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Markets, Civil Society and Democracy in Kenya, Peter Gibbon (ed), Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1995, 283pp, ISBN: 91-7106-371-4. (p/b) Price: SEK140, £12.95 (p/b).

The struggle for democracy in Kenya has created a very polarised society in the wake of demands for political and economic reform from both the donors and Kenyan peoples. Pressures for demanding change are motivated by a variety of reasons and at times conflicting interests. But the reality covered by contributions in this book, generally capture the fact that major struggles have been seen around the issues of economic and political reform, in a context of generally deteriorating economic performance, heightened ethnic tension and often poor relations between government and donors.

As noted by Peter Gibbon in his summary of the book, the studies deal with central dimensions of grassroots development and change in Kenya over the last decade and a half. The first concern covered by Gerrishon Ikiara, Mohamud Juma and Justus Amadi concerns continuity and transformations in the cereals marketing chain, the centrepiece of the World Bank, European Community and USAID efforts during the 1980s and early 1990s to liberalise Kenyan economic institutions on the basis of aid conditionality.

The second contribution by Karuti Kanyinge, examines development institutions, before and after the re-emergence of multi-party politics in 1991-92. The third, by Mutahi Ngunyi, examines the political developments and religious organisations characterised elsewhere as the most important institutions in contemporary Kenyan civil society.

In the development discourse, Kenya is now often seen as a problem child rather than a success story, and from these accounts, ample evidence is provided which allow us to reflect on the convincibility of the donor diagnosis of central policies and practices which preceded economic liberalisation. Ironically, Kenya had been eulogised for most of the 1980s by 'donor friendly' western academics who saw it as one of the Africa's few economic and political ornaments, a country to be held up, admired and analysed mainly in order to detect what might be transferable in its 'exceptional' performance.

In the chapter on 'The Cereals Chain in Kenya: Actors, Reforms and Politics' the reader is made to understand the politics surrounding cereals production and the marketing chain. The chain as noted by the contributors, is extremely important to the Kenya government since it is the main conduit for the country's food supplies and also an activity which became central to the national political patronage system developed since the death of President Kenyatta.

For donors, in their preoccupation with the development of a market economy, it became also a source of anxiety because they viewed it as the last remaining significant distortion in an otherwise well-functioning market economy. For the contributors, the main problem arising out of this chain is not only the way patronage has been grafted, but to distinguish "national economic" as opposed to "class-promotional" objectives in an environment where public resources are habitually put to private uses, while the private sector is simultaneously smothered and nurtured in the public sector's interstices. The complications that have been triggered off by liberalisation created distortions which in the eyes of the contributors confirm that there is no straight path to a free market, and possibly no path to a really free one at all.

Kanyinga's study lays bare the dynamics of Kenyan politics and demonstrates that it is not the presence, or even the extent, of social pluralism which determines whether democracy can emerge – but rather the type of this pluralism. For example, in Kenya's countryside – self-help groups, *harambee* project groups, cooperatives, NGOs, etc – share a common corporate form, whose governing principle is the cultivation of highly restricted and parochial economic interests. Consequently, the articulation of these interests not only leaves intact divisions between localities, but those between decision-makers and decision-takers, between patrons and their subjects, and between the "big" decisions and little ones. In conclusion, the former remain beyond popular control and the population remains obstructed from organising around or in relation to these.

It has become too commonplace a cliché to refer to civil society as the way forward for African society beleaguered by repressive regimes on one hand, and a weak opposition on the other. In Ngunyi's contribution the question of democracy is placed on the agenda as decision makers are grappling with conditionalities from donors. Ngunyi focuses mainly on the role of religious institutions in the process of Kenya's liberalisation, but highlights differentiation resulting from ethno-regional and social class basis of those institutions. He further argues that analysts should shift from positing civil society as intrinsically always opposed to the state and raise issues arising from the organic relation between civil society and the division of labour in the social formations in which they are founded on the one hand, and the continuous fundamental pattern of interaction between civil society and the state, on the other. He concludes on a very important note that Kenyan civil society is characterised more appropriately as structurally differentiated rather than as simply pluralistic, and that it has systematically been subject to state initiatives of a disorganising nature – although these have generally no more than reinforced or rationalised its existing polarisations.

This book is well written and offers a very sound analysis of Kenya's problems and reactions of donors. From a political discourse point of view, the book notes a very important point, notably that most donors and western-based scholarship used to believe that Africa's main problem was its flirtation with "socialism" in different forms. In this current conjuncture, the case of Kenya as discussed in this book presents donors as mainly positing that there are certain deeply rooted "organic" features of African social and political organisation which are responsible for its economic and political difficulties. Hence, the shift of donor agendas to include political democratisation as well as economic liberalisation.

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