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Colin Legum. *Africa Since Independence.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. 105 pp. $27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-33588-3.

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The End of Innocence

When I agreed to review Colin Legum's latest book, I expected a tome of at least three hundred pages. Africa since independence, after all, is a broad subject with a vast literature. I was pleasantly surprised when a book of 105 pages (including index and notes) arrived on my desk. Indeed, the great advantage of Legum's work is unashamed brevity. Only a scholar who has written about and engaged in African politics for nearly fifty years would dare be so forthright about his passion.

Africa Since Independence is drawn from a series of lectures delivered at the Institute for Advances Studies at Indiana University in Bloomington. Each of the four chapters identifies the spirit of a decade since independence. Legum begins with the "romantic period" from 1939 to 1970, when a generation of young politicians led Africa to independence. The decade between 1970 and 1985 was one of "disillusionment", when African states failed to deliver greater economic benefits and with a few exceptions enforced non-democratic forms of government. Beginning in the late 1980s, Legum argues, Africa embarked on a new period of "realism" that recognized the importance of democratic governance and modest economic development programs which did not subordinate rural to urban economies. Finally, Legum asks whether contemporary Africa has entered a period of "renaissance", as South African president Thabo Mbeki claims. Legum describes Africa's political journey as a maturation from innocence through the idealism of youth to the measured sobriety of adulthood.

Legum is at his best when describing the "youth" – the early nationalists with whom he sympathized and often knew personally. Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah feature prominently, but Legum could have drawn more extensively on his archive of experiences with these leaders. Occasionally, Legum seems a little too sympathetic: describing Nyerere's "ujamaa" as "the only successful agrarian revolution in Africa" (p. 28) raised my guard. Moreover, his description of elite politics needs much unpacking. He divides the first generation into conservatives (including among others Senghor, Kenyatta, Haile Selassie and Houphouet-Boigny), radicals (Azikiwe, Nyerere, Mboya, Obote, Kaunda, Tour and Mondlane) and militants (Nkrumah, Modiba Keita, Machel, Mugabe, Cabral). Besides their willingness to cooperate with Moscow or Washington, which had far more to do with vicissitudes of decolonization, these divisions did not correspond to proclaimed ideologies or concrete practices. In another instance, Legum lumps Patrice Lumumba and Nelson Mandela together in a group of leaders who "began as radicals and ended up as reformers because of their experiences in the struggle." (pp. 38-9). This makes too great a generalization of "the struggle" and individual "experience"; moreover, Lumumba never quite had the chance to become a "reformer".

I was even less satisfied with the lack of explanation for the failure of the "young" nation-states. The most important question of post-independence African politics remained untackled: What drove nearly all of these leaders, conservative or radical, to autocratic policies? >Moreover, Legum does not explore the characters, motivations or ideologies >of the second genera-

tion of African leaders – the likes of Chiluba, >Museveni, Obasanjo, Rawlings, Meles Zenawi and Kagame. Are we to expect >anything better from them? A crucial question, if we accept Legum's >contention that Africa has entered a new era of political maturation.

Legum's short volume devotes a few paragraphs to the social, environmental, cultural and economic transformations in Africa since independence. The challenge of ethnic identities to the new nations is a concern that runs through all the chapters. Yet the analysis of these contentious and debatable issues is rather short and superficial. One almost wishes he had stuck to a study of elite politics and politicians.

Legum's book is a lucid overview for those unfamiliar with the contours of post-independence African politics. Unfortunately, it occasionally lacks nuance and lapses into familiar arguments. It does not have the polemical force of, say, Basil Davidson's *The Black Man's Burden.*[1] In a sense, this is to Legum's credit. While African politicians promise the unattainable and western political scientists make a living out of their doomsday predictions of "failed" states, Legum's analysis is sober and cautionary without being pessimistic. His work is the harbinger of a "middle-aged" Africa, stumbling along, with stories of hope and despair.

Note

[1]. Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (London: James Currey, 1992).

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