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BOOK REVIEWS

Anonymous Kenyan Authors. Independent Kenya. London: Zed Press, 1982. Appendices, 119 pp.

This book is an overwhelming exposé of that East African country during the two decades of flag independence. Written in a dynamic language and with a multiplicity of concrete evidence, the authors narrate the real story of Kenya today -- unearthing the degree of corruption, the stealing of people's wealth to enrich certain highly well-placed individuals, and the suppression of all forms of resistance. The authors examine the country's plundered economy, polarized class structure, and bankrupt cultural dependency on imperialism. They clearly illustrate how external forces in the name of international monopoly capital together with the petit-bourgeoisie and a rapidly developing national bourgeoisie with compradorial tendencies, have effectively combined to render twenty years of 'independence' from British colonialism to sham independence.

The authors describe themselves as ranging from university academics to workers and peasants -- using their book knowledge and direct experience to narrate their country's agony from the colonial period to the present. They had to remain anonymous "because they are still living in their country."

The book is divided into five chapters. Chapter one (pp. 1-12), is a critique of colonial historiography, and it sets the records straight. Chapter two (pp. 13-36), focuses on the reactionary nature of "Big Boss" politics of Jomo Kenyatta and his party the Kenya African National Union (KANU), and maintains that independence has continued unabated to be sold to the highest bidder.

Chapter three (pp. 37-66), which is perhaps the most crucial chapter, examines more closely the dependent economy -- identifying who is capable of looting, and who gets bankrupted by the system. Here the authors discuss the ruling classes and the economic basis of their power. This chapter contains a gruesome section on land and the other 90% of the population living off agriculture, and whose hard labor is simply appropriated via several divergent mechanisms by the best-placed members of the oligarchy.

Chapter four (pp. 67-84), titled "The Culture of Dependency: Hakuna Njia Hapa!", examines the poverty and barrenness of neo-colonial culture. It demonstrates how subversive any ideas of independence become in such a stifling atmosphere of narrow greed and bankruptcy.

Chapter five (pp. 85-92) structures the way forward, suggesting various political scenarios -- from backward coups d'etat to popular mass struggles of an increasingly scientific socialist nature -- soundly contending that "We must now undertake the initial steps of defiance which can act as a trigger for the disciplined mobilization of our people . . . In the process of struggle our people will learn to create their own vigorous forms of expression, to revitalize their own culture, and to find a cure for mental apathy and the destructive habits of dependency. What better legacy can we leave future Kenyans?" p. 92. In essence, the authors argue that the struggle for scientific socialism in Kenya is inevitable, if the people there are to liberate themselves from poverty and repression - - which revolution can only materialize after a protracted and difficult struggle.

The book ends with appendices (pp. 93-119), containing samples of how the system works: from the ruling KANU party that appears to be operating without a constitution, to the open corruption of Nairobi municipal administration, to imperialist suckers inside the country in the name of transnationals; from the exploitation of farmers by bureaucrats of co-operatives, to the use of parastatals as breeding grounds for the plutocrats of the ancien regime -- to food politics that favor the importation of worthless yellow corn from the U.S. -- to unwarranted incessant impromptu closures and late openings of the country's so-called university (as the authors put it) by the Chancellor in State House -- forces that create revolutionary tendencies among the masses of the people.

The catalogue is devastating, and an eye-opener for the unfamiliar. The book has been written in an accessible style, and covers a good deal of ground. However, for the anonymity of its authors, some criticism warrants here. In a world of scholarship where it matters to know who is doing what where, colleagues or would-be colleagues are deprived of this benefit, despite possible victimization as they confirm in the introduction of the book: "We would obviously prefer to discuss issues of such vital importance to Kenya openly, but given the repressive nature of the regime such an approach is not possible now. The regime's refusal to tolerate any discussion or debate demonstrates its essential insecurity, and forces groups like ours to work covertly with all the pressure and limitations that involves." (p. xii.) All plausible arguments. But it might not take long before the system they have courageously exposed prevails on them. Time may therefore have arrived for them (if they have not done so), to go into exile to continue the struggle as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and others have done. This is to avoid a situation whereby some people might have qualms about the credibility of anonymous authors. Such people might also ask themselves if the repression of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's

efforts at mounting a popular theater would have been less significant, was he to be a complete unknown. Anonymity might also be interpreted or misinterpreted as an act of cowardice that would only make the system pretend to clear its image to the people so as to prolong its life, hence therefore simultaneously prolonging the suffering of the people.

Related to its anonymity, the book lacks references and footnotes -- factors that are vital in cross-checking certain issues in subsequent researches by other scholars on the same or similar subject. For this omission, the authors explain it as being the work of difficult circumstances under which the book was produced -- circumstances that inhibited the implementation of open investigations so as to produce a detailed presentation -- hence the condensed nature of the book. From this premise, the book seems to be a hurried effort rushed out for political activism. This may, however, not look strange, given the fact that in Africa today, the intellectual has also become a political activist.

Although the authors do a wonderful job in treating Kenya's role in U.S. geopolitics, they should have also discussed in some detail regional politics. This would have prepared some readers in construing later events that happened in the East African region, for instance, why Tanzania handed over leading fugitives from the August 1, 1982 coup attempt; why other Kenyan exiles in Tanzania, like the radical politicians in the names of Chelagat Mutai and James Orengo, who though may not have been connected with the coup attempt, were also handed back.¹

However, as for the subsequent events that occurred inside the country itself, the authors convincingly demonstrate that resistance to repression in neo-colonial Kenya was bound to gain a sophisticated dimension, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o's later writing² seems to confirm. Further evidence of continuing repression can be sought in the regime's handling of the so-called "cattle rustlers" in the northern parts of the country. Here the regime has of late used helicopter gun-ships, and other heavy weaponry to try to silence the peasants. The foregoing quotation could be regarded as confirmation of this manifestation: ". . . Pokot had one week to surrender all illegally held arms. Not a single gun was handed in by the deadline, so the Kenyan army, supported by the GSU (General Service Unit), police and anti-stock theft units, moved into southern

¹For details on this subject, see for instance, New African, July 1984, p. 14.

²Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya (Trenton, N.J.: Africa Wld. Press, 1983).

Pokot on what one relief worker termed 'a punitive expedition'.³

To term these Kenyan compatriots (who are actually part of the larger masses of the Kenyan people) "cattle rustlers," is a neo-colonial abuse to these herdsman. Are these merely "cattle rustlers," or are these oppressed people resisting a moribund order in the so-called Nyayoland? The Turkana nationality (one of the so-called cattle rustlers), for instance, as the authors of Independent Kenya have correctly registered on p. 9, were one of the earliest nationalities to rise against British imperialism in Kenya. It would appear that they are ready to rise again -- this time against primitive neo-colonial fascism in that country. Moreover, if there has to emerge a popular and well organized armed struggle by the masses of the Kenyan people, then such struggle could as well start in these strongholds of so-called cattle rustlers.

In the same vein, the authors of Independent Kenya did prepare some readers in construing the continued intra-class squabbles within the ruling national bourgeoisie -- the real protagonists being Charles Njonjo and the President himself. This culminated in the demise of the once powerful bourgeois Njonjo, leading to the unending 'inquiry' into his activities.⁴

In conclusion, it can be said that although only 93 pages (excluding appendices), whether this limitation has been self-imposed, demanded by the publishers or due to reality of clamped circumstances, Independent Kenya is a serious book that effectively discusses issues pertaining to the road to socialist transformation. It must be closely read by all those interested in joining and/or continuing the struggle against the repressive system in that country. The book is a brave publication, a political economy publication that befits all neo-colonies in Africa and elsewhere in the periphery. It is an important contribution to the rapidly growing progressive literature on neo-colonial Kenya.⁵

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³For details, see Africa Confidential, Vol. 25, No. 5, February 29, 1984, pp. 4-5. See also Africa Now, June 1984, pp. 67-69.

⁴For details, see for instance, New African, July 1984, pp. 26-28.