

Literature review on the wonga coup book by adam robert

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LITERATURE REVIEW: THE WONGA COUP BY ADAM ROBERTS

Literature Review

Africa, throughout the 20th century, has become a byword for massive poverty, corruption and greed. It is an understatement to say that Africa is a place rife with hunger, given that its rich resources have become central to the interests of various exploitative factors throughout its history. European nations, in particular, have scourged Africa for its material richness, much to the expense of the lives of the people living there. Adam Roberts covers that reality in his book *The Wonga Coup*, which details a seemingly contemporary repeat of the European exploitation of Africa through the attempts of a mercenary group consisting of Englishmen and South African soldiers to overthrow the ruling regime of Equatorial Guinea in 2004. Verily, the riches of Africa still proved attractive to foreigners to this day; it has remained vulnerable, as it was when the Europeans first arrived on its shores. “

Wonga”, the British slang term used by Roberts in the book title, serves as a preview to the fact that the story involved a modern-day European, specifically British, interference in African affairs with the end-goal of exploitation.

About more than 100 years prior to the failed coup attempt in Equatorial Guinea, Africa was a hotbed of exploitative activities instigated by European colonizers. The story of British aristocrat Simon Mann and his group of mercenaries somewhat stands as a dreadful repeat of the wretched past Africa went through. Roberts, then working as a correspondent of *The Economist*, documented how the group of Mann sought to overthrow then-

President Obiang Nguema. The objective of the group of Mann revolves around their desire to gain unlimited access to the vast oil riches of Equatorial Guinea by replacing the regime of Nguema with a government they could place under their control. Mann is a British Eton-trained aristocrat who has lived in both the United Kingdom and South Africa as a high-ranking official of the Special Air Service. The lavish lifestyle of Mann allowed him to have an exploitative mindset that would eventually enable him and his group to have the power to send any part of Africa into submission, which began when he met Tony Buckingham during the 1990s. Buckingham, another high-ranking soldier, convinced Mann to work with a group called Executive Outcomes, a company that advertised itself as a security provider that eventually turned into the mercenary group they both led.

Much of the members of Executive Outcomes come from the Army 32 Battalion of South Africa. Mann and Buckingham led Executive Outcomes to provide protection to major oil facilities in different nations, from surrounding nations such as Angola to faraway ones like Papua New Guinea. The influence of Mann and Buckingham grew sporadically through their international mercenary operations. However, what threatened the integrity of Executive Outcomes as an organization is the passage of the anti-mercenary law, which commenced in 1998 when South Africa was under the leadership of President Nelson Mandela. The anti-mercenary law expressly condemned any group that would render unauthorized military aid to other nations for any purposes. With the anti-mercenary law in place, Executive Outcomes found itself in a highly compromising position that has required them to look for alternative operation bases outside of South Africa.

Roberts detailed his documentation by cleverly switching between facts about the political situation in Equatorial Guinea and the sheer agitation felt by the group of Mann. Verily, there is a strong reason behind overthrowing the regime of President Nguema other than that defined by the ends desired by the group of Mann. Equatorial Guinea, in the words of Roberts, is the most despicable place existing around replete with the oppression perpetuated by the Nguema family, starting from the patriarch Macias up to his nephew Obiang. Corruption in Equatorial Guinea runs naturally with the nation under the control of the Nguemas alongside widespread cruelty among the populace, which Roberts described as one repeatedly exposed to several vicious circumstances such as cannibalism and extrajudicial killings. In sum, Roberts described Equatorial Guinea as a nation worthy of undergoing a drastic regime change, given that it has a vastly abusive ruling class whose power has the capability to silence out popular dissent. Yet, Roberts nevertheless starts discussing how Equatorial Guinea, amidst its nasty conditions, became a subject of exploitation by the group of Mann, who cunningly used the evil Nguema regime as their excuse for staging a coup. The Assisted Regime Change, referring to the plan of the group of Mann to overthrow the Nguemas, became the subject of the extensive research regimen conducted by Roberts, yet it is a significant fact that he failed to provide adequate footnoted details on his sources. Yet, what sufficed for the apparent deficiency of Roberts is his striking details on the network of people involved in the attempt to overthrow the Nguemas out of power. Roberts have named several people possibly involved in the failed coup as financial benefactors such as Jeffrey Archer and Sir Mark Thatcher, who is the son of

former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Noting that the network of people involved have successfully accumulated funds amounting to up to \$20 million to back sophisticated cooperative and strategic measures, Roberts then went on to explain why the coup turned to be a failed one.

The attempts of Roberts to provide several historical details behind the failed coup headed by the group of Mann did not ultimately result to all-encompassing contexts. Yet, what Roberts sought to achieve in his book is to portray how an exploitative attempt against an African nation could come about. Roberts underlined the massive support shown by notable figures from the West, particularly those from the United Kingdom, the nation of origin of Mann and Buckingham. Albeit displaying a seemingly speculative account of the activities engaged by the group of Mann, Roberts intricately provided the connections between illustrious Western figures and international corporations seeking to partake in the riches of Equatorial Guinea in a post-Nguema setting. Verily, the foregoing figures have great expectations to make their plan succeed, seeing as they do not have reason to expect failure due to the massive funding they have at their disposal and the sophisticated plans they have in place. Yet, Roberts himself emphasized on the general disappointment behind the failure of the international system to take into consideration the case against the group of Mann and the network of people conniving with them. Roberts noted that those involved in the failed coup against the Nguemas narrowly escaped prosecution from the international system, yet instead suffered reprisal from the angry populace of Equatorial Guinea and partial admonition from particular adjudicative institutions. Equatorial Guinea, being a nation vulnerable to foreign invasion

and control, shown in the end that its people still desire autonomy from foreigners, not even in exchange of deposing one of the vilest regimes that has ruled their nation. Clearly, Roberts professed how the people of Equatorial Guinea are well aware of the oppression that plagued their nation and Africa, on a general scale. As the Equatorial Guineans are well aware of the riches their nation beholds, they have stood adversely against any foreign advances, as seen in the story of failure involving the group of Mann and his vast crony network. The future of Equatorial Guinea, however, remains uncertain under the view of Roberts, given that it has yet to emancipate from the oppressive elements of its own society, particularly those initiated by their ruling class.

Africa, with all its vast riches, will stay as a subject of exploitation in the years to come, according to Roberts. Recalling the 1899 South African war initiated by the United Kingdom out of its intention to preserve its network of gold mining activities in South Africa, Roberts noted that Equatorial Guinea might suffer the same fate in the future, as manifested by the failed coup attempt against the Nguemas. Roberts emphasized the remarks made by officials from the United States (US) underlining the desire of the nation to protect all of its petroleum supply operations in the Gulf of Guinea, which has supplied almost a third of petroleum supplies in the nation. With such a fact being a possibility in the future, Roberts has yet to conceive a convincing possibility of a war led by the US on the subject of Equatorial Guinean oil, given the general inadequacy of his claims.

Bibliography

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