H-Net Reviews in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Throup, Charles Hornsby. *Multi-Party Politics In Kenya: The Kenyatta & Moi States & the Triumph of the System in the 1992 Election.* Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998. x + 660 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8214-1207-7; \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8214-1206-0.

Reviewed by Okete Shiroya (Valdosta State University) Published on H-Africa (December, 1998)

This book is about the political economy of contemporary Kenya, and, by extension, that of Africa as a whole. It specifically addresses conditions and circumstances under which political pluralism was reintroduced into Kenya from 1991-1994. It attempts to answer such questions as, why did the Kenyan government accept the re-introduction of multi-partyism, why and how did the ruling party, KANU, win the election, and why, following the election, are the opposition and the government not co-existing peacefully. The book also offers suggestions as to how the democratization process could be improved and strengthened.

Over the years, the authors carried out extensive research in Kenya on its political development. This book is the latest work they have published about Kenya. Although the book is aimed at the professionals, especially the academics and policy makers, it should also appeal to a wide range of readers not only because of its subject matter but also because of the style in which it is written, presented and organized. Professionals will find the figures, tables, photographs, index, and appendices exceptionally useful.

Although by 1991, Kenya had been politically independent for 28 years, it had experimented with multipartyism for only a very short period of time: from 1960-64 and 1966-69. For the rest of the years, Kenyetta and Moi ruled Kenya under a single-party system. In 1991 the West forced Moi to re-introduce multi-partyism to Kenya. The opposition which, at first, appeared united, fragmented along ethnic lines; as a result it lost the election and Moi retained Kenya's leadership.

Here, the lesson was clear: strong, viable multipartyism does not easily emerge or survive in a political environment in which the determining factor is personality, ethnicity, or both. For that to happen, ideology, policy, class, or all three should be present. A second lesson is that democratization is an expensive process. Electoral processes, which is only one component of democratization, requires massive foreign assistance and support. Such assistance should not end on the last day of the election. For the process to survive and to grow stronger, assistance should be continued. What is true for the electoral process is equally true for the democratization process as a whole. The question, of course is whether the West will be in a position to provide such massive assistance on a long-term basis.

So what did the re-introduction of multi-partyism mean for Kenya? According to the authors "whatever its weaknesses, the democratization process has broadened political and social freedoms in Kenya significantly ... economic freedoms have also expanded. Multi-partyism awoke enormous activism creating important checks and balances within the system which did not exist before. For the first time since 1964 centres of independent political power began to roll back power of the state, enhancing civil society" (pp. 592, 594). This is probably what happened in those African states that are currently experimenting with political pluralism.

It is clear from the authors' observation that democratizing a society is, of necessity, a gradual process which can only be accomplished successfully if it is carried out in stages. In the interest of strengthening the democratization process in Africa, the authors have made a number of suggestions. They have, for instance, suggested that African leaders and policy-makers revisit the issue of the one-party system: "Even single-party rule may provide a more attractive alternative to multi-partyism in the form of single-party states, in which each party is all powerful in its own ethnic stronghold, but where one group controls the centre and the distribution of patronage and development" (p. 591). This is a sound proposal which merits serious debate. I should also add that an almost similar system is currently being experimented with in Ethiopia. My own small input is that in a political arrangement such as the one being proposed by the authors, a mechanism or formula will have to be worked out by which the "controlling centre" could be occupied by eligible groups on a rotational basis. My assessment is that *Multi-Party Politics In Kenya* will remain, for years to come, the reference book on the evolution of multi-partyism in Kenya. It should be studied by those who wish to understand why ethnicity in contemporary Africa plays such a cen-

tral role in the political economy of the new states on the continent.

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