Policy Paper

Colonial history and geography have been the main determinants of Africa's poor economic growth: An Experience of Lost decades (1980-2000)

Abstract

Many states in Africa have experienced particularly painful growth trajectories and transitions to post-independence democracy. In particular many writers have noted the 'lost decades' for democratic consolidation and economic growth in Africa between 1980 and 2000. Current perceptions of Africa are framed by high levels of absolute poverty and low levels of life expectancy, and significant national debt burdens. Many countries have experienced extended periods of devastating political and military conflict, as well as unsuccessful attempts with Marxist- Leninist and free market economic policy, further exacerbating the painful nature of post-independence development. The development paths of many African countries have also been significantly conditioned by regional militarism as well as international geopolitical developments, furthering conflict and development trauma. This paper therefore seeks to identify some of the root causes of the poor economic growth that many post-independence African nations have experienced, specifically between 1980 to 2000. It argues that colonial (and neo-colonial) history and geography have played a significant role in Africa's lagging growth rate and peripheral regional status in a hostile and competitive global economy.

Key words

Colonialism; Decolonisation; Civil war and conflict; Economic growth; Poverty; Inequality; Economic disempowerment

Introduction: Africa and the Lost Decades

Many states in Africa have experienced particularly painful growth trajectories and transitions to post-independence democracy. In particular a number of writers (e.g. Darwin 1997; Landes 1998; Marais 1998; Bond 2000; Roy 2009; Chang 2003, 2011; Pettigrew 2013) have noted the 'lost decades' for democratic consolidation and economic growth in Africa between 1980 and 2000. Current perceptions of Africa are framed by high levels of absolute poverty (e.g.

61% of Angola’s population (Simon 2001) and 59% of Mozambique’s population (Mazula et al., et., 2004), low levels of life expectancy (39 years in Mozambique and 38 years in Angola (2006 CIA World Fact Book)), and significant national debt burdens ($4.5 billion in the case of Mozambique and $9.4 billion for Angola (ibid)). Many countries have experienced extended periods of devastating political and military conflict, (particularly in the case of Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, Sudan), as well as unsuccessful attempts with Marxist- Leninist and free market economic policy, further exacerbating the painful nature of post-independence development. The development paths of many African countries have also been significantly conditioned by regional militarism as well as international geopolitical developments, furthering conflict and development trauma (Pettigrew 2013). This paper therefore seeks to identify some of the root causes of the poor economic growth that many post-independence African nations have experienced. It argues that colonial (and neo-colonial) history and geography have played a significant role in Africa’s lagging growth rate and peripheral regional status in a hostile and competitive global economy (Carlos and Nicolas, 1988; Escobar 1995; Choudhary, 1998; Landes 1998; Cain and Hopkins, 2002; Lee 2003; Power 2003; Brown, 2009; Roy 2012). In particular colonial and neo-colonial control over space has significantly affected many state’s abilities to generate cohesive societies, strong economies and correct the considerable inequities created during the colonial period.

Table 1 highlights trends in real Gross Domestic Product growth over the post-independence period. It is important to note that many countries (e.g. Angola (1975) and Mozambique (1975)) did not gain independence until the mid 1970s and some countries (e.g. South Africa (1994)) not until the early 1990s. Notwithstanding its sole focus on Sub-Saharan Africa, the table does highlight poor economic growth performance for African countries over the post-independence period. Ha-Joon Chang (2003) however notes a greater complexity in the African growth pattern. He identifies that prior to 1980, African growth was below average for low and middle income countries. However, Africa’s poor economic performance became particularly pronounced from 1980-2000 (see table 1). Ha-Joon Chang (2003) argues that the most significant explanation for this was the effects of the enforced free-market doctrine on vulnerable African economies which came hand in hand with structural adjustment loans in the late 1970s and 1980s. The effect of this, he argues, was to ‘kick away the ladder’ (ibid.) of protection to vulnerable infant industries afforded through previous policies of protective tariffs and import substitution. As a result, the 1980s and 90s have come to be seen as the lost decades for African growth and economic development. It is also important to note the significance of considerable regional unrest over the period, most notably extended civil wars in Angola, Mozambique, the DRC and instability in South Africa and Zimbabwe, which have played a significant role in constraining economic growth (see later section).

Table 1: Trends in Real GDP growth: regions and the world 1965-2000 (*Average percentage growth*)

	1965- 1980	*1980-1990*	**1990-2000**
Latin America	6	1.7	3.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.2	1.7	2.4
South Asia	3.6	5.7	5.6
East Asia & Pacific	7.3	8.0	7.2
All low & middle income economies	5.9	3.4	3.6
High income economies	3.8	3.1	2.4
US	2.7	3.0	3.4
Japan	6.6	4.0	1.3
Germany	3.3	2.2	1.5
World	**4.1**	**3.2**	**2.6**

Source: World Bank (2002)

Table 2's focus on per capita GDP growth particularly highlights the poor growth of African economies. Both North African and Sub-Saharan Africa experienced negative per capita GDP growth rates during the lost decades, and were consistently the worst economically performing regions. It is therefore possible to identify a clear lag in African economic growth in comparison to both other low and middle income countries and higher income countries. In assessing the key determinants of this poor economic growth performance, the significance of European colonialism must be noted as having played a significant role. However European colonialism reached across the globe and was not confined to Africa, therefore highlighting the significance of other post-colonial factors in determining Africa's poor economic growth trajectory. This paper will argue however that many alternative factors have their roots in Africa's colonial past.

Table 2: Per Capita GDP growth rates in Developing Countries, 1980-2000

	1980-1990	1980-2000
Developing Countries	**1.4**	**1.7**
East Asia & Pacific	6.4	6.2
Europe & Central Asia	1.5	-0.2
Latin America & Caribbean	-0.3	0.7
Middle East & North Africa	-1.1	-0.1
South Asia	3.5	3.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	-1.2	-0.7
Developed Countries	**2.5**	**2.1**

Source: World Bank (2002)

The Colonial Past

Colonialism can be seen as an act of destruction of civilisation (Darwin 1997; Mazula et al., 2004; Brown, 2009; Roy 2012). Indigenous populations were regarded as indispensable for economic exploitation, and therefore the management of the colonial economy purely for colonial ends resulted in the weak integration of local populations apart from as proletariat labour (Newitt 2001). The colonial regime rejected any notion of indigenous people running the state, and colonial institutions were staffed overwhelmingly by European administrators at the technical and managerial levels. Despite this characterisation, it is important to note that colonialism took very different forms in different locations. Many postcolonial writers (e.g. Escobar 1995, Landes 1998; Newitt 2001; Power 2003; Brown 2009; Roy 2012; Pettigrew 2013) have therefore challenged some of the generalisations and stereotypes associated with colonialism, aiming to focus on the situated perspectives and diversity of experiences. The scramble for Africa (following the Berlin Conference 1885) and clash of rivalry imperialisms resulted in a division of territory and ownership by one of the major European powers. Different European countries 'developed' their colonies in contrasting ways, which had significant implications for the post-independence economic development of many states. Sidaway (1992) notes the contrast between British imperialism, with its focus on development of infrastructure and indigenous production, with that of Portuguese colonialism. They note that the latter was largely based around commercial ransacking to serve the needs of the metropole. The result was a highly uneven geography of concentration of development around major hubs of economic activity (particularly ports) in Angola and Mozambique, and marginalisation of the periphery and peripheral populations (Harrison 2002 in Lemon and Rogerson). This would have significant implications for the post-independence economic trajectory of these states. In addition different colonial histories would have significant implications for many African states' ability to generate economic growth after independence. Many (e.g. Darwin 1997; Landes, D. 1998; Lemon and Rogerson 2002; Brown 2009; Roy 2012; Pettigrew 2013) have written about the legacy of the policy of Apartheid in South Africa in constraining economic growth due to a combination of labour inefficiencies, mounting international sanctions and internal and external security costs. Similarly the Ian Smith regime (1965-79) in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) following the signing of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence caused international condemnation and the economic isolation of the Rhodesian economy until it collapsed in the late 1970s.

A number of legacies of colonialism in Africa can therefore be identified with significant implications for post-independence economic growth in many states. Firstly, colonialism created a highly inequitable distribution of resources within states, and subsequent marginalisation of the indigenous populations (Darwin 1997; Landes, D. 1998; also see Roy 2012; Pettigrew 2013). A classic example is the issue of land in Zimbabwe where the Land Apportionment Act (1930) set aside 51% of the land area of Zimbabwe for just 3,000 white European settlers, with the indigenous population allocated drier, agriculturally less suitable regions away from the central watershed, or confined to overcrowded African reserves (at densities of over 60 people/ sq km) (Lee 2003). A major problem for post-independence governments has therefore been the task of promoting indigenous economic empowerment and greater socio-economic equity (Darwin 1997; Hanlon 2000; Roy 2012). The failure of many of these attempts (e.g. in Zimbabwe and South Africa) has resulted in the failure to create sustained economic growth across the region. Secondly, colonial economic control produced a highly uneven pattern of development, both between colony and core, and within colonies, creating major urban core areas and marginalised periphery. This can be clearly identified in the case of South Africa where economic development centred largely in the ports of Cape Town and Durban, and in the mineral rich areas of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg). Such patterns of development have been exacerbated with post-independence state's incorporation into the global economy. This has created new forms of uneven development with many states remaining peripheral and vulnerable to global economic processes (see later section). The final major legacy in many states was the situation created by the rapid dismantling of colonial infrastructure and governance at independence (Escobar 1995; Hanlon 2000; Stiglitz 2002). This left a number of arbitrarily created economically disempowered states with significant internal ethno-nationalist tensions, creating the context for civil strife, civil war and resulting severe economic disruption. The colonial history and geography of colonialism, and their implications for the post-colonial trajectory of many African states have therefore been a major determinant of Africa's poor growth.

Civil War and Civil Strife

A clear constraining factor on economic growth and welfare in many African post-independence states has been extended periods of civil strife and civil war (Licklider 1995; Collier and Hoeffler 1998; Collier, 1999; Collier and Hoeffler, 2000). As stated above, these have their roots directly in the colonial past, and in particular the rapid and disorderly way in which many colonial empires were dismantled. Colonialism enforced an entirely Eurocentric conception of territory on indigenous populations, although remaining contested on the ground. The colonial map produced an imposed order on African territory and, in the process, a control of the geographies of indigenous populations. It is, however, easy to forget that the creation of empires and African states did not correspond to the geography of Africa prior to colonialism. When the colonial enterprise was dismantled, therefore, this left different ethno-nationalist groups with competing claims for territory and valuable resources (Licklider 1995). The implications have been catastrophic, creating humanitarian suffering as well as destroying the conditions for sustained economic growth.

Civil wars and conflicts have been a constant feature of a number of post-independence African nations (Ibrahim & Sambanis, 2000). In Angola and Mozambique civil war between divided nationalist movements has raged for an extended period (sixteen years in case of Mozambique and even longer in Angola due to failed peace attempts in 1992 and 1998), having a profound effect in creating social and humanitarian disaster, death and destruction, and failure of state modernisation plans (Landes, D. 1998; Simon 2001). Simon (2001) states that the seemingly endless civil war in Angola between the ruling party (MPLA) and dissident nationalist movement (UNITA) has generated untold human suffering through death, injury, displacement of populations and economic destruction. The humanitarian crisis has been worsened by rising levels of poverty throughout the country and poor infrastructure to rural areas due to artillery bombardment and heavy government expenditure on the military (over $5billion has reportedly been spent by Angolan government on military equipment (Le Billon 2001)). Tvedten (1997) has assessed the costs of war up to 1994 to be in excess thirty billion dollars in materials damage and loss of productivity. In addition, approximately one million people have died due to a combination of fighting and secondary effects; forty percent of whom were children (ibid). Similarly in Mozambique, the activities of RENAMO provided a major security threat to the FRELIMO government, with extensive fighting, destruction of key infrastructure, and terrorisation of the Mozambican rural population in an attempt to destabilise the ruling government (Harrison 2002). Prolonged conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has also caused considerable economic and social damage, was well as limiting the prospects of stable peace in the region.

Incidences of post-independence civil strife have also had a significant impact in limiting economic growth across Africa (Horowitz, 1985; Licklider 1995; Easterly and Levine 1997; Young 1988; Singer & Henderson, 2000; Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000b). The most notable example is Zimbabwe where the scale of the humanitarian crisis obscures the massive economic crisis that the country also currently faces. The Zimbabwean crisis and political and social instability, particularly from 2000 onwards, has created soaring inflation (with inflation figures in the millions despite currency corrections) as well as an escalating economic and social crisis (including a famine crisis and a shrinking economy (GDP -7% (2007 CIA World Fact Book)) making Zimbabwe the worst performing economy in the world with continuous negative growth since 2000. The Zimbabwean crisis has also affected foreign perceptions of the region and has had a negative impact on foreign direct investment to South Africa, especially between 1999 and 2000 (see Lee 2001). Zimbabwe therefore serves to compromise economic growth and spread instability across the region.

A significant reason for the failure to successfully create regional economic growth has therefore been the failure to maintain stability and security, as foreign investors have been reluctant to invest in unstable regions or corrupt governments. Managing conflict across

Africa is a daunting challenge (Landes, D. 1998; Mathoma in Simon 2001; Scott 2012). It is however the most important non-economic factor which should be included in economic policy thinking, vital for investor confidence, and therefore the economic health and growth of African regional economies. Security is more than just about preventing wars, or achieving a basic level of peace (Mathoma in Simon 2001). The very concept of development involves issues of security, stability, and freedom (ibid) crucial to the whole continent. Conflict and regional instability has to date had a devastating impact on economic development across the region. Many have looked to South Africa as the largest economy to promote peaceful regional integration, particularly in Southern Africa. South Africa has committed itself to an 'African Renaissance' through participation in peacekeeping operations on the continent and has stated aims to focus on improving freedom and empowerment and governance across sub-Saharan Africa:

'South Africa must commit to life and death objectives of peace, democracy, stability and development' (T. Mbeki 1998)

South Africa therefore identifies the importance of its commitment to regional security and stability as a fundamental driving force in the engine of growth, as FDI will only be attracted to a stable regional polity. A number of serious challenges to the quest for continental security and stability have however been posed within the region. Involvement by a number of states on different sides in the conflict in the DRC removed the region's sense of collective solidarity and relatively positive momentum to that point. In addition, the major regional challenge remains in Zimbabwe, where an escalating humanitarian crisis will continue to hinder regional stability, integration and growth. Thus far, however, there has been reluctance from neighbouring states (especially from South Africa) to actively intervene.

Neoliberalism and the failure to produce growth

As stated above, a major challenge of governments has been to promote economic empowerment and growth after independence. Some states (e.g. Mozambique) attempted ambitious and ultimately failed attempts at Soviet-influenced state socialism and development planning. Initiatives involved the creation of large state-owned companies, the creation of state-owned agro-industrial plantations, communal village systems and collectivisation of peasantry in rural areas, and state controlled trade and exchange (Harisson 2002). Despite the socialist rhetoric of many post-independence governments (e.g. South Africa, Zimbabwe), many government have however adopted the neoliberal development approach (including privatisation, market liberalisation, currency devaluation and cuts to government spending) in return for development money, aiming to create rapid economic growth and economic empowerment.

Table 3: Economic Growth in South Africa under GEAR

	Growth Rate
1996	2.6%
1997	2.6%
1998	0.8%
1999	1.9%
2002	3.6%
2003	2.8%
2004	3.7%
2005	4.3%
Expected Growth Rate	**6%**

Source: Peet (2002) and Lemon (2006)

This approach has however received an extensive critical literature across countries in the region (see Bond 1998, Marais 1998, Hanlon 2004). In South Africa, Peet (2002) has argued that neo-liberal initiatives for restructuring the South African space economy have limited scope for producing economic growth and much needed socio-economic redistribution, due to the limited nature of wealth 'trickle down' to the very poorest and most vulnerable. GEAR (the ANC's neoliberal development strategy) has come under considerable criticism in its failure to provide growth and employment. The program was criticised initially for failing to create sustained economic growth, however in the longer term is showing some signs of improvement (see table 3). Such recovery is however significantly short of government targets of a sustained 6% growth by 2000. Unemployment is also showing disappointing progress. Significant job losses were experienced initially (350,000 jobs lost 1996-99 (Lemon 2006)), and more recently unemployment rates remain high (2003- 41.8% according to the expanded definition of unemployment, and 39.0% in March 2006 (ibid.)). The poverty and inequality reducing drive of mass employment creation through growth has therefore not been facilitated by the GEAR program, and Marais (1998) and others have argued that the government strategy is actually serving to worsen inequality, undermining the redistributive effects of the budget. Similarly in Zimbabwe, Bond (1998) has documented the significant economic decline in the early 1990s, as a result of structural adjustment, leading to a failure to create growth as well as universal increases in poverty and sliding social development amongst marginal urban and rural groups. Bond (1998) states that due to the implementation of ESAP, poverty and hunger increased due to slow growth of employment opportunities, sharp increases in food prices due to inflation and significant retrenchments in the public and private sector. There were also ominous reversals in social provision, with the introduction of fees in rural clinics and primary education. Market-based development initiatives have therefore arguably been the cause of the growth problem of many African countries, not the solution to it (Landes, D. 1998). Many governments have had the unintended consequence of creating economic disempowerment and increasing inequality as a result of their policies. This has in many cases failed to create growth as domestic markets have not expanded due to continuing high levels of poverty and inequality.

Conclusions

This argues that colonial (and neo-colonial) history and geography have played a significant role in Africa's lagging growth rate and peripheral regional status in the global economy. Whilst it has sought to identify a number of postcolonial factors which have blighted growth across a number of African nations, it argues that many of these additional factors have their roots in Africa's colonial past. In particular, the numerous instances of civil war and civil strife can be directly linked back to the colonial project and disorderly way in which many states were hastily decolonised. Newly independent countries were therefore unable to generate cohesive societies, strong economies and correct the considerable inequities created during the colonial period. The neoliberal doctrine, enforced on many vulnerable postcolonial developing economies, has also significantly affected the growth trajectory of many African nations, with notable failures in Zimbabwe and South Africa. It can, however, be argued that this reflects a neo-colonial control over space by dominant financial actors in the global economy. The colonial legacy therefore remains a significant factor in post-colonial Africa. This could remain a major impediment to growth and an African renaissance in the future.

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