Five Models for Development in Kenya

Turned in on

Friday December 14, 2018

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for the class

MSID 4002 Country Analysis

at

University of Minnesota Twin-Cities

taught by

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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 hospials 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.

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Essay truncated here for brevity.

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