermediate technology, and many times Brazilian products are more adaptable."

The nations of Gabon, Nigeria and the Congo, in turn, have been selling some crude oil to Brazil. But they sell most of their crude to the United States and Western Europe, and none

has been seriously talking about substantially increasing sales to Brazil.

One recent visitor to Brazil was Sékou Touré, the autocratic president of the former French colony of Guinea and one of Africa's last surviving founding fathers.

He acknowledged Brazil's late acceptance of Africa as an economic and political ally.

"Both Brazil and Africa know the effects of colonialization," he said. "If we had been asked to visit (Brazil) in 1971, we would have come, but we weren't. We were invited in 1980. Better late than never."