

On Colonialism and Development – Why the Underdevelopment of the South cannot be Delinked from the Experience of the Past

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Abstract

Colonialism as a topic of discussion has retained a level of sensitivity both within and outside academia. Questions revolving around its merits and legacy, amongst other related issues within post-colonial societies, have remained an issue of debate; with different sides arming themselves with historical evidences to back their positions. Contemporary revival of the topic within academia warrants a relook at colonialism and an analysis of its utility or the reverse, from the perspective of the third world. This essay uses a historical lens to assess colonialism and how its legacy has influenced and affected the development of former colonies. The author draws on secondary data to make arguments and highlight inherent inconsistencies within debates that glorified the colonization of the global south. The essay draws on a historical approach and attempts to demonstrate the linkage between contemporary developmental challenges of former colonies and colonial policies pursued by imperial Europe. In highlighting the links between development challenge and colonialism, the author draws on historical records, and related works to demonstrate the influences of colonialism on development.

Keywords: Colonialism, Development, Global-South, Europe, West

Introduction

Developing countries may have moved away from assigning developmental (or lack of it) blame to colonial legacies. However, contemporary revival of the debate, and calls in sections of academia for decolonization¹ necessitates a critical evaluation of colonialism's link to developmental approaches adopted by and for the global-south, as well as the current developmental issues plaguing these countries.² The debate on the utility of colonialism in the fortunes of the global-south has been exhausted in literature. The works of Boahen (1987), Hochschild (1999), Césaire (2000), Rodney (2010), and Memmi (1991), document various aspects of the '*mission civilisatrice*'³ in the global south. Others including Fergusson (1994), Cooper's and Packard's (1997) attempt to analyse the colonial legacies and its effects on the shaping of development agenda in the global-south. These debates not only highlight contemporary asymmetries in developmental paths of post-colonial states, but imply a level of continuity and the effects of colonialism in contemporary development efforts of such states.

Although tagged as a '*mission civilisatrice*', colonialism, broadly speaking, is perceived by the global-south as, perhaps, the worst calamity to have befallen them (Barkawi, 2004). Not only did they suffer wars and conquest, extending to genocidal levels in some societies, associated with this 'civilizing mission' has been their exposure to new threats, dependency and other vulnerabilities associated with the world economy.⁴ This dominating and rapacious perception of colonialism by the subjugated societies is an antithesis of how the West believes its colonial legacy should be viewed; especially in light of discernible influences of colonialism in contemporary development apparatus. (See the arguments of Heldring & Robinson, 2012; Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2001; Lange, Mahoney & Vom Hau, 2006; Gilley, 2017 on colonialism and development). This divergence in perception necessitates a review of the links between colonialism and developmental efforts in the global-south.

Research Question and Methodology

This essay attempts to answer the question on the relationship between colonialism and developmental approaches within the global-south. It aims at assessing how the colonial architecture transformed the economies of the south and its impacts on post-colonial approaches and policies of development. Furthermore, it examines how these effects are reflected within

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1. For more on this debate, see Gilley Bruce's article *The Case for Colonialism* and associated literature.
 2. Global South in this context is used primarily to refer to Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin American countries which were colonized by European powers.
 3. Used loosely to connote the civilizing agenda often used in justifications for colonialism, i.e. as a westernization of the colonies, and presumptions of 'cultural backwardness' which justified such colonial interventions.
 4. For more on this ills and perceptions on colonialism, see Barkawi (2004).

contemporary developmental architecture.⁵ Therefore, the research question guiding this essay is: In what ways has colonialism-influenced development discourse affected the development of the global-south?

The work draws on literature on colonialism in making arguments on the effects of colonialism in the development of the global-south, and examines contemporary examples to back the arguments made. The works consulted are subjected to a content analysis and critique, using a historical lens, to reflect the position of the writer. The reliance on a historical approach, using works cited in related literature, situates arguments in demonstrable cases of colonial effects on the development of the global-south.

The Theoretical Underpinnings of Colonialism and Development

Analyses of colonialism's relationship with development are often situated within a structural approach to growth, dependency theory arguments or modernization theories. While the first two argue against the possibility of a mutually beneficial relationship between the North and South due to colonial and structural legacies (that exploit) the colonies, modernization theory advocates the adoption of modern institutions, often interpreted as western (Ferraro, 2008; Frank, 1966; Love, 1980; and Cardoso, 1982). Modernization theorists' influence in development approach is discernible from the Washington Consensus and its prescriptions of structural adjustment of the south to stimulate development.

Dependency theory, on the other hand, draws on colonial structures that, it argued, have facilitated the creation of *feeder economies* on the periphery, contributing to underdevelopment of the global-south. These theorists argue that such structures have created dependencies, whereby the colonies are tied to the metropole i.e. former imperial masters. Thus, their developmental path and progress are dependent on factors controlled by their imperial masters (Paul, 1957; Rodney, 1972; Wallerstein, 2004 & 2011). Although, these arguments have been criticized for failing to account for the development of some post-colonial states amongst a host of other criticisms, it nonetheless gives an idea on colonialism's influence on development theory within the immediate years of independence.

Notwithstanding the inherent contrast between colonialism theories (dependency and structural arguments) and modernization argument, a fundamental link between the two, that is, the role of the west in the development of the global-south can be inferred. This convergence on the perceived need to adopt growth institutions (under modernization theory, and the reverse in dependency) underwrites the linkage between colonialism and development literature. Dependency theorists' arguments about colonial institutions either as injurious, or otherwise, to growth in the global-south will be assessed in this paper.

5. Developmental architecture should be viewed as the institutions, personnel, policies and programs that underpin contemporary development agenda; not only in the global-south, but in the western societies that contribute to this process.

From Theory to Policy

Development discourse from the colonial era has been shaped in a variety of ways beyond the major theories that have influenced development in the global-south, to the actual policies pursued by individual states. On the theoretical front, the spillage and influence of development theories with roots in colonial debate can be inferred from developmental policies and approaches adopted in the aftermath of colonialism.

Amongst these development approaches in the global-south had been the ascent in advocacy for South–South trade in the decades after independence. A further manifestation in this line of argument are development theories and policies that advocated for Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI)⁶ and Export Led Growth, in an attempt to transcend structural limitations inherited at independence (Bruton, 1998 and Baer 1972).⁷ The proliferation of ISI among developing countries in the immediate post-colonial years attests, to a large extent, to the influences of such development theories on developmental policies of states.

Development Today and Links to Colonialism

The concept of development can be argued as being embedded with an implicit idea of a superior-inferior relationship. Not only is the framing of ‘development’ a recreation of *‘mission-civilisatrice’*, the vocabulary, policies and practices underpinning the approach to development are reflective of the same ‘western arrogance’ of superiority and perceived moral duty to civilize the world.⁸ Development approaches, like colonialism, are structured around an idea of erasing ways of life, introduction of social regulations and reproduction of new hierarchies without a full understanding of the local context (Fergusson, 1994).

This ‘hegemony’ of development architecture has not only created a replica of colonialism’s attempt at assimilation, but is, perhaps, doomed to remake the same errors, as shown in the failure of Structural Adjustment and its attempts to prescribe a modernist (liberal) approach to

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6. ISI theoretically builds on Infant Industry argument, Mercantilist and Keynesian theories. It sought to build up domestic industrialization through reducing imports and substituting it with domestic goods. Economists, including Baer (1972), argue that developed countries at a stage in their developing process utilized ISI as a strategy of growth.
 7. The works of Storper (1991); Power (1966); Puga & Venables (1999) and Hirschman (1968) explore, in details, the conditions underpinning the development growth strategies adopted by the developing world within the early decades after independence.
 8. Pigg (1992), as quoted by Cooper and Packard (1997), in examining development literature and framing narratives. The cultural depiction of Nepalese society by Stacy Pigg is analyzed to highlight generic categorizations, in development literature, of a non-western society. The vocabulary used, depicts assumptions of superior-inferior perceptions of culture.



development without an understanding of societies and their differences (Weeks, 1996; Easterly, 2005; Sahn, Dorosh & Younger, 1999).⁹

Not only are the policies and institutions that constitute development structured within a North-South relationship, one can argue further that 'development and underdevelopment' have become suitable synonyms to replace the colonial vocabulary of 'industrial and backward countries'. Thus, development can be viewed within the context of colonialism 'in another form' (Sagoe, 2015). The ideological frameworks, policies and programs do not only support development conceived in the west (or within western institutions), they are also implemented in the south, often with little control of the latter over the process. Worst cases have seen the 'export' of so-called policy experts from the West to the South, to oversee the process, with little policy space given to the supposed beneficiaries. As Rist (1990) argues, European conception of development has been interwoven with neoliberal policies. Together with Europe's vast resources, it is able to mobilize through institutions it controls to determine the approach to the development of the global-south. Deconstructing development through this lens brings out its neo-colonial underpinnings. Systematic studies of aid by several authors have highlighted a core foreign policy agenda, beyond the philanthropy argument often trumpeted (Lebovic, 1988; Lancaster, 2008; Hook, 1995; Feis, 1964). This foreign policy motivation was more prevalent during the Cold War era, and have transformed beyond strategic motivations to market and other neoliberal agenda (Alesina, & Dollar, 2000; and Milner & Tingley, 2013).¹⁰ Amongst the new motivations are: market opening and securing resources for western development (Bearce & Tirone, 2010; Wang, 2007).

Post-modernist criticism on development reflects many of the inherent continuities between colonial ideologies and development approaches today. It can be argued that the development agenda is an implicit 'surveillance and control' mechanism, but also, an assessment of the model of how development has been implemented gives credence to this assertion. Beyond the 'civilization agenda', the implementation of development legitimizes the continued presence of imperial powers within the economies of the south (a neocolonial agenda), and enables them to control the pace of the South's development. This extensive power is often coupled with development or aid conditionality that enables access to resources of the south in exchange for illusion of development. (See Riddell, 1987; Sogge, 2002; Bearce & Tirone, 2010 for related arguments on the aid and development agenda).

Colonial linkages to development can further be deduced from the conception of what constitutes development. Kothari (2006), Rist (1990) and Hoben (2008) examined the intrinsic link between economic growth and democracy. This link can be traced to western conceptions

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9. Analyses of the multiple countries to have undergone structural adjustment highlight failure of the West Bank policies to transform the economies of the respective countries. This failure has been attributed to multiple factors including a 'one-size-fits-all' approach adopted by the World Bank in the implementation of adjustment policies. See Easterly (2005) and Mosley (1992) for more details.
 10. Foreign aid has been given in pursuit of motivations beyond the influences listed above, others include military cooperation, civil society development, democracy promotion and other humanitarian purposes.

of what signifies growth, as well as their control over development implementing institutions. Contemporary conception and approach to development further reflect this western view and foreign aid, with its, conditionality espouse this ideological frame of development.

Therefore, the approach to development reflect an imperial hijack of the development process, and the cooptation of a few elites in the implementation of this agenda, reflecting a similar approach to colonization. The cultural arrogance of the west as dictators of what constitutes growth and the submissive attitude of the global-south, further legitimizes this superior-inferior conception of development, which was also the basis of colonialism. Together with the aid conditions that are attached to development, the physical and institutional approaches to development are a reflection of colonialism. , There is also a substantial similarity between both the ‘civilizing mission’ of the 18th century, and post-colonial development agenda. In *Aid as imperialism* (1971), Teresa Hayter highlights how the aid architecture works to maintain the capitalist underpinnings of the international system, and to ensure that developing countries remain subservient to such capitalist interest.

On Development and Aid

The close association between colonialism, aid, and development can also be further examined based on the *historical legacies of aid*. The movement towards colonial welfare in the mid-1930s to 1940s strengthened a perception of imperial responsibility for the welfare of the colonies. This interest and its links to colonial policies, including the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of Britain, paved the way for a post-independence role for imperial powers in the affairs of development in the global-south. This relationship birthed a skewed framing of benevolence of colonial masters, and together with systemic external affairs (Truman’s development agenda post-WWII), influenced aid, as well as the development discourse, by determining what qualifies as development and what constitutes modernity. Cooper and Packard (1997) describe this disguised framing of development as a conceited attempt by the imperial powers to remain influential in the future of the colonies. This single factor highlights that colonialism and development are intertwined. In addition, it explains the development agenda as an imperial design to remain ‘useful’ and satisfy imperial interests in the global-south (Hayter, 1971). Hayter (1971) demonstrated that beyond sustaining imperial interests in the recipient country, the aid architecture co-opts such developing world to tolerate the illicit practices of the donor, including the transfers of funds, and preferential treatment for their companies. Therefore, it can be concluded that the aid architecture is rooted in the colonial agenda and that this reflects the policy interests of the western powers that created aid as an institution geared towards diverse interests, the last of which is the benevolence of the colonial master.¹¹

11. The aid architecture has often been perceived as the West’s project of civilizing the world. Although this agenda may be true, provision of aid from the inception of the institution has granted Europe the privileged position and an underlying legitimacy to remain within the development agenda of its former colonies. This position has been exploited on diverse occasions to benefit both parties. As such, aid transcends being a *charity of the West*, and should be viewed more as the *business of the West*.

To What Extent is the Development of Colonies Rooted in Colonialism?

The arguments suggesting that colonialism laid the foundations for development in colonies are hinged upon an exaggeration and flawed assumption that institutions established in the colonies were capable of stimulating growth. Such arguments are skewed in assessing the true state of colonial institutions because they attempt to credit growth to colonial policies, without equally assessing the havocs wrecked on colonies. Notwithstanding colonial attempts at the latter stages to promote a level of welfare in the colonies, the success of such policies if not carefully and properly analysed may be erroneously appreciated, and the same can be said about giving them credit for the development of colonies. Tharoor (2017), in examining the colonial legacies of Britain in India, elaborates on the effects of purported colonial development policies. His documentation of the destructive effects of some British policies in India highlights systematic attempts by imperial powers to pursue the interests of Europe under the disguise of developmental policies within the colonies. Examples of these policies in the form of land tax and property ownership amongst others, under colonial regimes, attest to the extent to which imperial Europe gleaned resources that could have contributed to the development of the South.

Relatively unsuccessful attempts at transplanting values and institutions from the imperial core to the periphery can instead be argued to be detrimental if one examines colonialism as a failed adventure at assimilation of the colonies. Not only were institutions perceived as foreign and geared towards double motives of aiding imperial interests, the aftermath of colonialism saw the crumbling of these institutions, largely due to society being unable to identify with them. Transplanting into the south institutions that took centuries to develop and perfect in the west risked disconnection with society, and ultimately resulted in failure. A reflection of this argument can be inferred from Humphreys (2010). His argument on 'a culture of rule of law' as important in upholding the idea of 'rule of law' demonstrates the need for institutions to be rooted in culture.

Again, long term impacts of discriminatory colonial education policies are influential in the chronic underdevelopment of discriminated sectors. This fundamental challenge, coupled with other local and systemic challenges (and the persistence of institutions), has negatively condemned these economies into the proverbial 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'. Such policies question the utility of ascribing the development of the south to colonialism. In reverse, evidence abounds that highlight the systematic colonial attempts to destroy industry in the colonies.¹² Bates (1987), for instance, noted the use of British colonial policy to suppress the price of cocoa in Ghana. King Leopold's heinous 'rape' of the Congo further depicts such colonial policies and the destructions wrecked on the diverse societies that were subjugated through colonialism (Doyle, 1910).

If the fundamental works by Acemoglu et.al (2001 & 2005) on institutions are to be used in analysing the effects of colonialism on institutional development, the influence of the latter can be

12. In his work the *Inglorious Empire: what the British did to India*, Shashi Tharoor documents how colonial policies effectively destroyed the fledging textile industry in India, in an effort to create a market for the import of British textile. For more on this, see Tharoor (2017).

clearly examined. Colonial institutions in SSA (and non-settler communities) fail to promote growth, and the ability of these institutions to persist across time explains the challenges of development. Consequently, understanding the development predicament should be based on assessing the nature of the institutions transplanted into these communities during colonialism.

Colonial Legacies: Boundary Demarcations, Divisive Policies and State-building Challenges

Although colonialism may have long ended, its untimely demise, according to Tharoor (2002), has left stalemates that continually plague post-colonial states. Colonial legacies in the form of boundary demarcations continue to ignite and militate against development efforts. East and West Timor, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan are few of the areas where these stalemates have worked against efforts at state-building and development.

Influences of colonialism on development can further be analysed in terms of the divisive policies pursued under colonialism, which persist to create instabilities in post-colonial societies.¹³ Racial subordinations, divide and rule systems, and outright partition of states have been a contributing factor in post-independence struggles of many colonies (Tharoor, 2002 & 2017). Indeed, such policies have fractured societies, bred mistrust and hatred amongst communities and exacerbated ethnic rivalries, as demonstrated in the Hutus-Tutsi conflict of Rwanda. These policies, accompanied by unequal resource distribution across colonies, underpinned contemporary uneven development of such societies. The underdevelopment of South Sudan before the breakaway represents a case in point, where development projects have been concentrated within the Islam-dominated northern parts of the country against the Christian majority south (Kebbede, 1997; Duhnkrack, 2009; Heleta, 2008). In the words of Tharoor (2002), we will not create a better world in the 21st century by forgetting what happened in the 19th and most of the 20th centuries. Colonialism's fundamental effects on development in the global-south have been a disruption of indigenous attempts at state-building. The imposition of colonial rule and its associated industry dislocated local agency of development and robbed societies of indigenous efforts to develop at their own pace. Without disputing the argument that colonialism, through the introduction of western education and technology, enhanced the pace of development in the South, the predicament and of the developmental state after colonialism debunks this assertion. This is because colonized societies lost their identities and then failed to be westernized as envisaged.

13. Colonial powers pursued 'divide and rule' systems to weaken opposition to rule, favor some group against others and partition areas that challenged colonial power. These policies have however lingered into independence and contributed to conflicts in such societies. Tharoor (2002 & 2017) documents the partition policies of British Colonial Administrators in India.



Conclusion

Development discourse in the global-south today is invariably shaped by colonialism, and its legacies continue to be influential in contemporary perceptions and approaches to development. Reconciling the challenges of colonialism will be instrumental in the bid by colonized societies to achieve development, as well as in understanding its effects on the development approaches favoured by these countries. The persistence of colonial frames in contemporary approaches reflects a continuity of the colonial architecture in new forms (development agenda), and further highlights the continuity of superior-inferior assumptions underpinning the development agenda.

These links between colonialism and development can be explained using the lingering colonial belief about the need to westernize 'backward countries', as well as the persistence of institutions of the colonial era across time. Much can be said about the role of skewed narratives of colonialism's contribution to development in the South. However, any such analysis that fails to juxtapose arguments of development against the varied ills of colonialism, such as the subjugation and dislocation of development agenda in the south, will be tantamount to justifying or denying the Holocaust.

The underdevelopment of the global-south, if not directly attributable to colonialism, can be argued, to a significant extent, to have been influenced by legacies of the colonial era. And although the present leadership failures in many post-colonial societies cannot be excused, it is worth noting that a significant part of the current challenges can be traced back to ills suffered in the past.

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