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The Case for Colonialism

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Editor's Note: NAS member Bruce Gilley's article, "The Case for Colonialism," went through double blind peer review and was published in *Third World Quarterly* in 2017. It provoked enormous controversy and generated two separate petitions signed by thousands of academics demanding that it be retracted, that *TWQ* apologize, and that the editor or editors responsible for its publication be dismissed. Fifteen members of the journal's thirty-four-member editorial board also resigned in protest. Publisher Taylor and Francis issued a detailed explanation of the peer review process that the article had undergone, countering accusations of "poorly executed pseudo-'scholarship,'" in the words of one of the petitions. But serious threats of violence against the editor led the journal to withdraw the article, both in print and online. Gilley was also personally and professionally attacked and received death threats. On the good side, many rallied to his defense, including Noam Chomsky, and many supported the general argument of the article. We publish it here in its entirety, conformed to US English and our style.

Introduction

For the last hundred years, Western colonialism has had a bad name. Colonialism has virtually disappeared from international affairs, and there is no easier way to discredit a political idea or opponent than to raise the cry of "colonialism." When South African opposition politician Helen Zille tweeted in 2017 that Singapore's success was in part attributable to its ability to "build on valuable aspects of colonial heritage," she was vilified by the press, disciplined by her party, and put under investigation by the country's human rights commission.

It is high time to reevaluate this pejorative meaning. The notion that colonialism is always and everywhere a bad thing needs to be rethought in light of the grave human toll of a century of anti-colonial regimes and policies. The case for Western colonialism is about rethinking the past as well as improving the future. It involves reaffirming the primacy of human lives, universal values, and shared responsibilities—the civilizing mission without scare quotes --that led to improvements in living conditions for most Third World peoples during most episodes of Western colonialism. It also involves learning how to unlock those benefits again. Western and non-Western countries should reclaim the colonial toolkit and language as part of their commitment to effective governance and international order.

There are three ways to reclaim colonialism. One is for governments and peoples in developing countries to replicate as far as possible the colonial governance of their pasts—as successful countries like Singapore, Belize, and Botswana did. The "good governance" agenda, which contains too many assumptions about the self-governing capacity of poor countries, should be replaced with the "colonial governance" agenda. A second way is to recolonize some regions. Western countries should be encouraged to hold power in specific governance areas (public finances, say, or criminal justice) in order to jump-start enduring reforms in weak states. Rather than speak in euphemisms about "shared sovereignty" or "neo-trusteeship," such actions should be called "colonialism" because it would embrace rather than evade the historical record. Thirdly, in some instances it may be possible to build new Western colonies from scratch.

Colonialism can return (either as a governance style or as an extension of Western authority) only with the consent of the colonized. Yet now that the nationalist generation that forced sudden decolonization on hapless populations has passed away, the time may be ripe. Sèbe has documented how the founding figures of Western colonialism in Africa (such as Livingstone in Zambia, Lugard in Nigeria, and de Brazza in Congo) are enjoying a resurgence of official and social respect in those countries now that romanticized pre-colonial and disappointing post-colonial approaches to governance have lost their sheen.[1] As one young man on the streets of Kinshasa asked Van Reybrouck in his seminal 2010 book on the Congo: "How long is this independence of ours going to last anyway? When are the Belgians coming back?"[2]

Three Failures of Anti-Colonial Critique

The case for the past record of Western colonialism—usually referring to British, French, German, Belgian, Dutch, and Portuguese colonies from the early nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries—rests on overturning two distinct lines of criticism: that it was objectively harmful (rather than beneficial); and that it was subjectively illegitimate (rather than legitimate). There is, in addition, a third line of criticism that merits revision: that it offends the sensibilities of contemporary society.

The objective cost/benefit approach identifies a certain need of human flourishing—development, security, governance, rights, etc.—and asks whether colonialism improved or worsened the objective provision of that need. One main challenge of this research is to properly enumerate the things that matter and then to assign them weights, which presumably vary with time and place. In a brutally patriarchal society, for instance, access to justice for women may have been more important than the protection of indigenous land rights (which may be part of that patriarchy), as Andreski argued was the case for women in northern Nigeria under colonialism.[3]

A second challenge is measuring the counterfactual: what would likely have happened in a given place absent colonial rule? Many research designs, for instance, control for variations in colonial rule itself and for a variety of other factors that coexisted with colonialism (such as cultural norms, geography, population, disease burden, etc.). But they do not control for the presence or absence of colonialism (for instance in a highly cited study by Acemoglu and colleagues).[4] To construct such a counterfactual requires measuring not just global social, economic, and technological trends but also the likely course of indigenous development, of regional factors, and of an ungoverned non-colonial encounter with the West. Countries that did not have a significant colonial history—China, Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Haiti, and Guatemala, for instance—provide a measure of comparison to help identify what if anything were the distinctive effects of colonialism. So too does research into pre-colonial histories that, almost by definition, reveal comparatively weak institutions, divided societies, and subsistence economies, for instance in Biber's study of pre-colonial Namibia.[5]

Noting some of these complexities, Abernethy summarizes the objective cost/benefit question as follows: "In times and places where colonial rule had, on balance, a positive effect on training for self-government, material well-being, labor allocation choices, individual upward mobility, cross-cultural communication, and human dignity, compared to the situation that would likely have obtained absent European rule, then the case for colonialism is strong. Conversely, in times and places where the effects of foreign rule in these respects were, on balance, negative compared to a territory's likely alternative past, then colonialism is morally indefensible."[6]

Beyond these requirements, there is a list of simple epistemic virtues. Non-biased data and case selection, for instance, requires that evidence be gathered in a way that does not confirm the hypothesis at stake. Any claim about, say, the level of colonial violence, requires not just assumptions about the scale of violence that would have occurred absent colonial rule but also a careful measure of that violence relative to the population, security threat, and security resources in a given territory. One is hard-pressed, to take a prominent example, to find such care in measurement in the vast critical scholarship on the British counterinsurgency campaign against the Mau in Kenya from 1952 to 1960, especially in the scolding work of Elkins.[7] Daniels argues that "[h]ad the British left Kenya to the Mau, there would have been anarchy and further civil war, perhaps even genocide."[8] Just as many Kenyans joined the Kikuyu Home Guard and the special prison service for the rebels as joined the insurgency, and the independent Kenyan government has long applauded the historic contribution of the British in suppressing the movement.[9] At the very least, it is incumbent on scholars to show that the brutalities unleashed by the British in this campaign were not the likely result of a proportionate response given the context and scale of the threat. If this supposedly solid case is wobbly, what does it tell us about the lesser "violence" often cited as invalidating colonialism?

Perhaps the most egregious violation of epistemic virtues is internal coherence (or non-contradiction). Eminent scholars repeatedly make the logically contradictory claim that colonialism was both too disruptive and not disruptive enough, whether with regard to boundaries, governing institutions, economic systems, or social structures, as evidenced in the short space of just two pages by Young.[10] Africanists, in particular, applaud the work both of Herbst, who argued that colonialism did too little state-making, and Young, who earlier argued that it did too much.[11] New territorial boundaries are criticized for forcing social integration while old ones are criticized for reinforcing tribalism, a contradiction noted by Lefebvre.[12] Marxist scholars found colonialism at fault when it did not invest in public health and infrastructure (showing a callous disregard for labor) *and* when it did (in order to exploit it).[13] Colonialism is ascribed near-magical powers to sweep away everything good in its path (like tribal chiefs or ethnic identity) and with equally magical powers to make permanent everything bad in its path (like tribal chiefs or ethnic identity).

Finally, there is the simple epistemic virtue of falsification. This is most pointed in the treatment of what was undoubtedly a benefit of colonialism: the abolition of slave-trading. Anti-colonial critics squirm and fuss over this issue because it puts the greatest strain on their "colonialism is bad" perspective. The result is a constant stream of revisionism: it did not happen fast enough; there were mixed motives; not all colonial officials supported it; former slaves remained poor and former slave owners remained rich; it should never have existed in the first place.[14]

Of course, not all research falls afoul of the basic prescriptions above. Research that is careful in conceptualizing and measuring controls, that establishes a feasible counterfactual, that includes multiple dimensions of costs and benefits weighted in some justified way, and that adheres to basic epistemic virtues often finds that at least some, if not many or most, episodes of Western colonialism were a net benefit, as the literature review by Juan and Pierskalla shows.[15] Such

works have found evidence for significant social, economic, and political gains under colonialism: expanded education; improved public health; the abolition of slavery; widened employment opportunities; improved administration; the creation of basic infrastructure; female rights; enfranchisement of untouchable or historically excluded communities; fair taxation; access to capital; the generation of historical and cultural knowledge; and national identity formation, to mention just a few dimensions.[16]

This leads to the second failure of anti-colonial critique. Given that objective costs and benefits varied with time and place, another approach is simply to defer to the judgements of those affected. The subjective legitimacy approach asks whether the people subject to colonialism treated it, through their beliefs and actions, as rightful. As Hechter showed, alien rule has often been legitimate in world history because it has provided better governance than the indigenous alternative.[17]

Yet anti-colonial critics simply assert that colonialism was, in Hopkins's words, "a foreign imposition lacking popular legitimacy."[18] Until very late, European colonialism appears to have been highly legitimate and for good reasons. Millions of people moved closer to areas of more intensive colonial rule, sent their children to colonial schools and hospitals, went beyond the call of duty in positions in colonial governments, reported crimes to colonial police, migrated from non-colonized to colonized areas, fought for colonial armies, and participated in colonial political processes—all relatively voluntary acts. Indeed, the rapid spread and persistence of Western colonialism with very little force relative to the populations and geographies concerned is *prima facie* evidence of its acceptance by subject populations compared to the feasible alternatives. The "preservers," "facilitators," and "collaborators" of colonialism, as Abernethy shows, far outnumbered the "resisters," at least until very late: "Imperial expansion was frequently the result not just of European push but also of indigenous pull."[19] In Borneo, the Sultan of Brunei installed an English traveler James Brooke, as the rajah of his chaotic province of Sarawak in 1841. Order and prosperity expanded to such an extent that even once a British protectorate was established in 1888, the Sultan preferred to leave it under Brooke family control until 1946.[20]

Sir Alan Burns, the governor of the Gold Coast during World War II, noted that "had the people of the Gold Coast wished to push us into the sea there was little to prevent them. But this was the time when the people came forward in their thousands, not with empty protestations of loyalty but with men to serve in the army . . . and with liberal gifts to war funds and war charities. This was curious conduct for people tired of British rule."[21] In most colonial areas, subject peoples either faced grave security threats from rival groups or they saw the benefits of being governed by a modernized and liberal state. Patrice Lumumba, who became an anti-colonial agitator only very late, praised Belgian colonial rule in his autobiography of 1962 for "restoring our human dignity and turning us into free, happy, vigorous, and civilized men."[22] Chinua Achebe's many pro-colonial statements, meanwhile, have been virtually airbrushed from memory by anti-colonial ideology.[23] The few scholars who take note of such evidence typically dismiss it as a form of false consciousness.[24]

The failure of anti-colonial critique to come to terms with the objective benefits and subjective legitimacy of colonialism points to a third and deeper failure: it was never intended to be "true" in the sense of being a scientific claim justified through shared standards of inquiry that was liable to falsification. The origins of anti-colonial thought were political and ideological. The purpose was not historical accuracy but contemporaneous advocacy. Today, activists associate "decolonization" (or "postcolonialism") with all manner of radical social transformation, which unintentionally ties historic conclusions to present-day endeavors. Unmoored from historical fact, postcolonialism became what Williams called a metropolitan *flaneur* culture of attitude

and performance whose recent achievements include an inquiry into the glories of sadomasochism among Third World women and a burgeoning literature on the horrors of colonialism under countries that never had colonies.[25]

This third failure of anti-colonial critique is perhaps most damaging. It is not just an obstacle to historical truth, which itself is a grave disservice. Even as a means of contemporary advocacy, it is self-wounding. For it essentially weaponizes the colonial past, as the gradually imploding postcolonial South African state's persecution of Helen Zille shows. "What a meta-narrative of anti-colonial sentiment can render invisible are ways in which people made claims on new possibilities without deploying either anti- or pro-colonial idioms," Englund writes in his study of colonial-era newspapers in Zambia. "To devote all scholarly attention to the question of how different actors during this period sought to end colonial rule is to succumb to a limiting meta-narrative of anti-colonialism, one that allows no conceptual space between colonial and anti-colonial agendas, and thereby keeps other possibilities inaccessible to the scholarly and moral imagination."[26]

The Costs of Anti-Colonialism

It is hard to overstate the pernicious effects of global anti-colonialism on domestic and international affairs since the end of World War II. Anti-colonialism ravaged countries as nationalist elites mobilized illiterate populations with appeals to destroy the market economies, pluralistic and constitutional polities, and rational policy processes of European colonizers. In our "age of apology" for atrocities, one of the many conspicuous silences has been an apology for the many atrocities visited upon Third World peoples by anti-colonial advocates.[27]

Few cases better illustrate this than Guinea-Bissau and its anti-colonial "hero" Amilcar Cabral. In launching a guerrilla war against Portuguese rule in 1963 Cabral insisted that it was "necessary to totally destroy, to break, to reduce to ash all aspects of the colonial state in our country in order to make everything possible for our people." He took aim at a successful colonial state that had quadrupled rice production and initiated sustained gains in life expectancy since bringing the territory under control in 1936.[28] Cabral, in his own words, was "never able to mobilize the people on the basis of the struggle against colonialism."[29] Instead, he secured training and arms from Cuba, Russia, and Czechoslovakia and economic assistance from Sweden.[30] The resulting war killed fifteen thousand people (out of a population of 600,000) and at least as many civilians, and displaced another 150,000 (a quarter of the population).

Once "liberation" was achieved in 1974, a second human tragedy unfolded, costing at least 10,000 further lives as a direct result of conflict. By 1980, rice production had fallen by more than 50 percent to eighty thousand tons (from a peak of 182,000 tons under the Portuguese). Politics became a "cantankerous din of former revolutionaries" in the words of Forrest.[31] Cabral's half-brother, who became president, unleashed the secret police on the tiny opposition —five hundred bodies were found in three mass graves for dissidents in 1981.[32] A tenth of the remaining population pulled up stakes for Senegal.[33] The Cabralian one-party state expanded to fifteen thousand employees, ten times as big as the Portuguese administration at its peak.[34] Confused Marxist scholars blamed the legacies of colonialism or the weather or Israel.[35]

Things have gotten worse. Guinea-Bissau has a more or less permanent UN peacekeeping force and continues to suck up millions in aid as the "continuadores de Cabral" squabble under what the World Bank calls "continuing political disarray."[36] Today, in per capita terms, rice production is still only one-third of what it was under the Portuguese despite forty years of

international aid and technological advances. The health transition, meanwhile, slowed considerably after independence. By 2015, the average Guinea-Bissauan was living to just fifty-five, meaning gains of just 0.3 years of extra life per year since independence, less than half of the 0.73 extra years of life per year being gained in the late colonial period. What might have become a prosperous and humane Macau or Goa of Africa is today a cesspool of human suffering. Western and African anti-colonial scholars continue to extol Cabral's "national liberation" ideas.[37] But actually existing Guineans may be asking: when are the Portuguese coming back?

Guinea-Bissau seems like an extreme case. It is not. Of the eighty countries that threw off the colonial "yoke" after World War II, at least half experienced similar trauma while most of the rest limped on. For sixty years, Third World despots have raised the specter of recolonization to discredit democratic opposition and ruin their economies. Yet there is virtually nothing written about most of these postcolonial traumas since, as Igreja notes, it still assumed that anti-colonial movements were victims rather than victimizers.[38] Scholars in full Eurocentric mode prefer to churn out books on colonial atrocities or to suggest that "colonial legacies" have something to do with the follies and body blows inflicted on these countries by their anti-colonial leaders.[39]

To be sure, just as the colonial era was not an unalloyed good, the independence era has not been an unalloyed bad. A few postcolonial states are in reasonable health. Those whose moral imaginations were not shrouded by anti-colonial ideology had the most productive encounter with modernity, emerging as leaders of what W. Arthur Lewis called the "creative" Third World.[40]

But most of the rest remained stuck in anti-colonial "protest" identities with dire consequences for human welfare. A sobering World Bank report of 1996 noted: "Almost every African country has witnessed a systematic regression of capacity in the last thirty years; the majority had better capacity at independence than they now possess."[41] This loss of state capacity was no trifle; it meant the loss of tens of millions of lives. And it is not getting better. For instance, only thirteen of 102 historically developing countries are on track to have high state capacity by the year 2100, according to Andrews and colleagues. The people of Bangladesh will have to wait another 244 years at their current rate to reach a high capacity state.[42] Would it have taken Britain, even in some adjusted role (as discussed below), until the middle of the twenty-third century to institute good government in this former province of Eastern Bengal?

In international affairs, meanwhile, otherwise liberal and democratic states like India, Brazil, and South Africa continue to style themselves as enemies of Western colonialism. As Chatterjee Miller shows, the foreign policies of these former colonies continue to be driven by a sense of victimhood and entitlement rather than rational self-interest or global responsibility.[43] This means that every time the world is desperate for a coordinated response to a human, political, or security catastrophe—in Sri Lanka, Venezuela, or Zimbabwe for instance—the voices of anti-colonialism intercede to prevent action. As it turned out, the most serious threat to human rights and world peace was not colonialism—as the United Nations declared in 1960—but anti-colonialism.

Chatterjee Miller argues that it is the responsibility of the West to be "sensitive" to these anti-colonial viewpoints. An alternative view is that it is the responsibility of the West to help these nations kick the habit. After all, Britain's rise is surely inseparable from the ways that it embraced and celebrated its colonizers from the Romans through to the Normans. If anti-colonial sentiments had gone unchallenged in Britain, the country today would be a backwater of druid worshippers.

Resurrecting Colonial Governance

Even as intellectuals have continued to plough the anti-colonial furrow since the end of the Cold War, many countries have changed their domestic governance to replant the seeds of "colonial governance." This agenda has many things in common with the "good governance" agenda: economic liberalization, political pluralism, and administrative streamlining have replaced the socialist road in most countries. But the colonial governance agenda is distinct from the good governance agenda in two respects.

First, the colonial governance agenda explicitly affirms and borrows from a country's colonial past, searching for ideas and notions of governmentality. As Burton and Jennings note, "In the first decade or so after independence . . . East African governments often adopted or adapted both administrative structures and ideological concepts from their colonial predecessors in order to create quite successful forms of governance—certainly by regional standards."[44] In many cases, colonial bureaucrats and police were rehired by the newly independent governments.

Reclaiming this colonial trajectory abandoned at independence is key to the colonial governance agenda. No less an anti-colonial "hero" than Chinua Achebe ended his days with a memoir that explicitly affirmed the positive contributions of colonialism to governance in his native Nigeria: "It is important to face the fact that British colonies were, more or less, expertly run," he wrote.[45] What was important about Achebe's "articulation of the unsayable," as Msiska called it, was his rediscovery of "the colonial national formation as a habitable community."[46] This had concrete implications for how to organize the civil service, how to manage federalism, and how to promote education. As with democratic episodes in a country's past, colonial episodes become an attic to ransack in search of a livable past. This also underscores the importance of reinvesting in a non-biased historiography of colonialism so that the colonial periods are seen not as objects of resistance but as fruitful sources of creativity.

Secondly, and related, the colonial governance agenda recognizes that the capacity for effective self-government is lacking and cannot be conjured out of thin air. The lack of state capacity to uphold the rule of law and deliver public services was the central tragedy of "independence" in the Third World, as a few voices like Plamenatz and Barnes warned at the time.[47] To reclaim "colonial governance" means increasing foreign involvement in key sectors in business, civil society, and the public sector in order to bolster this capacity. In 1985, for instance, the Indonesian government fired all six thousand government inspectors at the Jakarta port of Tanjung Priok and replaced the corrupt and inefficient customs service with the Swiss firm SGS. The Swiss rebuilt the customs service, handing back partial control in 1991 and full control in 1997.[48] Indonesia's exports boomed. Civil society and successful policy reforms, meanwhile, improve faster with the presence of international civil society actors, as they did in the colonial era, as shown by studies of environmental civil society.[49] Multinational corporations, moreover, can be tasked with public service provision near their facilities in direct imitation of colonial practices, as Hönke has documented.[50]

The colonial governance agenda embraces a cosmopolitanism—a civilizing mission—often lacking in the good governance agenda. Bain, for instance, admits the "grim reality" and "ghastly consequences" of decolonization.[51] Yet he simultaneously rejects the idea that the West has anything to offer, since this implies an imperial mission. This "uncritical critique of the liberal peace," as Chandler calls it, consigns Third World nations to the foibles and vagaries of "authentic" or "indigenous" practices, a *de facto* abandonment of hope in their self-governing capacities.[52] By contrast, the colonial governance agenda resurrects the universalism of the liberal peace and with it a shared standard of what a well-governed country looks like.

The Case for Recolonization

The second broad way to reclaim colonialism is to recolonize some regions. It may be that in some cases, only a formal share of sovereignty for Western countries can provide the mix of accountability and authority needed to build capacity in weak states. In Chesterman's oft-quoted phrase, the problem with modern state-building is not that it "is colonial in character; rather the problem is that sometimes it is not colonial enough."[53]

The World Bank and USAID, for instance, experimented with "co-signatory" arrangements in Liberia and Chad in the 1990s and 2000s where major government expenditures required the signatures of both domestic and external agents. In the Australia-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) or the UN's International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (known by its Spanish acronym CICIG), key legal and police functions were handed over to external powers because of rampant corruption and criminalization of the state.

Sèbe calls this "cosmopolitan nation-building" because it represents an explicit rejection of the parochial myth of self-governing capacity that drove most postcolonial countries into the ground.[54] Rather than use an ever-expanding set of euphemisms that avoid the "c" word —"shared sovereignty," "conservatorship," "proxy governance," "transitional administration," "neo-trusteeship," "cooperative intervention"—these arrangements should be called "colonialism" because it would embrace rather than evade the historical record. As Ignatieff wrote in 2002: "Imperialism doesn't stop being necessary just because it becomes politically incorrect."[55]

While the conceptual abandonment of the myth of self-governing capacity is now mainstream, the challenges of making new forms of colonialism work are immense. There are three separate questions for policy-makers: (1) how to make colonialism acceptable to the colonized; (2) how to motivate Western countries to become colonial again; and (3) how to make colonialism achieve lasting results.

Any colonial relationship requires a high degree of acceptance from the local population. Perhaps this explains why post-Cold War interventions have sought to emphasize their participatory and consensual nature in contrast with an alleged illegitimate and coercively imposed colonialism.[56] This is another area where an accurate historiography of colonialism is sorely needed because, as noted, colonialism usually spread with a significant degree of consent from politically salient actors.

One lesson from colonial legitimation is that at least in the initial phases, legitimacy will be demonstrated not by the holding of a plebiscite or by the support of organized and broadly representative groups, but simply by the ability of the intervening state to win compliance from key actors and get the job done. Too often, critics of modern interventions have decried the lack of "accountability or representation."[57] Yet it is precisely the absence of conditions for meaningful accountability or representation that makes intervention necessary in the first place, much as colonialism spread in order to better manage ungoverned encounters with the West. As Chesterman wrote: "If genuine local control were possible, then a transitional administration would not be necessary." The creation of accountable political power "may well be the end of the transitional administration," he writes, "but by definition it is not the means."[58]

To push the logic further, it is the intervening state, bound to act as a trustee, that has the capacity initially to choose a legitimate path forward. As in colonial times, foreign control by a liberal state with its own robust accountability mechanisms is the closest that a people with a weak state can come to "local ownership." The widespread support in Sierra Leone for the 1999

to 2005 British overhaul and rebuilding of the police force was explained by this externally created legitimacy with an explicit colonial vestige: "There has always been a soft spot for the British among Sierra Leoneans. That feeling has now come into full play, with public demands for the Brits to stay for as long as necessary, because of the helpless condition of the country," one local journalist noted.[59]

The legitimacy of a new colonialism will almost always require a local leader who is both domestically popular and a strong advocate of the colonial relationship. After initial skepticism, Liberia's energetic president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf championed the post-2005 Government and Economic Assistance Management Program (GEMAP) that gave extensive powers over spending and budgeting to external actors. As a result, Liberians generally welcomed GEMAP.
[60] "Although some Liberian politicians see the plan as thinly veiled colonialism, it is wildly popular among those living on the rubbish-strewn streets of the capital," noted the *Times*. "We love GEMAP," Henry Williams, a shopkeeper, said to nods from the crowd at the counter. "It will stop the politicians from stealing from us."[61]

The dynamics of colonial legitimation moving forward are tricky because as a country "earns sovereignty" the legitimacy of the colonial relationship will decline if it is not constantly recalibrated and reaffirmed. As local institutions and norms improve, the colonial relationship will become more intensive but also more contested because of this more complex polity. Again, lessons from past colonialism are germane: "The central paradox of the process of colonial exit was that it coincided in most cases with the most active phase of colonial state-building," wrote Darwin.[62]

Very little attention is ever paid to the second challenge although it is arguably greater: how to motivate Western countries to become colonial. Despite cries of "exploitation," colonialism was probably a money loser for imperial powers. The Stanford economist Richard Hammond coined the term "uneconomic imperialism" to describe the ways that European powers embarked on ruinously costly and ultimately money-losing colonialism for largely non-economic reasons.[63] That is why they gave up their colonies so easily, as Wu also showed with regard to the Dutch surrender of Taiwan.[64] The benefits of empire were widely diffused while the costs were narrowly borne by the colonial power. As Kaplan wrote: "The real problem with imperialism is not that it is evil, but rather that it is too expensive and therefore a problematic grand strategy for a country like the United States."[65]

Australia's Lowy Institute for International Policy, for instance, calculated that the RAMSI program cost Australian taxpayers about $2 billion over its ten-year period, roughly the annual health and education budget for the capital city of Canberra or the equivalent of a year's economic output for every Solomon Islander. The institute described this as "a massive investment for a country where Australia's interests are limited."[66] The moment there was a whiff of Solomon Islander opposition using anti-colonial tropes, the Australians headed home.
[67] A willingness to assume responsibility for the affairs of a foreign land will not come easily since Western governments are held closely to account for their spending and anti-colonial ideology can be easily mobilized. The UN, meanwhile, is not likely to step in with more "international administration" due to the enduring anti-colonialism of leading Third World states.[68] Collier's suggestion for expanded UN-led governance provision is impractical for this reason.[69]

To solve the incentives problem, Hechter has called for a "market in transnational governance" which we might call less euphemistically "colonialism for hire."[70] Colonial states would be paid for their services, an important motivator to be successful. The contractual motivation would also strengthen consent through periodic renegotiation of the terms. Properly designed,

host countries would more than recoup those costs through higher foreign investment, lower external borrowing costs, and greater business confidence, benefits that were arguably more significant than improved governance in the colonial era.[71]

That still leaves the third question of whether new forms of colonialism would work. The salient point is simply to draw attention to the relevance of the colonial past to this question since the appropriate models for statebuilding are probably not modern liberal ones but something else.[72] Whereas the number of post-Cold War interventions involving a share of sovereignty has been quite small, there were many episodes and types of colonialism from which to draw lessons. For instance, the largely successful resurrection of the state in Cambodia after a Chinese-imposed genocidal regime is not attributable to the UN-led reconstruction effort of 1992–1993. Liberal peacebuilding failed in Cambodia judged in terms of the intention to create a robust democracy or an independent police and army.[73] Rather what emerged was a successful semi-authoritarian polity with deep roots in the colonial past.[74]

One lesson from the colonial past is that the share of sovereignty needs to be substantial and thorough in most cases. If external actors are constrained to work with rotten local institutions, as Matanock has argued, then reforms will be difficult.[75] Remaking a local police force may be possible without a share of sovereignty. But cleaning out a thoroughly corrupt national criminal justice system requires external control. Again, the reason to reclaim the word "colonialism" is that it does not sidestep this important empirical insight.

The second lesson is what Lemay-Hébert calls "the centrality of the social," the centrality of a congruence between the values in the community and those of the state.[76] Liberal interventions fail, he argued, because of their aversion to the social. Colonial interventions, by contrast, may stand a greater chance of success because historically this "emphasis on the social" is what colonialism was good at: the dual mandate, indirect rule, minimal expatriate staffs, and customary law went hand-in-hand with the infrastructure of modernity (schools, universal laws, "Western" medicine, etc.). "Since gaining independence, Congo has never had at its disposal an army comparable in efficiency and discipline to the former [Belgian colonial] *Force Publique*," was Van Reybrouck's sad conclusion.[77] Maybe the Belgians should come back.

The Tale of Galinhas

Even with local legitimacy, Western will, and a good plan, the challenges of making new forms of colonialism work are immense. Leaders will need to come up with novel solutions to continued chaos and displacement caused by a century of anti-colonial policies. So here is a modest idea: build new Western colonies from scratch.

In 2009, the economist Paul Romer—who became the World Bank's chief economist in 2016—suggested that rich nations build "charter cities" in poor countries.[78] Under this model, largely empty land is leased to a foreign nation or group of nations so that their sovereignty allows a modern enclave to grow up, as was the case in Hong Kong. That tiny British colony, according to Romer, "did more to reduce world poverty than all the aid programs that we've undertaken in the last century."

New colonies solve the three challenges above nicely. For the local population, they are legitimate because citizens choose to move there, escaping worse situations and because their governments agree to the terms. They are potentially attractive to Western states because for conservatives they are low risk and self-financing while for liberals they are "acts of justice."[79] Finally, charter cities could be effective—which was Romer's main concern in developing the

idea—because they have a blank slate to transplant home institutions without having to work with rotten local ones.

Back to Guinea-Bissau. Suppose that the government of Guinea-Bissau were to lease back to Portugal the small uninhabited island of Galinhas that lies ten miles off the mainland and where the former colonial governor's mansion lies in ruins. The annual lease would be $1 so that the Portuguese spend their money on the island and the Guinea-Bissau government is not dependent on a lease fee. Suppose, then, that the $10 to $20 million in foreign aid wasted annually on the country were redirected to this new offshore colony to create basic infrastructure. As part of the deal, the Portuguese would allow a certain number of Guinea-Bissau residents to resettle on the island each year. Portuguese institutions and sovereignty would be absolute here for the term of the lease—say ninety years as was the case with the mainland parts of Hong Kong. A small European state would grow up on the African coast.

At sixty square miles Galinhas could, over time, easily accommodate the entire population of Guinea-Bissau. If successful, it would attract talent, trade, and capital. The mainland parts of Guinea-Bissau would benefit from living next to an economic dynamo and learning to emulate its success, while symbolically escaping from the half-century anti-colonial nightmare of Amilcar Cabral. The same idea could be tried all over the coastlines of Africa and the Middle East if successful. Colonialism could be resurrected without the usual cries of oppression, occupation, and exploitation.

A preposterous idea? Perhaps. But not so preposterous as the anti-colonial ideology that for the past hundred years has been haunting the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the Third World. A hundred years of disaster is enough. It is time to make the case for colonialism again.

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