

Colonialism and its Legacies in Kenya

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Introduction

This paper analyses the legacies of colonialism and uses Kenya as a case study. The paper first briefly summarizes the main features of Kenya's pre-colonial communities. It then explains the meaning of colonialism within Kenya's context and analyses the impact of colonial conquest, the imposition of international and local administrative boundaries. The third area of focus is authoritarianism as a major political legacy of colonial administration. Examined further are the lasting consequences of colonial economic and social policies. The major argument advanced here is that the trajectory of development in Kenya continues to be determined by the conjuncture of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial socio-political and economic processes.

Pre-Colonial Situation in Kenya

For many millennia the many communities in Kenya adjusted themselves to their ecological niches (Sheriff, 1985). As a consequence communities such as the Agikuyu and the Miji Kenda developed agricultural economies. Others, including the Maasai and the Samburu practiced pastoralist forms of production. The majority such as the Luo and the Abagusii adapted themselves to a mixture of crop cultivation and livestock keeping. Besides there the Ogiek who thrived on hunting and gathering. Production was primarily for collective subsistence rather than individual accumulation. The kinship system was the basis of ownership of factors of production which included land, livestock and labour. Labour was largely cooperative within the family and the larger kin group. It was also manual. Surplus was quantitatively small and imposed limitations on trade. Regional and long-distance trade involved prestige goods and influenced society only minimally. The rewards of labour were mostly redistributed in kind and according to need. There existed little differences in wealth possession. Classes, if they existed, were largely incipient. Reciprocity and the egalitarian ideal ensured that individuals never slid into abject poverty.

There was very little impetus for large-scale state formation. Instead the largest political unit was the collectivity of a few families related by blood. Communities were highly acephalous or segmented. Centralized kingdoms were mainly found in the inter-lacustrine

region to the west of Lake Victoria. The ethnic boundaries among pre-colonial Kenyan communities were fluid. Inter-ethnic interactions were characterized by trade, intermarriages and limited and intermittent warfare. The histories of migrations and settlement were about continuous waning and waxing of the various ethnicities. Society was anything but static. Colonialism only gave new shape, meaning and direction to the communities' inherent dynamism.

The Colonial Interlude

Colonialism and its legacies continue to attract scholarly attention (Kitching,1980; Mamdani, 1996; Wrigley, 1965 and Wolff, 1974). For a number of scholars colonialism has had a powerful and lasting impact on Africa. For instance, Crawford Young ((1995: 24) states: "Overall colonial legacy cast its shadow over the emergent African state system to a degree unique among the major world regions". The implication is that Africa can neither be explained nor understood without first unraveling the continent's colonial experience. The Ghanaian historian, the late Adu Boahen, preferred a middle course. He stated (quoted in Akurang-Parry, 2006): "In some respects the impact of colonialism was deep and certainly destined to affect the future course of events, but in others, it was not". Did the colonial experience simply sweep aside the pre-colonial situation outlined above? The rest of the paper addresses this pertinent question.

The impact of colonial boundaries

Colonialism developed from imperialism, which can be referred to as the highest stage of capitalism. Capitalism, imperialism and colonialism share the following definitions: political and cultural domination and economic exploitation. At a particular point in time it became necessary that the three processes exist together. In Kenya's case, as with the rest of Africa, the starting point was the 1884/85 Berlin Conference, which set the rules of colonial occupation. Together with the 1886 Anglo-German Agreement and other inter- European territorial arrangements, the conference was instrumental in not only erecting artificial boundaries around Kenya but also in wresting diplomatic initiative from Kenyan people. In 1894 and 1894 Britain declared protectorate over Uganda and Kenya, respectively. Kenya's boundaries were demarcated without the consultation of

Kenya's people. It can be conceded that the colonial boundaries led to the establishment of a large territorial entity. But they arbitrarily brought together over forty previously independent communities into one territorial entity (Ogot, 2000). The colonial state, and later the post-colonial state, would find it a daunting task wielding these communities into one nation-state. Indeed, it took the Turkana, the Samburu and other marginalized communities the whole of the colonial period and even later into the post-colonial era to realize they were in Kenya.

More seriously the boundaries were responsible for dividing single communities such as the Maasai and Kuria between Kenya and Tanganyika (later, Tanzania), the Somali among Kenya, Somali and Ethiopia, the Luo, also among Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, and the Teso and the Samia between Kenya and Uganda. The fact that the administrative and ethnic boundaries were coterminous nurtured negative ethnicity as different communities competed for colonial resources. Inter-ethnic competition would characterize the post-1945 nationalist struggles and post-colonial politics. Examples include attempts by so-called minority Luyia, Kalenjin and coastal communities to establish quasi-federalism as a counterpoise to Kikuyu-Luo domination in independent Kenya. Furthermore, the colonial boundaries would also lead to Somali secessionist attempts by the Kenya Somali in their bid to join their kin and kith in neighbouring Somali. The colonial state employed authoritarian force to hold Kenya's diverse communities together.

Colonial administration and authoritarianism

Colonial military expeditions led to genocide and forced migrations of people among the Agikuyu, Abagusii, the Nandi, Ababukusu, Giriama and all the others who met colonial force with force. Colonial conquest led to loss of sovereignty as colonial rulers replaced indigenous leaders. This was one of the ironies of British indirect rule. Based on empty platitude, British indirect rule often led to recruitment of British collaborative agents and porters into leadership positions. Colonial military expeditions led to genocide and forced migrations of people. Moreover British colonial administration reflected orders from Britain rather than the consensus of community leaders. Colonial governance through

Chiefs' councils, native tribunals and local native councils was therefore a mockery of democracy. Chaired by colonial district officers these institutions acted as legal and administrative devices that were intended to keep Africans in their subordinate place. The purpose they served included political expedience and imposition of administrative costs on Africans. Law and order was, therefore, maintained in the interest of British capitalist accumulation (Mamdani, 1996).

On a broader scale colonial plans developed in London. The Europeans dominated executive and legislative councils formulated policies and made budgets in Nairobi with the approval of London. Africans were excluded from these councils, which were chaired by the Governor until and after the Second World War. Indeed, even European settlers complained that the councils were dominated by government officials. British indirect rule kept governance at a distance from the people. The colonial state centralized, racialized and ethnised power. This administrative set up, save its racial trappings, was wholly inherited by the post-independence regime. In a fundamental sense post-colonial governance became even more autocratic. Unlike the governor who was accountable to the House of Commons, Kenya's post colonial presidents have hardly been accountable to Parliament. Constitutional reforms since independence have transformed Kenya into a patrimonial and autocratic presidential system. Thus independent Kenya inherited and worsened the colonial crisis of governance with dire human rights and economic consequences.

Economic and social legacy

Sir Frederick G. Lugard, the high priest and agent of British imperialism in East and West Africa once made the following statement: "European brains, capital and energy have not been, and never will be, expended in developing the resources of Africa from motives of pure philanthropy" (quoted in Chiryankandath, 2007: 7). Lugard had no doubts regarding the motives of British colonialism: economic benefits for British metropolitan and local investors. In Kenya they included a number of merchant houses and thousands of European settlers (Swainson, 1980; Ochieng and Maxon, 2000). Like

other proponents of British colonialism Lugard did not really care if Africans in Kenya reaped incidental benefits at the behest of the Keynesian economics of imperialism.

At any rate, British colonial economic policy in Kenya included the following: Land alienation for European settlers (Sorrenson, 1968), African taxation (Tarus, 2004), African migrant/forced labour (Zezeza, 1992) development of settler dominated agricultural production and peasant commodity production, export production, rail and road transport and communication, education and health. These policies were formulated and implemented incrementally during specific stages of colonialism: the pre-1920 period which was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War; the interwar period which also saw the great depression between 1929 and 1934; the Second World War 1939-45 and the post- War era (Wiggley, 1965). The implementation of these policies was characterized by a series of contradictions with which the colonial state had to cope, rarely with any success (Lonsdale and Berman, 1979). There was, for instance a clash of interests between metropolitan capitalists and the colonial state in Kenya. British merchants and financiers often won the day. Internally African, Indian and European settler interests were also at variance. More often than not European settlers had the ear of pro-settler governors. Moreover, in the interest of capital these policies were anchored on partial dissolution and restructuring of pre-colonial structures. It was often cheaper, even if not efficient, to use pre-capitalist forces and relations of production. It was also in the interest of capital to place the market under the colonial state's control. This was done with greater enthusiasm during the post-Second World War period more popularly known as the second colonial occupation. Colonial commodity production, because of inappropriate practice, led to widespread environmental degradation. Forest concessions, which were granted to individuals and companies led to massive deforestation. Colonial enterprises destroyed local industries. Generally the colonial economic policies in Kenya were instrumental in incorporating the pre-capitalist communities into the colonial and international economic systems. This persisted into the post-colonial period.

Similarly, Christian missionary activities destroyed African culture through the gospels of salvation, obedience and work. Through Western education, which they dominated

despite the colonial state's role, Christian missions preached against African cultures. They were emphatic that the Africans' salvation must be gauged on the extent to which traditional cultural practices were abandoned. Their invocations about obeying the government because it is God who placed it there was meant to make Africans obey the colonial regime. Euro-Christian capitalist work ethic inculcated individualism and acquisitive culture. Colonial education therefore fostered the emergence of quiescent and obedient elites. They served the colonial state and economy as semi-skilled workers, clerks and chiefs. But some of them like Johana Owalo, Harry Thuku, Jomo Kenyatta, Dedan Kimathi, Oginga Odinga and Tom Mboya. This nationalism had its basis in primordial ethnicity and colonial administration. It was only after the establishment of the Kenya African Union that the nationalists attempted territory-wide mobilization of Kenyans. The colonial state carefully chose the leaders of the independent regime as it laid the grounds for neo-colonialism. As elaborated below the colonial economy and education established the structures and provided the historical forces that fundamentally influenced Kenya's colonial and post-colonial society.

The colonial economy has had a lasting impact in the following ways. First, both the colonial and the post-colonial economies were characterized by two major forms of disarticulation: geographical and structural (Ake, 1980). The first refers to enclave development, which is concentration of development activities in a few urban areas: Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu, Eldoret, and Naivasha. Structural disarticulation refers to the development of a limited range of activities. In Kenya these activities are largely centred on agriculture and a very limited range of secondary industries.

Secondly, Kenya's economy is has a narrow base. It is not adequately diversified. It relies on a few primary commodities including coffee, tea, pyrethrum and flowers for foreign exchange. As a consequence Kenya's economy lacks the desired auto-dynamism. This is primarily due also to the economy's external linkage, which places it at the mercy of fluctuations in world prices.

The third colonial economic heritage includes the monopolistic and imperfect nature of the market. Despite the country's pursuit of structural adjustment programs since the 1980s the Kenyan state continues to exercise control over the market through price regulation (Maxon and Ndege, 1995 and Chinsinga, 2004). As happened during the colonial era the market continues to serve as an instrument of political control and exploitation.

Furthermore, Kenya's economy continues to be technologically, financially, commercially and monetarily dependent on Britain, other European countries, the United States of America, Japan and, increasingly, China. Since the advent of political independence Kenya has successfully diversified the range of countries on which she is dependent for foreign aid. The consequence of this has been the deterioration in the country's balance of payments.

Moreover, income inequality and poverty have become more prevalent since independence (Ndege, 2008). Colonialism had its own share in the country's inequality and poverty as it promoted rural-urban, regional and class differences in development. As a consequence the contradictions that characterized colonial Kenya have been accentuated. These include contradictions in the social relations of production between the international and domestic bourgeoisie, between the peasantries and the bourgeoisie, and between capital and labour (Ake, 1980, Swainson, 1980 and Leys, 1996). Like the colonial state, the post-colonial state has had to cope with these series of contradictions. The local bourgeoisie habitually resort to high level corruption to accumulate wealth and power. They also invoke racial and ethnic sentiments to stay in power (Leys, 1975 and Atieno Odhiambo, 2004). Superintending class and ethnic politics is the president and the political elites around him.

Conclusion

It is logical to conclude with Crawford Young (1986: 25) that "(t)he character of the contemporary African state has been determined by its colonial origins. The colonial legacy in turn has been altered in crucial and often negative ways since political

independence was attained”. There existed and continues to exist within Kenya’s post-colonial social formation an uncomfortable mixture of the pre-colonial, colonial and global economic structures. As has been argued in this paper, the imposition of colonial boundaries, administrative system, economic and social policies only partially destroyed and restructured Kenya’s pre-colonial communities. As a consequence, Kenya people’s ethnic identities were politically enforced. The colonial state remained alien and governed through authoritarianism. Colonial capitalism was never the classical capitalism that was dreamed by Adam Smith and John Keynes. But it provided the anvil on which the post-colonial social formation continues to be forged. The post-colonial state has largely built on the colonial heritage. It has successfully deracialised but at the same time ethnicised the state as the political class continues to mobilize the citizenry around ethnic political parties. Lastly it has failed to democratize the state.

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