Chapter Three

Internal Reflection of the World Historical Context

Historical background and the world political and economic situation determine the causality, appearance, and intensity of the phenomenon of the absence of effective government.\(^1\) Many of the problems of African states have been ascribed to the imposition of colonial rule and the modern state system\(^2\) But while colonialism set the stage, the end of the Cold War was are more important factor. The globalisation process, especially in the economic context, not only intensified the breakdown of effective government, but also increased its negative effect on the world order. This chapter explains these external factors and their effects on the internal context.

Colonialism

The six-century legacy of colonialism is one of the most important historical contexts for the absence of effective government.\(^3\) Almost every state in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America that has dealt with the phenomenon has had a colonial inheritance,\(^4\) but Africa is the only continent to have had its entire territory (with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia) colonised by seven European countries.\(^5\)

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\(^4\) Ibid., 5.

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The outcomes of colonialism and decolonisation were manifested differently on every continent because of different historical backgrounds. The Ottoman Empire’s hegemony from the western Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, especially between the 16th and 19th centuries, Indian Hindu rule in South Asia from the 9th through the 14th centuries,6 and European colonialism differ in many respects. Differences can also be seen between the first wave of colonisation in South and North America between the 15th and 19th centuries and the second wave in other parts of the world in the 19th and 20th centuries. One of the most important of these differences was the motive for colonisation, which was occupation in the Americas but exploitation of natural resources in Africa and Asia, where Europe largely remained on the periphery.7 The time frame of decolonisation also differed, from one-and-a-half to three centuries in the American colonies but only 36 years (between 1945 and 1981) in most colonial territories of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.

Today the colonial heritage still has a malign effect on the economic, social, and political structures of the former colonial territories.8 Because of the complexity of this issue, this section focuses on colonialism in Africa.

Arbitrary Boundaries

European powers twice determined the boundaries of the colonial territories, first when they divided them among themselves and later when new states were formed in the colonial territories. The legal basis of colonisation and colonial borders in Africa was largely determined in the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885. European countries—France, Great Britain, Italy, and Germany—came together ‘as a forum for the liberalization and internationalization of trade in Africa’. The main aim of the conference was however, to divide the African territories in order to eliminate potential conflict among them. While legalizing ‘the partition and subordination of the continent to European states’ was the centre issue for the Berlin conference, there was little consideration for ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, economic, and demographic features.9

1880–1935 (London: James Curry, 1990). At one point, 11 European imperial countries occupied Africa, but by 1914 the number was reduced to 7: Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.
7 Ibid., 5.