

REVIEW

THE TRAGEDY OF A STOLEN AFRICAN LIBERATION

JOHN GRAVERSGAARD

Two Paths in Kenya: The Ideological Struggle between Capitalism and Socialism in Kenya, 1960-1970. By Shiraz Durrani

[Vita Books, Nairobi, 2023, 328 pp. Pbk/ebook, ISBN 978-99661-33120, £25.00]



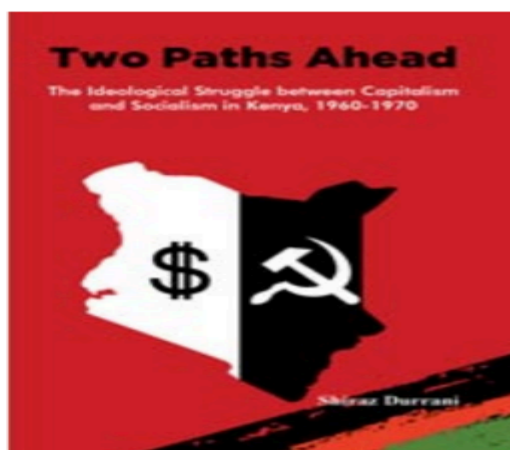
SHIRAZ DURRANI'S book, *Two Paths*, is a crucial work for understanding the tragedy of an African liberation being stolen and degraded to the benefit of a new African

ruling class – to the satisfaction of British imperialism that wanted to keep its key position in support of the white settlers and capitalism.

Kenya was part of the British Empire until it became an independent republic in 1963. The book documents the long struggle for freedom and land before independence and after, with key documents from the main conflict between capitalism and socialism. The treason of the new black bourgeoisie is revealed; imperialism was able to take the wind out of the sails of the liberation, by using all kinds of violent and dirty tricks.

The colonial expulsion of Africans from their lands, and their reduction to the status of servants of the white rulers, had resulted in constant rebellions. The land-grabbing by the British colonialists was systematic, and the Pan-Africanist WEB Du Bois wrote about it in the 1920s. In the collection *The New Negro* he said:

“Here was a land largely untainted by the fevers of the tropics and here England proposed to send her sick and impoverished soldiers of the war. Following the lead of South Africa, Britain took over five million acres of the best lands from the 3,000,000 natives, herded them gradually towards the swamps and gave them, even there, no sure title; then by taxation she forced sixty percent of the black adults into working for the ten thousand white owners for the lowest wage. Here was opportunity not simply for the great



landholder and slave-driver but also for the small trader, and twenty-four thousand Indians came. These Indians claimed the rights of free subjects of the empire – a right to buy land, a right to exploit labour, a right to a voice in the government now confined to the handful of whites.

Suddenly a great race conflict swept East Africa – orient and occident, white, brown and black, landlord, trader and landless serf. When the Indians asked [for] rights, the whites replied that this would injure the rights of the natives. Immediately the natives began to awake. Few of them were educated but they began to form societies and formulate grievances. A black political consciousness arose for the first time in Kenya. Immediately the Indians made a bid for the support of this new force and asked [for] rights and privileges for all British subjects – white, brown and black. As the Indian pressed his case, white South Africa rose in alarm. If the Indian became a recognised man, landholder and voter in Kenya, what of Natal?

The British Government speculated and procrastinated and then announced its decision: East Africa was primarily a ‘trusteeship’ for the Africans and not for

the Indians. The Indians, then, must be satisfied with limited industrial and political rights, while for the black native – the white Englishman spoke! A conservative Indian leader speaking in England after this decision said that if the Indian problem in South Africa were allowed to fester much longer it would pass beyond the bounds of domestic issue and would become a question of foreign policy upon which the unity of the Empire might founder irretrievably. The Empire could never keep its colored races within it by force, he said, but only by preserving and safeguarding their sentiments”.¹

After the Second World War socialism was popular, and the Kenyan workers and peasants wanted a people's republic with nationalisation of land, and free education and health. But the white settlers were not willing to give up their privileges in the form of stolen fertile land and control of the state. Tired of the humiliations, Kenyans started a more open liberation struggle against the British through the Land and Freedom Army, the so-called Mau Mau. The British tried to subdue the militants by means of propaganda, splitting and harsh repressions like hangings.

The Land and Freedom Army gave hope to millions of Africans tired of the foreign rule of white racism. The settlers tried to reduce the armed liberation struggle to “an irrational force of evil, dominated by bestial impulses and influenced by world communism”,² ie not only using racism, to reduce the fighters to animals – the ‘uncivilised primitives’ against the ‘civilised’ – but also using Cold-War rhetoric to gain support from white racists and imperialism.

The book describes the main protagonists, with Jomo Kenyatta in an important role. He was able to sideline his opponents, who wanted justice and land reform, and he became a willing tool of the British, although they had earlier imprisoned him. He himself was able to profit, becoming a big landowner, and he used the tribal card to divide and rule, privileging his own tribe and loyalists with positions and land. One of the more shocking details in Durrani's book is the scorn and contempt that Kenyatta expressed for the Mau Mau, shortly after his release from prison:

“At Githunguri, an African-run teacher-training school turned into a butchery during the revolt, where over one thousand Kikuyu were hanged by

the British forces of law and order, Kenyatta referred to the Mau Mau as ‘a disease which has been eradicated and must never be remembered again’. (p 178)

The Kenya African National Union (KANU) was divided on ideology and the future of a liberated Kenya. British intelligence worked hard to corrupt the incoming African politicians, and Kenyatta became their favorite. The opposition, with people like Pio Gama Pinto and Oginga Odinga, challenged the land- and money-grabbing that they could see. Pinto was regarded by the new rulers as a key enemy and he was brutally assassinated in 1965 – a hard blow to the socialist collective that he was part of.

The Kenya People's Union (KPU) was formed in 1966 to challenge Kenyatta and his capitalist policies. Imperialism tried to reduce the struggle to tribal warfare or a struggle between personalities, but for the first time in Kenya a political party openly advocating socialism was formed. In 1969 the Kenyatta government banned the KPU and arrested its leaders.

One of the tricks Kenyatta used was to talk of his policy as an “African Socialism”. The *KPU Manifesto* from 1966 characterised this as a meaningless phrase and a cloak for the practice of total capitalism, promoting the development of a small privileged class of Africans, with control of the economy by foreigners growing every day, and without any nationalisations – in contrast to socialism's basic principles of equality in the distribution of income, control over the means of production and minimisation of foreign capitalist control of the economy. The KPU put its finger on the fact of ministers owning big estates, and demanded that land be available for the Wananchi (the masses).

Shiraz sees the murder of Pinto as crucial in the class struggle for Kenya's future. The *Wananchi Declaration* of 1969 said clearly that the people wanted all that the Mau Mau had fought for, including the return of the stolen land. They wanted economic and social changes fulfilling KANU's earlier pledges to the people. This progressive nationalism was met with terror and arrests, to the delight of the British settlers and imperialism.

Kenyatta made deals with the British that forced people to take loans if they wanted to buy back their stolen land. He instituted a system whereby he and his loyalists profited, and he installed a

regime where looting, land-grabbing and corruption became systematic. Market principles of ‘willing buyer/willing seller’ were introduced, a disgrace to the freedom movement where land rights always had been at the very heart of the struggle. Kenyatta gave himself and his loyalists the same privileges for land-grabbing as the British. The rights of the British Governor were transferred to the President, and destroyed the prospect of a more just and equal Kenya. This betrayal continues to the present day, as the class struggle in Kenya to a high degree concentrates on the land issue.³

While Kenyatta was picked by Britain to ensure its interests, the USA was also involved to build acceptance of capitalism and Western economic interests. The activist trade union movement had to be controlled, and here Tom Mboya played a crucial role (p 130). Through him the CIA poured money into the country, to support capitalism and an African elite against the demands from the people who wanted to break the chains of colonialism. Susan Williams documents this in her important book, *White Malice: The CIA and the covert recolonisation of Africa*.⁴

Two Paths is a tribute to the brave people from the Land and Freedom Army and people like Oginga Odinga, Pio Gama Pinto, Bildad Kaggia, Makhan Singh and many others fighting for justice and socialism. And it contains key documentation on their political positions.

Thanks to Shiraz Durrani and Vita Books for publishing this important book, which ought to be widely read by the young people of Kenya in the struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

Notes and References

- 1 WEB DuBois, ‘The Negro Mind Reaches Out’, in *The New Negro*, Alain Locke ed, Aslbert & Charles Boni, New York, 1925, pp 404-5, online at <https://archive.org/details/the-new-negro/mode/2up>; originally published in *Foreign Affairs*, New York, Vol III No 5. Quote also at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenya_Colony
- 2 From the British government's official Corfield report, quoted at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mau_Mau_rebellion.
- 3 See JM Klopp and O Lumumba, ‘Reform and counter-reform in Kenya's land governance’, in *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol 44, No 154, 2017, pp 577-594.
- 4 S Williams, *White Malice: The CIA and the covert recolonisation of Africa*, PublicAffairs, 2021.

