The Role of Colonialism in the North South Divide

By

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Abstract

In this paper we evaluate the impact of colonialism on development on the North-South Divide with a crucial focus on Africa. In the world context, colonialism had very heterogeneous effects, operating through many mechanisms, sometimes encouraging development sometimes retarding it. In the African case, however, this heterogeneity is muted, making an assessment of the average effect more interesting. We emphasize that to draw conclusions it is necessary not just to know what actually happened to development during the colonial period, but also to take a view on what might have happened without colonialism and also to take into account the legacy of colonialism. We argue that in the light of plausible counter-factuals, colonialism probably had a uniformly negative effect on development in the North-South Divide. The study builds on the framework of colonial activities, its connection to development studies, and its critique of the concept of the global North and the global South, mostly in relation to colonialism and its consequences. Thereby the North-South divide is challenged.

Introduction

The impact of colonialism in the Global South or more generally the colonized countries is a question which has reverberated though the social sciences for over a century. In the context of the late 19th Century "Scramble for Africa", Marxists like Lenin formed an unlikely consensus with colonial administrators in believing that European colonization would have very positive effects on African economic development. By 1926 a British academic was writing of an " Economic Revolution in British West Africa" unleashed by the colonial powers on backward Africa (McPhee, 1926). This consensus between left and right continues to the present,

with Lenin being replaced by Warren (1980), who argue that the empirical evidence is consistent with the Marxist view that imperialism has dragged Africa closer to capitalism, and colonial administrators being replaced by Ferguson (2002.) Interestingly, these scholars refer to many of the same empirical outcomes though starting from a different set of presumptions about the intentions of the colonizers. Perhaps even more interesting, they often have the same counter-factual in mind, without colonial intervention Africa would have stayed backward. Opposed to this eccentric consensus is a vast literature blaming colonization for all the ills of former colonies, including persistent poverty and dictatorship.

Colonialism is neither a European phenomenon, nor is it restricted to the Scramble for Africa (which may itself not have been a completely European phenomenon since one can argue that Ethiopia under Menelik II also took part). Modern China is an Empire constructed over millennia primarily by the Han Chinese. The Ottomans constructed a vast empire in the late Middle Ages and Early Modern period which stretched from the Gates of Vienna to Iraq, Yemen and Tunisia. The Russians colonized Siberia and large parts of Central Asia and in the 100 years before the conquest of the Americas the Incas created a huge empire stretching from southern Colombia to Chile and northwestern Argentina. Britain was colonized by the Angles, Danes, Jutes and Saxons and subsequently the Normans.

In this article we restrict attention to European colonization and focus on the Global South especially in Africa, since this has been the crucible of much of the academic debate and where the literature spans the entire spectrum of answers. We also restrict our attention to formal colonization rather than more general 'interaction' with potential colonial powers or the type of 'informal empires' postulated to exist by Robinson (1953). This means we leave a lot out. In the context of African development for instance we put aside the issue of the impact of the Atlantic and other slave trades on the development of Africa (Nunn, 2008) except to the extent that it molds the initial conditions at the time of colonization. We also set aside the question of whether the huge adverse health effects of colonialism were really just due to 'contact' (and thus would invariably have happened in the wake of simple trade expansion) or can be attributed to colonialism. We also focus

simply on the impact of colonialism for the development of the colonies not the colonizing country, even though this is an important topic (Williams, 2005).

Methodology

The study mainly relied on secondary sources of information, which involved using written materials or documents. These sources, which include textbooks, academic journals, and news articles authored and published by numerous historians, are crucial for reconstructing historical events. A multidisciplinary approach was also used, allowing us to draw on data or expertise from other fields that are closely related to the humanities and social sciences. These models were utilized to generate the data that was used to rebuild this work and to ensure that there was little chance of content distortion.

Conceptual Clarification

Colonialism

To fully understand Colonialism, one should make clear what is meant when talking about the notion of colonialism. Colonialism might be comprehended in different ways. While most connect the concept of colonization to European colonization (Diamond, 1997), others have argued for a wider conceptualization. Therefore, one possible definition of colonialism is presented below.

Jürgen Osterhammel quotes Philip Curtin and interprets colonialism as the "domination of people of another culture" (2010:p.15). However, Osterhammel claims that the definition of colonialism must include other factors: a society which is manipulated externally, but also that the colonized society is obliged to transform and adapt to the colonizers' interests, as well as the fact that colonizers do not acknowledge earlier cultures in the colonized society, and a demand to civilizing the "barbaric others" (ibid.). By considering this, Osterhammel lands in the following definition of colonialism:

Colonialism is a relationship of domination between an indigenous [...] majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority

and of their ordained mandate to rule. (Osterhammel, 2010:p.16-17).

Though, in his book, *Colonialism*, Osterhammel also mentions the notion of colonialism without a colony. This could be possible to see within countries, where the colonialism is not about a "mother country" and a colony which is geographically far away. Colonialism without colonies is more about a superior or dominant center of power standing against a peripheral society (Osterhammel, 2010:p.17). Consequently, colonialism must also be understood as a process that can happen within a society. On the other hand, colonialism can be argued to be a global mechanism and be seen as something that still marks the world (Eriksson Baaz, 2005:p.34). According to Spivak, colonialism is to be linked to a global process which was initiated due to the colonies distribution of labor. In turn, this led to globally unequal power relations in which the "Western" superiority and the colonies' production of goods to the "West" simply were expected (Spivak, in Kapoor, 2004:p.629).

North-South Divide

The terms North and South are used in scientific as well as political discourse to describe the relationship between the rich and industrialized countries on the one hand and the poor, less industrialized countries on the other hand. Despite the geographic connotation, the dividing line between North and South is not a spatial one since several countries from the Southern Hemisphere belong to the North and vice versa. Instead, central to the concepts of North and South are different economic, political, and social structures, which together generate a specific level of development, which can be measured using a variety of indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP) per head, productivity, unemployment, illiteracy rates, infant mortality, life expectancy, and the like.

While economic and social indicators describe the structural aspects of the North–South divide, a political analysis of the North–South conflict has to deal with the emergence of different coalitions and institutions, representing the interests of South or North in the domain of international politics. The history of the developing countries also plays an important role in this context since it was the experience of colonial subjugation and oppression which contributed to the formation of a common, anti-colonial identity in the South. This article makes use

of both definitions of North and South: one of them describes the structural features of the North–South relationship and one relating to North and South as political forces, themselves shaping world affairs.

The origins of the North-South divide lie in colonialism. The colonial encounter devastated the indigenous civilizations of Asia, Africa, and the Americas, and enabled Europeans to appropriate and exploit their lands, labour, and natural resources. Colonialism converted self-reliant subsistence economies into outposts of Europe that exported agricultural products, minerals, and timber, and imported manufactured goods. Mining, logging, and cash-crop production destroyed forests, dispossessed local communities, and dramatically altered the ecosystems of the colonized territories. International law justified the colonial enterprise by constructing native populations as racially and culturally inferior and by asserting a moral duty to "civilize" them through compulsory assimilation to European ways. Influenced by Enlightenment scholars and philosophers, international law decreed the domination of nature and the development of industry as the key obligations of civilized states. Societies that lived in harmony with nature were pronounced "uncivilized" and in need of "modernization" and "development." Colonialism universalized European notions of nature as a commodity for human exploitation while creating a global economy that systematically subordinated the global South. For example, post-colonial states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were integrated into the Northern-dominated world economy as exporters of primary commodities and importers of manufactured products. Because the terms of trade consistently favoured manufactured goods over primary products, the nations of the global South were required to export increasing amounts of their output in order to acquire the same amount of manufactured goods. Efforts to boost national earnings by increasing the production of minerals, timber, and agricultural products generally glutted global markets with primary commodities and depressed prices, thereby reducing Southern export earnings, exacerbating Southern poverty, and reinforcing the North-South economic divide. The North's control over a large part of the world's resources from the colonial era to the present fuelled the North's industrial development and enabled the North to maintain levels of consumption far beyond the limits of its own natural resource base. As historian Feldman observes, "Much of the price of that achievement was paid by the population of the Third World in the form of exploitation, poverty,

and human suffering." (Feldman, 1966, pp 378-395)The South's economic dependency on export production enabled the North to exploit Southern resources at prices that did not reflect the social and environmental costs of production.

The Role of Colonalism in the North-South Divide

Colonialism has played a significant role in shaping the North-South divide as we understand it today. Colonialism refers to the process by which European powers, during the 15th to 20th centuries, established colonies in various parts of the world, primarily in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The obvious reason for the very wide dispersion of views about the role of colonialism is that it is very difficult to construct a convincing research design to examine its impact. Without such a systematic approach ideology has much more scope for allowing scholars to pick and choose facts which fit into their view of the world. Central is the problem that there is not a well defined counter-factual to answer the question: what would the income per-capita of Ghana be today if it had not been colonized? Though a few countries were not colonized by the Europeans such as China, Iran, Japan, and Thailand, one cannot use these as a control group because it is surely not a coincidence that these countries were not colonized, potentially biasing the findings. In other cases, such as Barbados or Mauritius which were uninhabited at the time of colonization, the counter-factual question becomes exceedingly speculative. Nevertheless, it is also clear from Acemoglu, (2002) that colonialism had very heterogeneous effects. It seems difficult to believe that in any plausible counter-factual Australia or the United States would today have higher GDP per-capita if they had not been colonized. At the same time, as we will argue in the essay it is difficult (for us) to believe that the income per-capita of Botswana or Ghana would not be higher today had it not been colonized. Even though Botswana has been an economic success since independence in 1966 this was not because of colonialism, but despite it (Leith, 2005,). Other cases are of course much more ambiguous. Most parts of Africa did not have the types of centralized political institutions that Botswana or Ghana had and even when they did they were often much less accountable and militarized, as in Buganda, Rwanda or Zululand. Because colonialism was such a heterogeneous phenomenon taking different forms and interacting with different circumstances this means that it is not very interesting to inquire as to what the average effect of colonialism was on development. Of course this would not be true if ones approach was normative.

We do not believe that colonialism could have ever have been good according to any coherent normative criteria. When the focus is on development, income per-capita, average educational attainment, or average life expectancy, however, one cannot generally say colonialism was good or bad independent of context. If one accepts this position, then our inability to propose a definitive identification strategy to estimate "*the* causal effect of colonialism on development" turns out to be less of a problem. There is no one causal effect, but rather different effects working through different mechanisms and channels. Sometimes the net effect of these in a country is (almost surely) positive (Australia) sometimes it is (probably) negative (Botswana and Ghana). The more interesting thing is to conceptualize the mechanisms via which colonialism influenced development and try to investigate empirically how these worked. Providing causal estimates of the impact of specific mechanisms may be much more feasible and, subject to issues of external validity, it may even then be possible to aggregate these as one way to come to a conclusion about the net effect of colonialism.

The imposition of colonialism on Africa altered its history forever. African modes of thought, patterns of cultural development, and ways of life were forever impacted by the change in political structure brought about by colonialism. The African economy was significantly changed by the Atlantic slave trade through the process of imperialism and the economic policies that accompanied colonization. Prior to the "Scramble for Africa" or the official partition of Africa by the major European nations, African economies were advancing in every area, particularly in the area of trade. The aim of colonialism is to exploit the physical, human, and economic resources of an area to benefit the colonizing nation. European powers pursued this goal by encouraging the development of a commodity based trading system, a cash crop agriculture system, and by building a trade network linking the total economic output of a region to the demands of the colonizing state. The development of colonialism and the partition of Africa by the European colonial powers arrested the natural development of the African economic system.

Africa prior to colonialism was not economical1y isolated from the rest of the world. Indeed, African states had engaged in international trade from the time of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt, and west Africa specifically had developed

extensive international trading systems during the eras of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. These huge empires relied heavily on the taxing of foreign trade to finance government expenditures. The wealth of these nations was dependent largely on the trade in gold, but also on the levying of customs, taxes, booty from foreign expeditions, and fees associated with administrative offices. However, even more significant to the era of colonialism is the era of the Atlantic slave trade. The Atlantic slave trade existed in Africa for over three hundred years and introduced to the continent sophisticated systems of credit and exchange. Although these markets existed prior to the trade, the great increase in trading brought about by European demand for slaves stimulated their further development. Masi (2020); "Credit, debt in currency, and interest all developed apace with the trade." One result of the increase in international trade was that indigenous African economy was subordinated to the interests of Europe. The slave trading system did this by substituting European manufactured products for those products which normally would have been made locally. Thus we see early developing a pattern of Africa as a source of raw materials, in this case labor, and as only a consumer of goods. The result of such uneven trade is evident. Even innocuous imports such as textiles, competed damagingly with local products, with the result that the technological gap between Africa and Europe, confined in the 15th century to shipping and Firearms, widened to such an extent that African technology failed to progress. This pattern of unbalanced trade continued into the period of colonialism and remains today. In spite of this, local states still controlled the supply side of the slave trading system. Although some slave raiding was done by European merchants, they still depended on the cooperation of local rulers to insure a steady supply of slaves for the market. In fact, it has argued that the slave trade itself was an essential part if the development of some African states. Masi (2020); "The compulsions of the times were such that neither Europeans nor Africans had any alternatives but to engage in the trade." In any event, the development of the Atlantic slave trade forever altered the relationship between Africa and Europe.

The nineteenth century and the end of slaving saw the commercial integration of the entire continent of Africa: north, west, south, and central. Europe was still rapidly developing and therefore needed the raw materials that Africa had to offer. Import needs and raw materials prices in the late nineteenth century do not

support the assertion that the industrial core economies were increasingly dependent on raw materials supplies from the periphery. The raw materials of the Industrial Revolution had been coal, iron ore, cotton, and wool, and these the core produced itself. These goods could therefore be considered as luxuries to the European market. As Europeans exercised greater and greater control over the production of these commodities and as they began to establish colonies in Africa, the prices for these goods were driven down. Masi (2020); "Prices for palm oil and kernels - the great staples that developed at mid-century actually fell in the last three decades." Thus we see that the European colonizing powers sought to control the economics of Africa more and more. To do this, power was wrested from local control and in 1880, the partition of Africa began in earnest. The economic goals of colonialism were simple: to provide maximum economic benefit to the colonizing power at the lowest possible price. As the effects of the Berlin Conference which establish the "rules" of the partition game became clear, those areas of Africa which had previously been developing significant trade and economies of their own were brought under the control of European economic policies. To the British, French, and Germans, the primary colonizing nations, the individual needs of their colonial subjects were not important. Instead the desire to "vertically integrate" the colonies of Europe by controlling production from start to finish became the overriding goal of colonial agents.

Colonialism was not just about economic subjugation, but about the ability to wrest control of the local economy from African rulers. Improving the production methods or strengthening the economy was not important. Masi (2020); "The British opposed the general development of palm oil plantations in Nigeria, despite the fact that the collection method of production was wasteful and produced a poor quality of oil." Colonial powers instituted trade controls that limited colonial imports to those from the colonizing power and restricted exports to that same market. This reduced the freedom of choice in marketing goods that was previously available to commodities producers. Taking this power away under the guise of colonial development made traditional rulers weaker because their power base was destroyed. Since Africans were not allowed to improve their methods or to market their goods freely, they were forced into the colonial system. By insisting on the development of certain crops, Europeans undermined the existing economic power structure and made Africa totally reliant upon Europe

for their economic destiny. Driven by outside forces, the local fanner was no longer able to decide for himself what crops to grow or what resources to cultivate. Instead, the decision was made for him in a predetermined market. Under the British for example, colonial economic policy reached far and wide. Masi (2020); "few commodities escaped the 'long ann' of the British raw materials trade." One of the most significant reasons for such stringent economic controls was the desire for colonies to be self supporting. Although originally European nations took great interest in Africa, they felt that the main duty of the colonial governments was to maintain law and order at the lowest possible cost. Economic development and education were considered unimportant and were left to the private sector. Designed to enrich the mother country, colonies were expected to foot the bill for their internal development and administration. Masi (2020); "One measure of the viability of a colonial territory was its financial self sufficiency." Ironically, the bill for colonialism was covered in the same way that West African nations had always paid for government: through the taxation of trade. Acemoglu (2002); "A large portion of government revenue derived, directly and indirectly, from foreign trade." Unlike its predecessors however, the taxing authorities were foreign powers who had no real interest in supplying the needs of local citizens. Taxing foreign trade and strictly regulating the economy paid for any expenditure for development.

Impact of Colonialism in the North-South Divide

The impact of colonialism affected the Global South and especially Africans in other ways as well. While economic policies were designed to keep prices low, under colonialism, agriculture became increasingly commercialized. "The commercialization of land provided an avenue of escape for many of the males of the servile and cheap labor force in agriculture and added the price of land to the cost of production." Thus colonialism saw the rise of a large, landless class of laborers who traveled from place to place in search of work. It became easier to provide wage labor than to produce for the export market. It was certainly an easier and more secure way of obtaining money for taxes and for purchasing consumer goods. Colonialism also changed patterns of work and gender roles. The demands of the cash crop economy forced many women and children into the production system. Achebe (2012); "these women and children performed the bulk of the labor in farming enterprises that considerably enriched many owners."

Colonialism and its economic demands irrevocably altered the social structure of many African societies and set the stage for later problems in African economic development.

Colonialism lasted in Africa for only a period of about eighty years. During that time, colonial governments built a substantial infrastructure, introduced a cash crop system of agriculture, and changed the traditional standards of wealth and status. Education reforms were introduced and in many areas, modem state systems implemented. However, the long term economic impact of European development held some very negative consequences for Africa also. The infrastructure that was developed was designed to exploit the natural resources of the colonies. Also, the technological and industrial development that had been occurring in Africa was stalled by the imposition of colonialism. Prior to the partition of Africa, local production provided Africans with a wide variety of consumer goods. The policies of colonialism forced the demise of African industry and created a reliance on imported goods from Europe. Had native industry been encouraged and cultivated by the colonizing powers, Africa would probably be in a much better economic and technological position today. The most significant negative impact of colonialism on Africa was the overemphasis on single cash crop production. Colonial African economies were focused on the production of one or two agricultural products for consumption in the world markets. The coming of independence during the mid nineteen sixties led to the breakup of many large colonies. The individual nations that remained often could not or did not produce the range of agricultural goods that were produced prior to independence and the breakup of colonies. An example of this is in French West Africa. The interior states of Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali did not have access to the lucrative cocoa market that tided Cote D'Ivoire through the first precarious days of independence. Other consequences of colonialism are the destruction of trans-African trade and cooperation. Prior to the partition of Africa, the continent had become increasingly integrated economically, with trade occurring north-south and east-west. The policies of the governing powers redirected all African trade to the international export market. Thus today, there is little in the way of inter-African trade, and the pattern of economic dependence continues.

The role of colonialism in the North-South divide has had numerous negative impacts and continues to shape the global economic and social landscape in several ways, as Colonial powers extracted vast amounts of resources from their colonies, often at the expense of the local populations. Raw materials, such as minerals, agricultural products, and labor, were forcibly taken and used to fuel the industrialization and economic development of the colonizing nations. This exploitation resulted in economic underdevelopment of the colonized regions and contributed to the wealth disparity between the North and the South.

Colonial powers established trade patterns that favored their own interests, resulting in unequal trade relationships between the North and the South. Colonized regions were often relegated to supplying raw materials to the industrialized North, while being forced to import manufactured goods at high prices. This perpetuated a dependence on the North and hindered the development of local industries and economies, thus it can be said that Colonialism disrupted existing social, cultural, and political systems in colonized regions. Indigenous knowledge, institutions, and governance structures were often undermined or destroyed, leading to a loss of cultural identity and social cohesion. This disruption had long-term effects on the ability of societies to recover and develop independently.

Colonial powers imposed their own cultural values, languages, and institutions on colonized populations, often resulting in the erasure or marginalization of local cultures. This cultural imposition contributed to a sense of inferiority and loss of identity among colonized communities, further perpetuating social divisions and inequalities, which led to the mapping of arbitrary borders without regard for existing ethnic, cultural, or political boundaries. This led to the creation of artificial nations with diverse populations and historical grievances. The legacy of these arbitrary borders has resulted in ongoing conflicts, ethnic tensions, and unstable political situations in many post-colonial countries, hindering their development and perpetuating divisions. The power imbalances created during the colonial era have persisted in the post-colonial period. Former colonial powers continue to hold economic and political influence over their former colonies, influencing decision-making processes, trade agreements, and resource exploitation. This perpetuates the unequal power relations between the North and the South and

hampers efforts to address the North-South divide, as they left behind weak or exploitative institutions in the colonized regions, which continue to hinder development efforts. These institutions may lack transparency, accountability, and effectiveness, leading to corruption, social unrest, and economic stagnation.

The Way Forward

The role of colonialism in the North-South divide is a complex and multifaceted issue that has had long-lasting impacts on societies around the world. While it is important to acknowledge the historical context and the influence of colonial powers in shaping the present-day divide, it is equally crucial to recognize that the divide is influenced by a wide range of factors beyond colonialism. Colonialism, as a system of political and economic domination, often resulted in the exploitation of resources and the imposition of cultural and social hierarchies. In many cases, colonial powers prioritized their own economic interests, leading to the extraction of wealth from colonized regions and the establishment of structures that perpetuated social and economic inequalities. In the context of the North-South divide, colonial powers played a significant role in shaping the economic and social landscapes of different regions. In some cases, colonial powers favored certain regions for resource extraction or strategic reasons, leading to disparities in development and infrastructure between the North and South. Additionally, colonial policies often contributed to the marginalization and disempowerment of certain communities, exacerbating existing divisions. However, it is important to note that the North-South divide cannot be solely attributed to colonialism. There are numerous other factors, including geographic, historical, political, and socioeconomic factors that have contributed to the divide. These factors include natural resource endowments, historical conflicts, governance structures, demographic patterns, and more.

Moving forward, addressing the North-South divide requires a comprehensive and nuanced approach that takes into account the historical legacies of colonialism while also addressing the contemporary challenges faced by both regions. This includes efforts to promote inclusive economic development, improve infrastructure and access to basic services, foster regional cooperation, and tackle issues such as poverty, inequality, and governance. Additionally, it is essential to prioritize dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation between different regions

and communities. This involves recognizing the diverse perspectives and experiences within the North and the South, and working towards building bridges, fostering mutual respect, and promoting equal opportunities for all. Ultimately, overcoming the North-South divide requires a collective effort that involves government institutions, civil society organizations, community leaders, and individuals. By acknowledging the historical role of colonialism while also addressing the multifaceted factors that contribute to the divide, it becomes possible to work towards a more equitable and inclusive future for all regions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, It is important to note that colonialism is not the sole factor responsible for the North-South divide, and other factors such as globalization, geopolitics, and historical legacies also contribute to the divide. However, the historical impact of colonialism on the economic, social, and political structures of the colonized regions has played a significant role in shaping the disparities between the global North and South that persist today. Constructivist-functionalism as an alternative to Neoliberalism in the Global South has the potential to play a vital role in narrowing the North-South divide. However, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive and sustainable approach that addresses the specific needs of the regions in the Global South. It is essential to acknowledge and address these negative impacts of colonialism to foster equitable and sustainable development and work towards reducing the North-South divide. This includes promoting decolonization, supporting local initiatives and institutions, and addressing historical injustices to build more inclusive and just societies. Far from producing prosperity, export-led development strategies depleted the South's natural resources, harmed human health, and reinforced social and economic inequality by imposing disparate environmental burdens on the communities targeted for petroleum extraction, mining, and other forms of resource exploitation. Much of the environmental degradation in the global South has been caused by export-oriented production to satisfy the needs and desires of Northern consumers rather than local consumption.

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