

Comparison of colonial strategies and their impact today



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Colonialism is the practice by which a powerful country directly controls less powerful countries and uses their resources to increase its own power or wealth. More than 90% of the countries in the world have been colonised at one point in time. It goes without saying that colonialism has influenced contemporary development trajectories, but the degree to which is incredibly varied. To reduce 'colonialism' to a singular concept is not only naïve, but also severely limits our understanding of the truly plentiful implications of colonialism on development trajectories. Colonialism was undertaken by several countries who not only had completely different agendas and thus utilised different strategies, but also colonised different areas of the world, which respectively required different procedures and policies. The time period that the colonization took place in and the length of the colonization period that countries were subjected to also varied widely, further increasing the diversity in developmental outcomes. These are only a few of the large number of factors that affect the degree of influence colonialism had on development. Development tends to be interpreted through a purely economic lens. This framework is somewhat justified and relatively useful as it is quantifiable to an extent, but it impedes our understanding of the true social, cultural and political aspects of development. Analysing the cases of British rule in America, Zimbabwe and Nigeria, Japanese rule in South Korea and Belgian rule in the Congo, I will attempt to show some variation in colonial strategy and the subsequent myriad of implications on development trajectories.

Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2001) argue that the identity of the colonial ruler is somewhat irrelevant to the outcomes on development, but

there is a plethora of evidence to suggest otherwise. Lange et al. (2006) indicate that the type of colonial rule – linked to the identity of the coloniser – affected developmental trajectories. The Spanish adopted a mercantilist approach to colonialism which implied that less ‘ colonialism’ was better for development. The British took a more liberalist approach where supposedly more intervention had positive effects on development trajectories. Some evidence of British rule can be seen in the cases of the USA and Zimbabwe. Both these nations were settler colonies held by the British, but this is probably their only comparable dimension today. In both cases, the British uprooted, conquered and marginalised the indigenous population. In America, the population was so small, it was easy for the British to conquer and set up institutions which solely benefited the settlers. Whereas in Zimbabwe, there were large indigenous populations which led to huge ethno-racial conflict when the British invaded. The British also had a different goal in Africa than America. To effectively exploit the natural resources and fertile land they demanded a large proletariat, but they invested little in the institutions of the natives, who were by far most of the population. Zimbabwe is still attempting to rectify the implications of the colonial system and the racial segregation that took place. America’s GDP per capita (PPP) is about \$60, 000 compared to \$2, 300 in Zimbabwe (World Bank 2017).

Aforementioned, this comparison is not completely reasonable, as the colonial context was totally different for the two countries. Comparing countries within the same continent may give us a better understanding of how different strategies of colonial rule affected development under relatively similar circumstances. Apart from Ethiopia, all the countries in

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Africa were colonised at some point in time and so it provides an ideal ground to show some implications of different colonial strategies. Much of the continent either fell under British or French rule. Even when the goals of the colonisers were relatively similar, the different strategies imposed affected economies in different ways and thus their respective development trajectories. The British tended to adopt a strategy of indirect rule as a practical cost-efficient way of administering Africa's large territories. This compared to the direct rule approach adopted, at least initially, by the French (Crowder 1964). Indirect rule is a form of colonialism that integrated pre-established local elites and native institutions into the administration of the colonial government. Direct rule involved the establishment of a centralized foreign authority within a territory, which is run by colonial officials. Grier (1999) found that former British colonies have better economic performance than former French colonies, and that the difference can largely be explained by educational level at independence. Taking Cameroon as a rare case of a country that had territories controlled by both Britain and France, Lee and Shultz (2012) found that formerly British rural areas boast higher levels of wealth and better public services than former French territories. Furthermore, the tensions caused by the ethnic divide can clearly still be seen in the political and economic structures today.

One argument for Africa's weak political and economic position today places an understanding in the nature of colonial rule implemented (Lange 2004). The British had little intension of developing Africa, instead colonialism was undertaken as an exploitative capitalist regime (Ake 1981). Cooper (2002) identifies Africa's colonial rulers as a ' gate-keeper state', solely focussed on

creating profits through extraction of natural resources and creating a market for manufactured imports rather than building the institutions required to develop the economy. In Nigeria, like most Sub-Saharan African colonies, Britain failed to implement a centralized system of governance. Instead, they created and handed ruling power to local authorities, picking and choosing where to utilise and disregard the traditional power structures and chieftaincies that were already in existence. This created a disarticulated state that was run under a system of ‘decentralised despotism’ (Mamdani 1996). This not only had an array of negative consequences within local societies, but also significantly impacted state legitimacy and state building capacity. The fractionalisation of the state created huge frictions between regions with distinct socioeconomic characteristics.

Britain only invested in socially beneficial infrastructure where it suited and benefited them, with the aim of further developing the extractive efficiency of the state. Protestant Christian missionaries created schools to teach English, so people could read the Bible, but the British also aimed to increase taxation revenues through higher levels of formal sector employment. They also needed to create a comprador class of elites who gained pecuniary benefits from enterprise, further incentivising rent seeking behaviour (Mizuna et. al 2009). The resultant large inequalities in Nigeria’s wealth, health and education systems can still be seen today. The country is home to various armed indigenous rebel groups, who have been striving for equality since the colonial period. The rise of Islamism within these groups was a natural reaction to Britain’s push for Christianity. Britain left behind an

incredibly weak and damaged decentralised state, filled with strife and a class of elites who strive to gain and maintain power at any means. There have been very similar outcomes for many African nations who fell under British colonial rule

British rule in Africa was fundamentally different from Japanese rule in South Korea in nearly every conceivable way. The result is clear in current day development outcomes. South Korea was colonised by Japan until 1945 and today it boasts the 15th largest economy in the world. Prior to colonisation, South Korea suffered from wide social class divisions and the states incapacity to collect taxes on agrarian income. The fundamentally weak economic stability combined with the financial difficulties to mobilize a military response to growing external pressures made it easy for Japan to take over the region. The Japanese used force and coercion to establish a truly authoritarian state which controlled every aspect of the economy. They transformed an inefficient and corrupt agrarian system into an organized and efficient bureaucracy. In contrast to Britain's extractive colonialist regime, Japan aimed to modernize and develop South Korea by investing heavily in the necessary infrastructure. The Japanese saw the importance of education and understood that the continued success of the state relied on an educated workforce. In 1910 South Korea had 10, 000 educated people but by 1945 there were 1. 7 million (Kohli 2004). The Japanese were forced to give up their colony during the second World War, but by that time Korea had the most efficient railway system in Asia outside of Japan. Japan also majorly increased agricultural efficiency by implementing new technologies and advanced techniques. However, during the colonial period the Koreans

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ended up consuming less of their own produce as they exported more rice to Japan. The Japanese also created a well organised police force, employing many Koreans, which monitored state operations. We can't know the level of development that South Korea would have experienced had it not been colonised, but investment in infrastructure and the quality of formal institutions was noticeable in comparison to the levels of 1900.

The focus thus far has mainly been on institutional and economic development, but it is important to understand the cultural and societal implications that colonialism bore. Looking at Nigeria, Nunn et. al (2011) showed how monumental an impact the slave trade had on trust within society. The lack of trust between citizens not only affects economic activity between agents and thus development, but also the formation of relationships between friends, family and the state. This impact is understandably difficult to quantify or even perceive but has undoubtedly affected development trajectories. Colonialism has had wide-ranging social and cultural ramifications. War is a more tangible consequence and is widely accepted as a hindrance to development

Conflict has persisted in the Great Lakes region of Africa since colonialism arbitrarily divided areas and tribes, creating seemingly incompatible ethnicities. Both Prunier (2009) and Reyntjens (2009) argue that areas in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have remained at the centre of possibly the worst humanitarian crisis in contemporary African history. The Democratic republic of Congo (DRC), in the heart of Africa, is the size of Western Europe and is home to over 250 ethnically diverse groups. Kivu is an area in the east of the country neighboured by Uganda, Rwanda and <https://assignbuster.com/comparison-of-colonial-strategies-and-their-impact-today/>

Burundi. In this region the nature of Belgian colonial rule aids in the explanation of the ongoing ethnic based conflict. The Banyaruthshuru were one of many tribes indigenous to the region upon King Leopold II's arrival. This was justification for the Belgians to classify these people as natives. The extractive industries set up during colonisation required huge pools of labour to maximised output. The Banyamasisi were a tribe from Rwanda brought in as labour migrants and were thus classified by the Belgians as non-indigenous. The Belgians utilised this ethnic division and empowered the 'indigenous' people with slightly improved rights. The rift was evident and became acknowledged by the natives. Post-independence, the Congolese government passed a law recognizing the ethnic divisions and in turn, preserved the Belgian's colonial legacy. Ever since, there has been deep rooted conflict between the ethnic groups. Disregarding the initial genocide faced by the natives in the DRC by the Belgians, Lemerchand (2009) estimated that the ongoing struggle has caused the death of over 5 million people. Even though it could be argued, that this mineral-rich part of the county has witnessed atrocities of an economic or geopolitical nature, ethnic hostility has remained so profound that they have engulfed nearly all the countries in this region.

The influence of colonialism on contemporary development trajectories is evident. However, we can't truly quantify the impact without a consideration of the counterfactual, which is immeasurable. We won't ever know would have happened if Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Korea or the Congo had not been colonised. Though, we do know colonialism enforced long-lasting racial and social class inequalities in Zimbabwe. It created a disarticulated commodity-

based export economy in Nigeria that led to a class of wealthy elites and an insurgency among local groups for the country's resources. Colonialism reinforced Japan's political and economic structures in Korea and it ruptured local identity and structural organization in the DRC. These are only a few examples of the impact of different colonial regimes in certain countries. They barely show the wide-ranging impact of colonialism on development trajectories but give some understanding of the variety of consequences colonialism had.

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