

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 democratisation 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