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Accepting Guilt as Former Colonial Empire

Between the early sixteenth century to the late twentieth century, much of the world was either colonized or had been colonized for various lengths. Although the nature of this impact is still being discussed today, a notion that former colonial powers benefited at the expense of former colonies has intensified in the past few decades (Boahen 1987). In such context, some have controversially argued that former colonial powers should pay reparations to former colonies. My opinion on this issue is that economical reparation should not be paid, while moral reparation should be paid. Moral reparation, in my own terms, is the apology by former colonial empires for gaining wealth at the expense of their colonies, and the promotion of such attitude into public opinion. Moral reparation can be calculated based on how much pro-colonialist statements, both governmental and nongovernmental, that the former metropolises have to rescind. I will therefore argue how former colonial powers have indeed done more harm than good to former colonies economically, politically, and socially, how they have missed their chances to pay economical reparation, and how they have not yet served their responsibility to acknowledge and apologize for the harm they brought to their former colonies, mainly focused on colonies in Africa, Americas, and India.

Colonial empires, as they focused on exploiting natural resources in their colonies, slowed the economic development in former colonies. Firstly, most colonies were converted to mono-resource economies and was prevented from diversification, including a stop in inter-

African trade. For example, the economy in Belgian Congo was heavily dependent on rubber export, and was severely affected during the Great Depression due to lack of demand. Secondly, colonists did not encourage development of existing industries, only to be replaced by export-focused primary sector economy. This made African economy reliant on foreign imported goods, especially food, and prevented creation of specialized workers. Thirdly, unevenly distributed construction of transportation and communications infrastructure led to uneven regional economic development in former African colonies. Lastly, foreign exchange earnings were not used for colonial development, impeding them to become economically independent. In the case of India, these economic policies led to the fall of their economy from almost quarter of world share in early eighteenth century to less than five percent by the time when it became independent in 1947 (Boahen 1987, 101-102) (Tharoor 2015).

A counter argument to the notion of adversary effect is that overall, the development of infrastructures, primary economic sector, and money economy benefited African colonies, as well as their introduction to global economy (Boahen 1987,100) (Rodney 1973, 205). Commercialization of land and cash-crop agriculture enabled economic mobility. Nevertheless, these were only byproducts of colonial exploitation of the natural resources, not development (Boahen 1987,101). There is a statistic that there is a negative relationship between slave use and current income in the US (Nunn 2014, 351). In addition, indirect rule negatively correlated with levels of economic production and GDP growth rates in 1960 (Lange 2005, 135). Although there is a finding that island colonies' prosperity correlated to their length of colonial rule, this does not consider islands that were not colonized (Nunn, 2014, 354). Thus, colonialism was in practice an exploitation of colonies by colonial empires or a "One-armed bandit", and brought very little benefit over harm to this date (Rodney 1973, 205).

Colonialism also resulted in negative political legacy, where authorities of former colonies lack control of their state through democracy. One was due to loss of independence and sovereignty through direct rule (Boahen 1987, 99). Through this system, indigenous autonomy was completely replaced by colonial control. Even for indirect rule, which there are suggestions that it gives more autonomy to the locals (Furnivall 1948, 427), indigenous authority was only reconstructed superficially by colonists (Lange 2005, 119). Consequently, local elites, once the states became independent, had to follow an authoritarian structure of governance, rather than a democratic structure. In addition, the more indirectly ruled princely states in India had lower levels of postcolonial governance and democracy in 1960 and perpetuated onward. The finding is also applicable to Africa which was ruled through indirect colonial rule (Lange 2005, 135). Granted, colonial rule introduced civil service, new judicial system, and liberal democracy (Boahen 1987, 98). However, democratization was a benefit brought mainly by Christian missionaries rather than governmental institutions, and they replaced local forms of governance on the assumption that liberal democracy is a superior political institution (Lankina and Getachew 2012, 465). Also, within these democratic colonial empires, those with civil law background provided weaker rule of law to their colonies (La Porta 1998, 1113).

Colonial rule also led to establishment of military institutions. Because most of the soldiers in colonial armies were trained by officials from the metropole, professional armies were locally developed. However, notably in African colonies, military institution became chronic source of anarchy, confusion, and instability, as they attempt to obtain post-colonial authority through military coups (Boahen 1987, 99).

Another political consequence was the establishment of arbitrary borders through Berlin Conference, which led to great division of ethnicity, culture, and language within each African

nation (Boahen 1987, 96). It is true that emergence of independent African states with these borders created few conflicts between the states (Boahen 1987, 95). Nonetheless, domestic issue rose from these border, such as ethnic clashes, especially the one which culminated to a genocide in Rwanda (Mamdani 2002, 41), boundary disputes (Boahen 1987, 96), and unequally distributed resources and territorial sizes across countries (Boahen 1987, 96). In fact, without colonization, inter-African trade would have continued, leading to possible sharing of language and culture, for example in western, eastern, and northern Africa (Boahen 1987, 102). Although unification of different ethnic groups under one border may have contributed to generation of nationalism, and pan-Africanism, these movements were only by-products of colonialism, and became unpopular within few decades of independences (Boahen 1987, 98).

Colonial empires did more social harm than good as well. Firstly, through slave trade, close to 10 million Africans to the Spanish America and Brazil were displaced (Newson 2005, 156). This does not include those who died during their travel and the ensuing exploitation. Granted, slave trade was done by some locals to trade with Western goods. Nonetheless, societies where people were enslaved are less trusting today, leaving more harm to the former colonies (Nunn and Wantchekon 2011, 3221). Secondly, many of the former colonies experienced collapse of population in the early stages of colonization. This includes death of close to ten million Congolese directed by King Leopold (Hochschild 1998), loss of local Caribbean and coastal Brazilian population through Spanish and Portuguese conquests (Newson 2005, 161-165), and the massacre of the Aztecs in the process of conquering their empire (Leon Portilla 1992). Population eventually recovered increase in some of these colonies during colonial era, and some benefited from better health infrastructure such as piped water and

hospitals. (Boahen 1987,104). Despite this, inequality spread between urban and rural areas (Boahen 1987,104).

Another negative social legacy was invented tradition (Ranger 2000). This included separation of Indian society into castes according to their degree of loyalty to the empire created lasting divisions (Dirks 2001), and lowered social status of women in Africa (Boahen 1987,107) (Ranger 2000). Invented colonial tradition did bring merit-based social mobility, culminating to independence movement led by elites (Boahen 1987,105). To the colonies' detriment, this was usually not the case due to disproportionately greater social services given to local colonizers (Boahen 1987,105), which perpetuated illiteracy (Boahen 1987,104). Artificial tradition also instilled a sense of inferiority among Africans, including local elites, which led to less political participation of the mass (Boahen 1987,106-8). Some cite the spread of Christianity and Islam as positive social legacy, as they created better sense of union between countries that followed same religions (Boahen 1987,104). However, spread of Christianity often resulted from condemnation of indigenous tradition.

Although it is economically, politically, and socially clear that colonialism gave negative legacy to its former colonies, former colonial empires should not pay economical reparation as doing so is impractical at this point. It is hard to calculate the amount, as there is lack of data in demographic, psychological, and physical damage. For example, estimates of demographic loss of indigenous population Hispaniola ranges from 60,000 to 7.9 million (Newson 2005, 161). More importantly, former colonial powers have missed the chance to identify who has the responsibility to pay and to whom it should be paid, and therefore cannot punish or compensate the right people. If the former colonial empire tries to pay with their current budget, they might end up taxing immigrants coming from former colonies. They cannot have descendants of

colonists pay as it is hard to determine to what extent they should be liable for the damage. Also, it is too late to decide if the reparation should be given to the former colonized government or to the specifically affected people. This makes economic reparation a settlement on an individual-to-individual basis. Most importantly, any payment would not sufficiently compensate for perpetuation of damage. Granted, lack of economic reparation would not punish people who benefited from colonial exploitation. Therefore, colonial empires are responsible to at least make moral reparations.

Former colonies should pay moral reparation, which is an apology to their former colonies for colonization, which is calculated by how many pro-colonialist statements, both governmental and nongovernmental, the former metropolises should rescind. Colonists, by seeing themselves as superiors of the colonized, justified colonialism, but now that this mentality has been largely rejected, governments of former colonial empires need to accept their fault. This is necessary to recovery of relationship between former empire and colonies as this politically settles that negative economic, political, and social attributes of colonies are largely because of colonialism (Tharoor 2015). For example, France may recover relationships with disenfranchised citizen from Algerian colonial backgrounds if they admit their colonial injustice (Saadia 2017). Additionally, Belgium has not yet apologized for colonization of Congo, and neither did Britain for Amritsar massacre (Abernethy 2000, 110). Some note that “Empire was thus an unplanned product of the chronic disorder caused by informal European penetration” and that colonies are not too guilty of rapid expansion (Fieldhouse 1973, 83). However, these empires did take the opportunity to expand, which entitles them to guilt.

In conclusion, this essay does not argue that former colonial empires are forgiven given that they do not need to pay economic reparation. Instead, it sets fourth that since benefits of

colonization were overwhelmingly shadowed by years of harm, which prolongs to this day, it is the former colonial empires' responsibilities to hold themselves accountable. Fundamentally, what matters is not solely the apology of these countries toward of former colonies, but the construction of better relationship between them on the basis of overcoming their negative historical developments.

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