

Five Models for Development in Kenya

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Abstract

The legacy of colonization lives on in Kenya, where oppression runs rampant by local elites as well as global capitalist institutions. Five key areas where Kenya's social structure maintains colonialist social relations are identified, and solutions are proposed for the detailed problems.

Keywords: *colonialism, Africa, Marxism, liberation, policy*

1 Introduction

The postcolonial situation of Kenya is marked with several crises. Despite gaining independence over a half-century ago, the country remains in many ways beholden to the colonial legacy. Tribalism is a major point of contention in Kenyan politics, with members of its varying ethnic groups fighting for supremacy (Orvis, 2001). Land ownership is unequally concentrated in the hands of a ruling bourgeois class, while many Kenyans lack access to land (Syagga, 2006). Further, the use of land is highly environmentally unsustainable (Syagga, 2006). Healthcare in Kenya is vastly underdeveloped, with high death rates from preventable disease (Feikin et al., 2011). Finally, the relationship of Kenya to the West is primarily extractive in nature, despite the attainment of independence.

2 Kenyan Tribalism

2.1 Historical Context

Kenya as a state traces its heritage to British East Africa, where arbitrary borders were drawn across Africa by European powers in order to consolidate their holdings. The Berlin Conference of the late nineteenth century solidified the British Empire's borders as irrevocable and indisputable, forming what would come to be called Kenya.

African political systems were not formed based on the Westphalian model of European states, and as such were not equipped to deal with the imposition of state violence and oppression. Ethnic groups were either cleaved in half across international borders or were forced together regardless of historical relations. Compounding this was the British system of divide and rule, in which the colonial administration stoked resentments between the ethnic groups within their territory in order to deflect violence from themselves (Wesseling, 1996).

After independence, tribal identity has remained a major part of Kenyan social life. 42 languages are recognized within the relatively small nation, and all share differing relations with one another. Post-colonial

political elites in Kenya have utilized this British-instilled ethnic divide for their own political gain, using tribal nepotism to ensure their own supremacy (Orvis, 2001). Even archaeological research is influenced by the elites' tribalism. Archaeology outside that of early human evolution has failed to see the light of day, with most archaeologists being Europeans following in the footsteps of the Louis Leakey and family (Koff, 1997). Schmidt (1995) has argued that this white-dominated focus on paleoanthropology is an ideological choice by the government: the Kenyan ruling elite is threatened by the land claims of the country's ethnic groups, many of whom have long been evicted from their historical homelands.

2.2 Solutions

Tanzania, immediately south of Kenya, has had a vastly different story in regards to tribalism, despite having similar societies and languages. In both countries, the coast is occupied by the native Swahili population, who have long been international traders and whose language (also known by its endonym Kiswahili) has become the primary mode of state and interpersonal communication throughout the region. While both states have adopted Swahili as an official language, Kenya permits its ethnic groups to continue using the language of their heritage, which has led to two-thirds of Kenyans having fluency in a mother tongue alongside Swahili (Githiora, 2008). Conversely, the Tanzanian state has since independence implemented a single-language policy (Topan, 2008). This use of a single official language has been cited as a major reason for Tanzania's relative lack of intertribal relations. Tanzania's first president, Julius Nyerere, said as much during his 1990 resignation from his position as party chairman, declaring that "making Kiswahili Tanzania's language has helped us greatly in the battle against tribalism. If every Tanzanian had stuck to using his tribal language ... we would not have created the national unity we currently enjoy" (Nyerere, 1990; cited in Topan, 2008).

Nevertheless, Tanzania's effective abolition of its tribal languages comes with significant consequences. The colonial system served as a weapon to destroy cultural identity in the pursuit of capital. As such, it would behoove one who desires a reversal of the colonial legacy to work toward preserving cultural identity rather than hastening its death. Even where other tribal cultures are taught in school, the language of instruction remains Swahili (Topan, 2008).

While it may be possible to reduce intertribal conflict via linguistic unity, one must take care to preserve cultural heritage. If African societies are crushed under unity, there would be no practical difference from the colonial agenda.

3 Land Ownership

3.1 Historical Context

Western empires chose to colonize the world for a twofold purpose: land and labor. Raw materials were rapidly diminishing in Europe, and its industry needed fresh land for extraction. Thus, colonization sought to retrieve the crops and materials needed by industrial capital to turn a continuous profit. In doing so, the empires claimed only the highly-arable land, shunting the indigenous population into those areas unsuitable for cash crops. In Kenya, clandestine treaties with indigenous leaders gave Britain legitimacy over many areas (Rutten, 1992), and in others brute force was used. The Native Lands Trust Board in 1930 declared that indigenous Kenyans may not hold land in the way Europeans had the right to unilaterally claim territory for plantations (Syagga, 2006). Africans were sent into a state of landlessness far away from their historical homelands.

Today, large swaths of African land are occupied by enormous plantations occupying land to which many indigenous groups have historical claims. Kenya has a sizable ruling class which profits from this land ownership. While many Kenyans remain landless peasants, rich Kenyans were able to during independence take over the colonial plantations, especially the political dynasty of the Kenyatta family (Syagga, 2006).

3.2 Solutions

In South Africa and Zimbabwe, grassroots movements have found footholds to return African land to indigenous Africans. In these countries, the inequality of land ownership during the colonial era was more severe than anywhere else in Africa, and the relatively more difficult and longer-lasting struggle for independence has

meant that only in recent years have the countries begun to reckon with European ownership of land (Syagga, 2006).

This model used in southern Africa, of the state intervening in land ownership, may be quite applicable to the situation of Kenya. While roundly criticized by European settlers, the state can be recognized as the sole arbiter of land rights – ownership of real property is a social construct that can be changed at will, not a concept beholden to laws of the Universe.

However, the Kenyan state has a conflict of interest in returning land rights. While in South Africa and Zimbabwe the state represents the landless majority, Kenyan political elites are largely profiteers of the present land ownership system. Rather than an external and underrepresented minority owning most of the country's farms, the current President of Kenya belongs to a family which owns a large proportion of the country's large farms (Berg-Schlosser, 1982). It is unlikely that the Kenyan ruling class would choose of their own volition to sacrifice their own bourgeois supremacy. This was seen most clearly in the Maasai land movements of the twenty-first century, where Maasai whose treaties with the British empire had expired chose to petition the government for their land. Rather than follow the hundred-year treaty, the Kenyan government chose to quash the Maasai rebellion.

Nevertheless, it may be possible to equalize land rights. Through grassroots movements, the state may be forced to reckon with its control over land. Syagga (2006) has proposed policies that the Kenyan state can be forced to make, such as an amendment to the constitution allowing the seizure of idle land. However, these proposals still do not address the desires of ruling class, permitting them to be the implementers of such policy proposals.

4 Environmental Unsustainability

4.1 Historical Context

The colonial system utilized its possessions as extractive sources for resources, especially in Kenya of tea and pyrethrum. The empire had no need to maintain the ecological diversity of the country, as the consumers of colonial exports had no connection to the land from which they were sourced. This system has not declined in any form since independence, as land rights were continued even in the independent state. Large plantations remain devoted to single export crops, continuing the ecological degradation of the country (Syagga, 2006). As is well-known amongst ecologists, the reduction of wild flora to make way for monocropping will inevitably lead to mass famine as the natural ecosystem that supports farming is itself extinguished.

4.2 Solutions

Kenya must immediately work to not only preserve but enhance its natural ecosystem. While the country currently has many game preserves and national parks which preserve the ecosystem, they are few and far between. The colonial system of enormous plantations will not survive inevitably, and Kenyans must work toward a system that introduces the natural environment back into the country.

However, it must be noted that this will be exceedingly difficult. Again, the ruling class in Kenya is inexorably tied to continued profit from exclusive colonial-style agriculture. It is not likely that they would give up their rights to run their farms as they see fit, regardless of the ecological consequences (Berg-Schlosser, 1982). Secondly, Kenya is economically dependent on its exports and cannot simply sacrifice those.

5 Healthcare

5.1 Historical Context

The British empire had little need to preserve Kenyans' physical health, as they were solely interested in extraction. The little care that was given to the indigenous was explicitly focused on ensuring their forced labor force would be strong enough to continuously produce goods for export to the imperial capital. For instance, state security would regularly conduct random inspections on Kenyans' dwellings under the Public Health & Prevention Ordinance, with any evidence of mosquito habitation, exposed food, or simply general uncleanliness invoking severe criminal punishments, often corporal (Achola, 2010). This policy was still

unable to maintain wellness in the African population, as the poverty imposed by the colonial administration precluded subjects' ability to maintain their own health.

Today, Kenya's healthcare system has improved greatly since the colonial era. The government operates a hierarchical system of hospitals throughout the country, and most are able to access at least rudimentary care, often at low cost. However, the system is very fractured, with a multi-tiered system of government hospitals for the poor and private healthcare for the wealthy. Even in government hospitals, services can be priced outside the budgets of many of Kenya's poor even when such services are available. The country also suffers from high rates of infectious disease, primarily targeting the poor who cannot afford healthcare. For instance, children under 5 years of age in the unregulated urban settlement of Kibera suffer from an average of 8 diarrhea days per year (Feikin et al., 2011).

5.2 Solutions

The single-payer healthcare model has worked extremely well in the Soviet Union, Cuba, the United Kingdom, and Canada, where residents are free to access the health system without worry of bankruptcy. In Kenya, this system is absolutely necessary. As a tropical nation, infectious disease is an omnipresent fact of life amongst Kenyans. Widespread poverty means that for many health-related deaths, the root cause of death was a lack of money to access the healthcare system.

The government, however, will find significant trouble in implementing such a system. As Western nations manufacture the world's medical technology, the threat of a large negotiator like a single-payer system usurping small hospitals and insurers threatens the profits of pharmaceutical and medical technology corporations. Structural Adjustment Programs require that periphery states reduce their public expenditures, enforcing Western control over public services in the oppressed nations. Kenya would have to buck the trade system that so enforces this dynamic in order to run its healthcare system independently.

6 Relationship to the Core

6.1 Historical Context

The expansion of finance-capital in the West by its own nature necessitated its export to new markets, and in the era of classical liberalism this meant expansion of colonies across the world (Lenin, 1917). It is of no question that Kenya was a colony of the British Empire. The capitalist regime utilized Kenya's resources and population for its own profit, and left when it deemed departure to be in its best interest.

Despite Kenya flying its own flag emblazoned with the Pan-African colors, its relationship to Western nations is primarily extractive in nature. The country still exports far more to the West than it imports – or even consumes on its own – and in many ways its policies are written by the businessmen in the global core. Internal policies of nations are no longer determined by internal factors, but by the whims of the global managerial class, who exist outside the bounds of any political system and are only beholden to their financial backers. The World Trade Organization sets binding rules on nation-states, requiring that periphery nations expose themselves to Western monied interests or face sanctions. The global financiers require countries to adopt structural adjustment programs in order to receive money, or even to refinance crippling debt. These programs often include provisions for the privatization of public services and reduction in social benefit programs. In Kenya, privatization of state resources and public services allowed Western financial services corporations to reap profits by exploiting the country's impoverishment (McMichael, 2004).

6.2 Solutions

Within the global capitalist system, there is no way for Kenya to truly liberate itself. The systems of real property ownership and labor relations remain not a bug but a feature of capitalism, and Kenya must abolish its participation in the global system that preserves its impoverishment. The European states maintain their supremacy and standard-of-living solely through the extraction of resources from the global periphery.

The only way this could be accomplished is through Marxist-Leninist-Maoist class warfare. The Soviet Union was able to create a society in 1917 that protected the rights of all people and provided healthcare, land (in the form of state housing), and a social role to all people. As Kenya is highly populated by peasants

rather than an industrial proletariat, Mao's China further serves as a worthwhile example of the possibilities of revolution. In a few decades, the country managed to transition from a Western vassal state to a world superpower. Kenya has the laborers and resources to manage on its own, akin to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which has closed itself off from the world and yet has managed to develop nuclear weapons technology while legally still at war with the United States. With this independent acquisition of nuclear weapons, the country has been able to bring its oppressor, the United States, to the bargaining table. The two countries have thus reopened tense dialogue, and true independence from the West appears to have been successful.

However, one must look towards the former communist revolutions of Africa for a warning. The Western powers do not look too kindly upon a country's bucking of the capitalist system, and thwart attempts to gain independence. Without looking at the tragedies of Latin America, Africa has been home to many anti-capitalist movements. Libya under Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's ideological system brought prosperity to the country and an egalitarian system unique from the rest of the world. He was murdered in 2011 by a United States-backed coup and the country has been in violent disarray since. Thomas Sankara promised Burkina Faso independence from the French imperial legacy, and was deposed quickly in a coup. Without the support of the Soviet Union, Angola's revolutionary party was in 1992 usurped by its longtime foe, UNITA, supported by the United States and apartheid South Africa. The protracted people's war in Kenya would be an intense struggle, but the nation has fought for its independence in living memory. Kenya is more than capable of challenging its oppressors for a second time.

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