

Colonial Rule & Its Effects

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Thomson provides a useful chart on page 20 of the text (Table 2.1) which summarises the legacy of colonial rule. He lists six main themes of problems which go on to handicap the ability of African states to modernise their politics, economy, and society. Arbitrary territorial boundaries were imposed with no historical or economical concern; the colonisers developed only lopsided state hegemony; no legitimacy was ever sought for extractive colonial states; indirect rule was administered by an African bourgeoisie who were alienated from the peasant class. In the political economic sphere, the mode of production was only developed to produce primary goods for the imperial core; compounded with the arbitrary boundaries, many states found themselves unable to diversify into self-sustaining economies. Lastly, institutional democracy was left behind as an accident, rather than developing organically, meaning that it hadn't yet acquired sufficient inertia to overcome the other five problems of colonialism.

Thomson includes counter-arguments from some (white) historians who argue that the colonisers weren't *all* that bad. Specifically, infant mortality fell after European contact, as best as we can tell from the historical record. Western education systems were introduced, allowing an African intelligentsia to develop. These historians argue that even if the colonisers left behind extractive industries or monocrop agriculture, at least these instruments of revenue were now in the hands of Africans.

The chapter concludes with a case study of Kenya, a country which embodies aspects of all the arguments presented. It was first widely colonised by Bantu people but became a host to many ethnicities. The territory was then visited by Arab traders from Zanzibar and Oman before falling under British dominion in the 19th century. After the Kenyan elite forced out British rule in the 1960s, the ruling parties consolidated power and returned to an authoritarian bureaucratic model within a decade. The corrupt KANU coalition controlled the state until 2002, when it was finally defeated in parliamentary elections.