The Role of Independence Movements and Colonialism in Societal Development

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ABSTRACT

The development of a country in the modern world is strongly influenced by its colonial past, whether it obtained its independence through violent or so-called more 'peaceful' movements. This article reviews the way that colonialism set the stage for a country's difficulties in the establishment of stable governance, such as the Apartheid in South Africa. It examines factors that differentiate colonies in the rush for development and self-determination, such as former British colonies appearing to be more successful in regards to levels of democracy, despite countries like Canada and Australia developing very differently from India or South Africa. The way in which populations rose to independence also had an impact in the way that they further developed. Frantz Fanon argues that true independence could only be achieved through violent manifestations, while leaders such as Gandhi devoted their lives to a peaceful independence campaign. The violent ones have shown to lead to a more unified and nationalist population, and as nationalism is positively correlated with economic development, to greater economic growth of a former colony. Initiatives have tried to relieve the effects of colonialism, while it is argued it could only foster more dependency on higher developed countries. Still, aid has shown to increase African countries' GDP and debate over ways for the international body to fight poverty.

Introduction

Colonialism comes through human history as pervasive and persistent. In 1914, European powers controlled 60% of the globe (Figure 1). The fact that only fifty countries were independent during that period, when that number nearly quadrupled to today, is due to the process of decolonization and self-determination (World 101). The Second World War was a turning point in which conditions were ripe for the birth of national liberation movements, as populations had more access to education, creating new social classes and political nationalistic intellectuals. Nationalism was the main ideological stance for the phenomenon as a reaction to the unequal distribution of wealth and power (UNESCO, 2008). The nature of this process led to fragmentation of peoples, such as the Apartheid in South Africa and the non-self-determined borderlines in the African continent, along with the weakness of domestic markets and economic development. Therefore, while colonialism handicapped the overall development of nations, some patterns can be observed: British colonies have shown some advantages in development in comparison to other colonizing powers, and the motivation for self-determination - whether the intention was peaceful or not - may have caused former colonies to flourish differently in the face of the modern world's adversities.
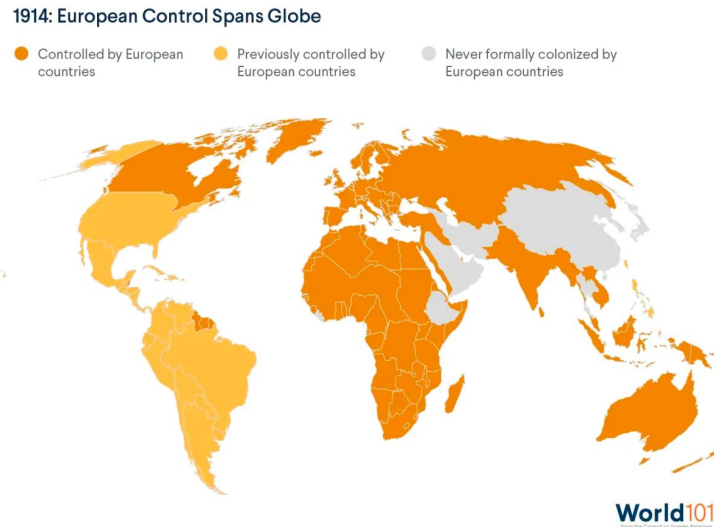
Figure 1 – (Retrieved from World 101)

Development of Democracies

Systematically, colonialism has been associated with underdevelopment. Due to strong correlations between higher levels of democratic stability and levels of development, a pattern is shown for post-colonial countries to have greater hardships in maintaining democracies. That is partly because colonialism creates patterns of development that make former colonies highly dependent on monocrop or extraction of resources for exportation, such as oil and gas, which has been traditionally exploited with taxes and forced labor (UNESCO, 2008). That makes a country vulnerable to volatile world prices for primary goods and creates an inactive civil society, as it becomes dependent on the labor repressive tasks that are plantations or resource extractions (Bernhard, 2004). Hence, this negative growth can disrupt chances for successful democracies. The development of colonial economies distorts social classes so those in power were resistant to democracy, as colonizers would cooperate with traditional ruling groups at time of national liberation and writing of the constitution, while weakening classes that have been historically associated with democratic practices. Such was the Indian Dominion between 1947 and 1950, an informal ruling under a "dominion the British Commonwealth of Nations", in transition for independence. Lord Mountbatten, a British man, continued as India's Governor-General, but appointed Jawaharlal Nehru as the nation's first Prime Minister (Parliamentary Archives, 1947). Alternatively, during the Apartheid in South Africa, in which the white minority held power (15% of the population). Authority was discriminatory and repressive, shooting down people in demonstrations for freedom and equality. Nelson Mandela, an important leader of the resistance movement was imprisoned and sentenced for life on a number of charges, including breaking the Suppression of Communism Act (McRae, 2018). In a "Long Walk of Freedom", Mandela demonstrates how postcolonial government was nonconductive to democracy: "Authorities attempt to exploit every weakness, demolish every initiative, negate all signs of individuality" (Mandela, 1994). The soon to be first South African democratically elected leader had aspired to achieve democracy his entire life but was arrested for speaking up for freedom. Since colonialism was built upon status differentiation, as was the white minority in power, social fragmentation and suppression was enroot in the post-colonial environment. Yet, in Canada and Australia, both former British colonies, development evidently played out very differently. These had a majority white population, whose cultural heritage was related to the British to a much greater extent. The language and religion - English and Christianity - were common to them, so the process of development and adaptation to ruling similarly to the British came much more naturally (IGNOU, 2017). In Viceroy Linlithgow's record for the British Cabinet of his conversation with Gandhi, the Indian leader states that "Australia, Canada, and the other Dominions were one thing. India was another. India could never be a daughter State, for her roots did not lie in England." (The National Archives).

Fractionalization of Ethnic Groups

Colonial powers were also responsible for the fractionalization of ethnic and religious groups, as border lines within ethnic groups were drawn by external powers, which in some instances had history of enmity and warfare. That is especially true in Africa, as in most cases the borders inherited were drawn in the Scramble for Africa in the 1800s, which led to turmoil between 825 different ethnic groups, leaving the continent with the separatist issue it faces today (Hyde, 2016). A study by the American anthropologist George Peter Murdock showed that 28% of these groups saw their ancestral land split across different countries, which led to 57% more political violence than in non-partitioned homelands (Figure 2). These two groups - partitioned and non-partitioned - can be easily compared as both characteristics are indistinguishable: from elevation to agricultural potential to the presence of underground oil reserves, they don't have any remarkable differences (Hyde, 2016). The only difference among them is the previous size of the country, which led to separations. Therefore, it can be concluded that the reason for the tendencies for violence in the area is the extent that they were split up. Furthermore, differing ethnic tribes from the central government are more likely to face brutal discrimination, such as the Bushmen people (also referred to as San people or Basarwa) in Botswana. Lobelo, a Bushmen woman that was moved to New Xade with her family, tells the BBC about being forced to leave her home by the police to government-built resettlement camps far from the Kalahari Desert, where her people lived for millennia. In this reserve, they live amongst alcohol, teen pregnancy, and diseases such as AIDS, which they were forced to adapt to. Efforts have failed, as many face court penalties for hunting, which is a long-established practice of them. The Bushmen build huts in their yards as a form of resistance and reminder of their traditional lives (BBC News, 2014). This can be traced to colonization for its separations and power struggles, as different ethnic groups are placed under differing ethnic rulings, bordered by a line that wasn't there before.
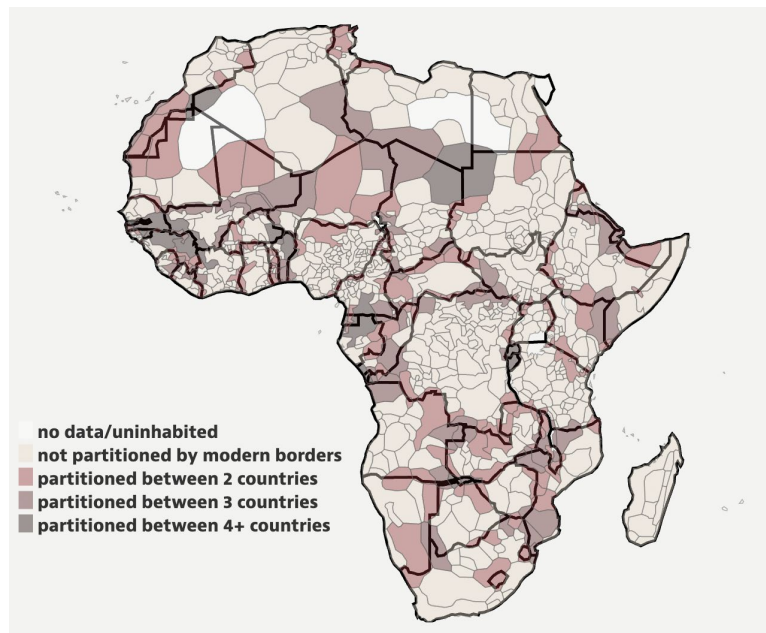

Figure 2 – (Retrieved from American Economic Association)

The Difference in Colonial Powers

Differentiation in the development of colonies is influenced by the origins of the colonizer, as certain powers had prepared their dependent nations for democracy further than others. In fact, British colonies were shown to be more resilient to changes and susceptible to democracy overall: according to an analyzed sample of 132 countries in development in 1988, there was a positive correlation between British legacy and level of democracy, while the opposite was true for the French (Bernhard, 2004). Firstly, the amount of parliamentary democracies in the post-colonial world has been shown to be higher than presidential democracies, which is a sign of British influence and legacy. Also, the British held democratic elections for local self-governing bodies to give some power for the home-rule before independence, such as mentioned previously with the Indian Dominion before Indian independence. That was likely due to their substantial loss of North American colonies, and as they showed no flexibility to American requests before its revolutionary war, which led to the drastic breaking of the United States from the British, they were likely more willing to compromise with the newer colonial subjects. The elections held by the British as well as the French may have contributed to the creation of one-party regimes after independence. Still, it is undeniable that British colonizers were more open to reforms towards colonial development, including the investment in secondary education, railroads, and larger, better trained bureaucracies that relied further on local personnel when compared to the French. The British indirect rule, as opposed to the French direct rule, Belgians economically focused "paternalism", and the Portuguese oppressive "assimilationist", allowed for a gradual emergence of a strong civil society, which was more conducive to democracy as their presence was not preventive of organizations of subordinate classes (Conteh-Morgan, 1997). Therefore, it can be concluded that the British, in order to increase control over their colonies, ended up incorporating lower class reforms by denying upper class means to repress them, limiting state power and improving chances of a surviving democracy. More recent studies show the pattern amongst the 132 countries in 1988 to have disappeared. That can be due to the influence and relevance of a colonizer diminishing with time, or by the fact that other colonial powers had negative influences and Britain's was neutral, as French colonies' negative correlation with democracy were shown throughout the period (Bernhard, 2004). Haiti was a French colony, and according to a study conducted among Haitian survivors of the 2010 Earthquake, their experience of cumulative trauma, beginning with slavery and centuries of political and structural violence led to the "perpetuation of inequities such as poverty, illiteracy, and preventable disease" (Rahill, et al, 2016). This shows that due to French colonization, Haiti had to forcedly adapt, having difficulties that handicapped their development as a nation. Even though other factors like natural disasters might have contributed to its stagnation in development, the weak structure of governance that defined the aftermath. Such can be seen as Japan had a tsunami just a year after the earthquake in Haiti. If using the measure of Positive Peace as "society's tendencies towards stability and harmony and societal attitudes that foster peace", the concept is very influential in the aftermath of rebuilding a country from a natural disaster (Positive Peace, 2023). Japan is ranked in the top 20, while Haiti ranks 149th in 2020 of Positive Peace (Vision Of Humanity, 2021). The structure of violence in Haiti distances it from Positive Peace, which wasn't fostered in Haitian identity due to dualisms of class, race and religion left by its history with colonialism (Déus, n.d.).

Independence Movements

As a member of the Algerian National Liberation Front in the Algerian War for independence, psychiatrist Frantz Fanon argues that the only real way to decolonize is through violence. He states that "violence is the only language spoken by the colonists", and therefore the only way to respond - or radically overthrow an inherently violent system - would be through violence (Shaheryar, 2020). On the other hand, Mohandas Gandhi, leader of the Indian campaign for independence, dedicated his life to elucidating the benefits of a nonviolent approach to self-determination. In his view, the native population could change the status-quo by showing the brutality of the system to the world and colonizers. This was seen in 1922, when Gandhi suspended his movement when 23 police officers were killed, in

protest to the violence. Similarly, Ghana, the first country in the South of the Sahara Africa to self-determinate, had a nationalist leader, Kwame Nkrumah, who founded the Convention People's Party and won elections from jail (Howard, n.d.) His concept of 'positive action' was to battle for independence through education and non-violence. Britain, for its part, wanted Ghana to be a full member of the Commonwealth and feared escalation of radicalization if self-government wasn't granted (Apter, 2008). The process ended in mutual negotiations, and even British scholars and educators supported independence. On the contrary, Algeria had a war to break from French ruling, and French intellectuals would only support with education some of whose services they used. Undeniably, colonial powers were brutal even to 'peaceful' approaches, as there was still struggle and violence. Yet, the violence Fanon proposes is not unprecedented, as he recognizes negative impacts on victims, such as the long-term psychological damage in Algerians. Instead, he argues violence had a purpose to free the colonized from an inferior complex, so they are set up as liberators. That is especially true in India, in which most of the non-violent were intellectuals, middle- and high-class citizens, whereas landless and poorer natives wanted to seize the land with their own hands. It therefore can be concluded that, in regard to human development, the peaceful movements could have set precedent for better outcomes, as in educational levels, while not in economic development. According to data from the CIA World Fact Bank, Algeria has about 47% less poverty than Ghana and 43% less than India, while their literacy rates are only about 0.02% apart (My Life Elsewhere, 2023). Nelson Mandela stated, "The authorities' greatest mistake was keeping us together, for together our determination was reinforced". Though, it can be understood that the unity of a violent breaking could have the ability to unify and bring a stronger foundation to nationalism. Greenfeld argues, in the Harvard University Press in "The Spirit of Nationalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth", that the emergence of nationalism is fundamental for economic patterns and sustained activity and growth. Therefore, Fanon's argument of violent independence movements can also be seen to lead to economic kick-off and ultimately the development of a nation (Greenfeld, 2001).

Conclusion

European powers delayed and shifted patterns of growth of former colonies. That is especially true in African nations, as seen by the socially inconsiderate borderlines, while not as noticed in Western countries such as Canada. British legacy mostly guided the pattern to a democratic route, even if unintendedly, by incorporating a greater scope of lower classes in its ruling. Stronger waves of nationalism and the breaking of this dependency had higher applicability in violent approaches, as seen in Algeria. Still, development is not a solitary goal, which pushed international efforts to relieve the impacts of colonialism. UN initiatives such as the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) have tried to aid and shape multilateralism amongst emerging countries (UNESCO, 2008). Yet, it could be argued foreign aid has only fostered dependency and corruption, while others argue sums just have not been large enough. There is still no significant relation between more foreign aid and faster economic growth; but over the last 30 years official aid has increased African countries GDP on an average of 1% per year, which can be powerful for countries in poverty (Edwards, 2014). MIT professors and Nobel Prize winners Banerjee and Duflo said there needs to be a "radical rethinking of the way to fight poverty", in which international institutions look at programs that have succeeded, such as economic recovery in Rwanda after the genocide, to help devise specific aid programs in the war against underdevelopment (Edwards, 2014). Regardless, self-determination continues to question the validity of borders today. For instance, Catalonia held a contested independence referendum in 2017, 92% voting yes, and Spain ruled it unconstitutional; Scottish referendum ruled staying the UK by 55% to 45%, and in absence of agreement with the English, they cannot issue a new one (Burgen, Jones, 2022).

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