Week 4 Abstracts: Post-Independence

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Young, 2004

Young argues that if a Post-Colonial moment ever existed, by 2004 it had come to an end. The semantics of dependency theory and critical post-modernism no longer corresponded to realities in Africa, which had struggled to overcome political dysfunction and economic underdevelopment for as long a time as they had been colonised by Europeans. The one point he concedes to Post-Colonial theory is that the political and economic structures inherited by independent nations survived largely intact, thus perpetuating exploitative practices.

In places where the mode of production and political charters were reworked, the promises of development and modernisation were not fulfilled. The centrality of the state as a surrogate capitalist was politically required throughout this period; the Single-Party state was a means to this end. Crawford distinguishes from the colonials, who demanded mere obedience, from the Nationalists, who demanded identification with the regime as well.

The contradictions of the ISI-developmental economics came to a head in the late '70s and early '80s, coinciding with the Neoliberal turn in the Atlantic and Pacific. Comparing unfavourably to the so-called East-Asian Miracles, African states were forced to adopt demands for structural readjustments if they wanted foreign aid. Importantly, central planners for many of the high-priced national projects failed to accurately assess their viability in the long-term. And even when state-owned enterprises were up for auction, the publics were rightly suspicious of insider dealing. First on the neoliberal chopping block were whatever welfare instruments that existed, rather than offshore accounts of corrupt politicians.

The gangrene of corruption and autocracy was so entrenched, argues Crawford, that there was no hope of economic recovery without democratic reform. Predictably, shock-therapy market policy and chaotic democraticisation accomplished little. Civil Society inched a toe-hold in to prevent the return to violent autocracy, which saw an enhanced role for women in society. Neoliberals explained away the failure of their prescribed medicines by accusing disinterested native bureaucrats of not implementing them as instructed.

Crawford also notes the proliferation of small arms as blowback from 'ended' wars. Lacking any opportunity for upward social mobility, joining an insurgency offered a living for demobilised young soldiers. Of note was the diamond trade, which became monopolised by militias in South Central Africa.

Thomson, Chapter 4

Thomson encourages students of African Politics to jettison racist caricatures of tribalist conflict and see ethnicity as a force of political mobilisation, a banner which marshals people to address a political problem. Indeed, the source of conflict is no different in Africa than anywhere else.

Ironically, modern tribal groups are a relatively recent phenomenon that emerged under colonialism and *not* a primordial thread of Africa's socio-historical tapestry. Modernity, rather than tempering ethnic

ties, has emboldened them. The process was initiated by the colonisers, who invented oversimplified categories to expedite imperial administration; 'tribal' intermediaries complied to bring home spoils in an precarious environment characterised by competition for scare resources. After independence, these socially constructed groups endured as a matter of convenience. Moreover, it is as often a force for progress and pluralism as it is a wedge which divides people and legitimises violence.

Adopting Rothchild's model of *hegemonic exchange*, Thomson argues that the strong central state buys off challengers through spoils. This encounters three major problems: first, that perfect representation and balance is nearly impossible, or can become a political struggle; second, that this system is massively inefficient and sensitive to corruption; and third, that this system necessarily limits mass public participation in the political process. Indeed, these 'problems' are sometimes deliberately stoked when leaders wish to elevate one group or another. Thus, states relying on ethnic balancing may have been stable but performed ill and let their legitimacy wither. When the spoils dry up, the ethnic balance falls apart. Thomson suggests that channeling ethnic mobilisation into democratic contests instead of divvying up spoils will improve governance on the continent.

The author then switches gears to discuss the role of faith in African politics. Like ethnicity, African Islam and Christianity were brought to the continent from without, but over millennia rather than a single generation. Like always and everywhere, the orthopraxy deferred to local customs and animist practices, making the African variants of major world religions distinct. An important consequence of Africans' piety is that religious institutions were almost never censored or persecuted like other civil society organisations, even in the most extreme cases. While faith often mobilises political actors, religious institutions prefer to enjoy the separate sphere rather than cross over.

That said, some religious leaders *do* take an active interest in politics, especially Hardline Christians and Salafists. Most of these congregations and brotherhoods are active in politics but only few commit violence in the name of belief, typically in existing conflict zones. These impulses, peaceful and non-violent alike, reflect disenchantment with the political status quo; religion rationalises and justifies instrumental choices.

Thomson concludes their discussion by reminding the reader of nationalist identity-building undertaken during the Independence struggles. Ethnicity and religion were not completely suppressed but were thought of as political objects the Nation had to overcome to realise modernity and development.Ironically, without recourse to other legitimate representation, the artificial constructs of colonial tribes and foreign religions were elevated as vehicles for political mobilisation and governance.

To illustrate his points, Thomson provides a case study: Nigeria. The British invented the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani out of convenience with no underlying reflection of social relations in the territory at the time. The three groups corresponded to the three colonial administrative areas the British lumped them into; missionaries and the authorities promoted a single *lingua franca* within each area to simplify their indoctrination. The northern Hausa-Fulani remained Muslim, however, which created a 2-vs-1 situation with the Christianised south (despite the north being more populated). As Nigeria's political and economic fortunes floundered, religious civil society organisations filled the state welfare role that structural readjustments had axed. Islamic law appeals to people jaded with bureaucratic corruption. It is in this environment that jihadist guerillas like Boko Haram operate: they justify their actions with religion, but they are indeed responding to socio-economic disenfranchisement.