State Building, the Colonial Legacy and Development: How the North and South Were Born

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I arrived at the Neulands Orphanage Home in Mvuleni, Tanzaniain the summer of 2007. The orphanage housed hundreds of Rwandan children that had been left alone following the ravages of war in their homeland, and despite the time that had passed since their loss, they were still uncared for and often lacked the most basic necessities of life. A meal was often no more than a handful of dirt drawn directly from the same ground that formed both their bed and their toilet. I felt mortified, enraged, saddened and broken, but most of all I was confounded. How was it possible that people in the developing world were still living in prehistoric conditions in the twenty-first century? Why was it that during the same time that these children were worrying if they would live to see another day, my younger brother's classmates in Beverly Hillswere worrying about which new video games their parents would buy them on their birthdays? In sum, what created such stark gaps in economic development between the North and South? Developed regions are generally able to provide basic welfare services for their citizens, while developing regions are plagued by extreme poverty, government ineffectiveness, and other socioeconomic adversities.[i] Many scholars have attributed these disparities to the different processes through which state formation occurred in developed and developing countries. These scholars maintain that developed regions such as Europe possessed certain favorable preconditions that facilitated the task of state building and development, which were largely absent from the experience of third world countries. Moreover, these scholars contend that the legacy left behind by brutal and exploitative colonial powers led to economic and political underdevelopment in the South, thereby impeding state building and economic progress. It is the purpose of this essay to examine these claims by comparing the state building processes in Europe and the third world and to reach a conclusion regarding the effects that this difference had on their respective degrees of development.

Europe

State building in developed regions such as Europe occurred naturally over centuries. The process began nearly half a millennium ago and saw the rise and fall of thousands of political units before the modern state structure was established.[ii] One could argue that there was almost a form of 'natural selection' or 'survival of the fittest' to determine which states would survive and which would fail. State perpetuity was primarily a function of differential power, wealth, and governmental effectiveness, and any state that failed to fulfill the empirical qualities of statehood would cease to exist. [iii] Thus, stronger, more effective states would often consume their weaker, less efficient neighbors.[iv] States were therefore able to achieve what Robert Jackson terms, 'positive sovereignty,' which is "determined primarily by military power and alliances, socioeconomic capabilities and resources, internal unity and legitimacy, science and technology, education and welfare, and various other familiar constituents of empirical statehood."[v] It is in this regard that Jackson maintains that sovereignty in Europe began as de facto independence and only later became de jure.[vi] The boundaries, leadership, and administrative apparatuses of the state evolved naturally through the aforementioned process of selection until they reached a point of equilibrium size, location, and population.

The international recognition conferred upon these entities was, therefore, no more than an acknowledgment of preexisting facts, "a sort of juridic baptism."[vii] During this transformative time, a number of preconditions held true in Europe that greatly facilitated the process of state formation. First, the relative cultural homogeneity of Europe,

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which prevailed in large part thanks to earlier unifications by the Roman Empire, greatly decreased the cost of state building and helped divide the region into unitary entities displaying "relatively little disparity in language, kinship, cosmology, religion, aesthetic form, or even political tradition."[viii] This is not to imply that there was no diversity in Europe, but rather that cultural variation was minimized within states and maximized among states.[ix] This cultural convergence promoted loyalty and solidarity among state subjects and enabled people to think in terms of national rather than provincial interests.[x] The relative absence of tribal and irredentist forces within political units facilitated the creation of a common national identity meaning that state builders did not have to spend large amounts of resources coordinating and controlling local quarrels and could enact common edicts across the entire territories they controlled.[xi] This provided for an environment far more conducive to state building than areas where people could not communicate effectively with one another or properly understand governmental policies. The second favorable precondition that enabled successful state building was the large peasant base that prevailed in Europe at the outset of the state building process.[xii] "Nomads, slash and burn agriculturalists, fishermen, hunters, and even herders were rare in most of Europe," as the majority of the population and resources "were committed to a peasant way of life."[xiii] Within this sedentary structure, landlords already exercised some degree of sovereignty over their subjects, which meant that state builders could simply co-opt or coerce landlords to form alliances with them to gain control of large populations.[xiv]

Thus, state building occurred through the absorption of preexisting political units, which formed a "state-landlord combine".[xv] This fact greatly facilitated territorial agglomeration and helped state builders lay claim to large tracts of land relatively easily.[xvi] A third factor which proved conducive to European state building was that burgeoning states were relatively protected in space and time and enjoyed an open periphery within which to expand.[xvii] Europe was a creation in the making and expanding states generally faced a "lack of important concentrations of power around the immediate areas in which states were forming," as well as "the availability of territories for expansion, conquest and extraction of new resources."[xviii] Consequently, states enjoyed the opportunity to be able to grow freely without fearing direct confrontations from other political units. The existence of the aforementioned factors meant that political leaders found it relatively easy to engage in constructive state building policies that further consolidated the state system. Charles Tilly, for example, identifies "preparation for war" as "the great state building activity" of the time.[xix] This preparation was greatly facilitated by the homogeneity of the region, the large peasant base, and the openness of the European periphery.[xx] As noted previously, Europe was a work in progress. During this transformative time, state boundaries were far from being predetermined and would expand or contract depending on a given state's success in war. A state's structure, and indeed its very existence, was determined by its military capabilities. As Tilly writes, "war made the state, and the state made war."[xxi]

Building a successful military machine meant that state builders had to have the ability to extract enough resources from their subjects to support such a machine. The need to build an army, therefore, regularized taxation and consolidated state control over a given territory. A "tight circle" was thereby created "connecting state-making, military institutions, and the extraction of scarce resources from a reluctant population."[xxii] This circle greatly strengthened the state and its institutions by laying the groundwork for the state to exert its control over a population despite their resistance, as well as allowing it to extract resources for other purposes.[xxiii] This process enabled European countries to fulfill Tilly's definition of what constitutes a full fledged state, namely "territorial consolidation, centralization, differentiation of the instruments of government and monopolization of the means of coercion."[xxiv] In sum, state building in Europe was formed through a series of favorable preconditions and state policies combined with a process of natural selection. The expiration of unviable political units, a relatively homogeneous population, a large peasant base, a protected position in space and time, and the need to build military capabilities created the modern and effective state system we see in Europe today. As we shall see, the experience of developing countries occurred along very different lines and had profound effects on their developmental potential.

The Developing World

While the modern state system developed naturally in Europe and 'official' statehood was no more than formal recognition of preexisting territorial sovereignty, the state system was superimposed upon developing nations who not only lacked the favorable preconditions that held true in the West, but began at a severe disadvantage because of the devastating effects of colonialism. Prior to their formal recognition as modern states, third world countries had

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very different governing structures than their European counterparts.[xxv] The idea of the state as we know it was non-existant in the developing world.[xxvi] Rather, many different ethnic groups, each with their own polities, inhabited the areas that are now unified sovereign states.[xxvii] These entities were often comprised of herding and nomadic tribes, as opposed to a land-based peasantry, and consequently did not have the same preexisting ties to landlords, which, as we have seen, formed a crucial aspect of the European model.[xxviii] This was one major difference between the developed and the developing state building experience. In addition to lacking this favorable precondition, developing countries had to overcome a myriad of structural problems they inherited from their colonial mother countries. Once European colonists arrived in the South, they began amalgamating and consolidating large tracts of land for their own diplomatic and economic interests without regard for substantive conditions such as ethnic boundaries, traditional forms of government, or the consent of the ruled.[xxix] This often occurred along unnatural borders carved up by European colonizers in the shape of "that abomination of the scientific geographers, the straight line."[xxx] One of the consequences of this fact was that state builders in the developing world were unable to enjoy the same level of homogeneity as their European counterparts.

Territorial consolidation, therefore, became a far more problematic task since forming a unified national identity was hampered by a plethora of tribal allegiances and loyalties, which formed "complex and fragmented societ[ies]" and planted the seeds of ethnic conflict.[xxxi] This was one of a number of difficulties that developing countries were faced with as a result of the colonial legacy. Another obstacle that colonialism imposed on state building in the developing world was inculcating the general populace with the notion that the state was a predatory and self-serving institution to be avoided. Bolanle Awe explains how, prior to colonialism, third world leaders formed a representative "government of the people for the people."[xxxii] Once imperial powers took control of the South, however, they set the interests of the majority subservient to their own. Even the local leaders who were implanted to govern the system were instructed to look out for colonial rather than local interests. This created a sense of alienation between the rulers and the ruled.[xxxiii] Consequently, people tried to escape rather than abide by state control mechanisms such as taxes and military recruitment, preferring instead to become what Robert Fatton Jr. calls marrons, or individuals living in freedom from any form of state coercion.[xxxiv] Additionally, colonial administrators were not timid to use brute force against their subjects. The same antagonism that existed between slaves and their white masters was thereby transferred to colonial subjects and their 'trustees'.[xxxv] In his work, National Collective Identity, Rodney B. Hall offers the example of English men in Tanzania who possessed the right to carry a whip and lash any 'native' they felt deserving of punishment.[xxxvi] In this sense, formal authority became a violent enemy to steer clear of rather than a source of social welfare, a fact which greatly complicated loyalty-building (and hence state building) efforts in the developing world, especially when combined with the heterogeneous base that third world leaders had to deal with.

In addition to the specific problems posed by the colonial legacy and the lack of certain favorable preconditions, the international environment in which third world states gained sovereignty varied exceedingly from the one that prevailed in Europe. As mentioned previously, the state system was superimposed on the developing world, which meant that states were unable to undergo a process of natural selection in which only the stronger, most effective states survived. In Europe, sovereignty was determined primarily as a result of a political unit's internal conditions and viability. Effective governance was a precondition to statehood and ineffective states would simply cease to exist. Following changing norms in the international system, however, colonization ceased to be an acceptable institution and developing states were granted unconditional sovereignty within the territories allocated to them by the international community. It is in this regard that Robert Jackson maintains that developing states were granted sovereignty externally (i.e. not as a result of their internal conditions, but rather because of prevailing international ideologies). Thus, while in Europe substance determined structure, third world states were given the structure without regard to their substance –de jure often preceded de facto statehood.[xxxvii] This was formalized in the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which stated, "all peoples have the right to self-determination" and "inadequacy of political, economic, social, or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence."[xxxviii] Consequently, what took centuries in Europe took no more than a few years in the developing world. For example, while there were only three sovereign African states in 1955, by 1965 that number had skyrocketed to thirty-one.[xxxix] Thus, the long piecemeal process of forming alliances, homogenizing the population, engendering loyalty, taxation, and army building that led to 'positive sovereignty' in Europe was not afforded to developing states, who, as a result, often lacked the substantive qualities that their

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Western counterparts possessed.

As noted previously, this was in large part due to their history as colonial subjects. Colonial states first exploited their 'protectorates' thereby setting the stage for failure, and then left them to their own devices. The result was that many developing states formed nothing more than 'juridical shells,' sovereign only insofar as the international community recognized their existence. These states possessed what Jackson coins 'negative sovereignty' and were often unable to control the territories allocated to them, let alone provide basic welfare services for their citizens.[xl] A final ramification of the system in which developing states were born into is that, unlike European states, these countries were generally locked into the territories allocated to them. While Europe offered bourgeoning states plenty of room to expand and thereby reach their points of natural equilibrium, third world countries lacked the 'openness of the periphery' that formed such an important aspect of the Western model. Charles Tilly contends that the European process of state building was impossible to replicate since developing states were no longer able to expand freely.[xli] This created a diminished need for creating an army and extracting the resources to support it, thereby decreasing the prospects for state consolidation. This diminished need was exacerbated by the likely involvement of the great powers in wars anywhere in the world following decolonization.[xlii] State building for developing countries, therefore, became a far more difficult task given the new constraints of the international environment. This reality had profound effects on the developmental potential within these states.

Consequences on Development

As my experiences in Africaso chillingly showed me, a number of developing states have failed to safeguard even minimal degrees of social welfare for their citizens. These 'quasi-states' have become kleptocratic "parod[ies] of statehood" plagued "by pervasive incompetence, deflated credibility, and systematized corruption."[xliii] It is impossible, however, to study the ramifications of state building processes on the development potential of third world countries without taking the colonial legacy into account. The social, economic, political, and even psychological structure of third world states was, in large part, a direct outgrowth of their colonial heritage. Accordingly, any analysis of the developmental potential of the third world must include a look at the specific effects of colonization on these states. As we have seen from the previous section, the fact that developing states were born without the favorable conditions enjoyed by their European counterparts meant that they were unable to successfully consolidate state control over the territories allocated to them. Their artificial boundaries and resulting heterogeneity, lack of faith in and allegiance to state leaders, inability to expand, and the official recognition of unviable political units, meant that state builders had to overcome a myriad of obstacles to be able to both exert their authority over their subjects, as well as enact policies that would spur economic development. These difficulties were augmented by the economic underdevelopment imposed on the South, which stripped developing countries of the resources necessary to build effective states. Thus, while European states were able to garner large amounts of funds to fuel their growth, developing countries lacked the wherewithal to engage in constructive state building. Imperialism condemned many third world countries to material deprivation. In his seminal work, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Walter Rodney explains how colonial powers hindered the development of third world states by systematically removing all surplus capital in the South–capital which could have been used to assist in state building–and sending it to the North instead.[xliv] Moreover, dependency theorists maintain that colonial powers put developing countries in a sort of 'resource bondage' whereby they constricted developing countries to producing cash crops for the sole purpose of providing the developed world with the necessary primary goods to continue their rapid industrialization.[xlv] The core would then sell the periphery back those resources in the form of finished goods at a far higher price.

The periphery was therefore forced to sacrifice its own developmental potential for the sake of the core. During this time, locals were strongly encouraged (or coerced) to supply the human capital necessary to support the cash crop system and were dissuaded from pursuing higher education. In fact, at the time of Congo's independence there were only sixteen Congolese university graduates.[xlvi] For this reason, Robert Jackson maintains that local leaders lacked the experience and knowledge necessary to build effective developmental states[xlvii] following independence.[1] Sovereignty was eventually granted to these countries, but "sovereignty is not a guarantee of domestic well-being."[xlviii] Even after independence, state leaders were constricted to either continue their preexisting focus on cash crop exports or "ultimately condemn the[ir] countr[ies] to material underdevelopment."[xlix] In fact, a United

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Nations report issued after decolonization showed that 90% of peripheral export earnings derived from primary goods, 50% of which came from a single commodity.[l] It is in this regard that Hoogvelt maintains that the colonial system was perpetuated despite legal sovereignty and had severe effects on economic development in the South.[li] The unfavorable economic structure created by colonization reproduced economic stagnation and led to abject poverty in the developing world. The result of this state of affairs was that politics became one of the only means of upward social mobility for poor and destitute populations.[lii]As noted previously, people in the developing world had already come to view the state as a self-serving institution. Many political leaders and bureaucrats "took for granted the basic structures of colonialism" and decided to take personal advantage of the potential benefits offered by public office.[liii]Thus, self-serving politics, or 'la politique du ventre'[liv] to use the Haitian term, came to be the order of the day with elected officials treating office "as possessions rather than positions."[lv] Governments became kleptocracies "riddled with nepotism, patronage, bribery, extortion, and other personal or black market relationships,"[lvi] and became less agencies "to provide political goods such as law, order, security, justice, or welfare and more fountain[s] of privilege, wealth, and power for a small elite."[lvii] As President Mobutu himself remarked, "everything is for sale, everything is bought in our country. And in this traffic, holding any slice of public power constitutes a veritable exchange instrument, convertible into illicit acquisition of money or other goods."[lviii]

This reality retarded state development in a variety of ways. First, a nations economic progress became secondary to its leadership's personal gain. Additionally, the earlier apprehensions and distrust that common citizens had of their governments was perpetuated, thereby further alienating rulers from their citizens and complicating the task of effective state building. Disillusioned with (if not outright molested from) their governments, masses excluded themselves from the political process, preferring instead to find order within their own ethnic communities.[lix] Politicians were therefore able to evade the rule of law and politics became plagued by "electoral rigging, bribery, violence, fraud, and corruption."[lx]For these reasons, many developing nations turned into failed states characterized by extreme underdevelopment and possessing nothing more than 'negative sovereignty.'

Conclusion

We have seen how the state building processes inEuropeand the developing world occurred along very divergent paths as well as what effects this has had on their respective degrees of development.Europewas a flexible entity possessing both the preconditions and time necessary to build and consolidate effective states. The homogeneous base, land-committed peasantry, and the ability to expand freely enabled state builders to engage in positive state building processes, such as military buildups and resource extraction, thereby consolidating state control over large populations.

Third world countries were denied these privileges in large part as a result of their colonial heritage. Imperial powers condemned developing states to a reality in which they had to contend with a myriad of problems that may have otherwise been absent from the task of state building. These obstacles include a heterogeneous base artificially locked into inflexible borders, a suspicious if not hostile view of government authority, a lack of time to undergo a process of 'natural selection', an unprofitable economic structure based on cash crop exports, and the resulting culture of public service as a means to personal enrichment. The effects that such constraints created on economic development in third world countries are painfully evident today.

Notwithstanding the plethora of difficulties experienced by the South following independence, it is important to bear in mind that the effective states we see operating in Europewere born only after "centuries of ruthless effort."[lxi] Developing countries are still in their infancy compared to Western states. It will undoubtedly take time and effort for these states to gain 'positive sovereignty' and overcome the numerous obstacles imposed on them, but it is the responsibility of those nations that placed them in such precarious situations to help them their struggle. Doing so would help compensate for the injustices perpetrated against the third world, the results of which are extreme poverty and underdevelopment. By pooling their resources and uniting for the common purpose of alleviating the suffering that reigns in the developing world, the international community can overcome the obstacles imposed by the colonial legacy and put developing countries on the path to real and lasting progress.

[1] One exception to this rule was in what Peter Evans coins Newly Industrialized Countries where education was

generally promoted and formed one of the primary impetuses of economic growth.

[i] Robert H. Jackson, "Quasi-states, dual regimes, and neoclassical theory: International jurisprudence in theThird World" International Organization 41 (4) 1987. Hereafter:Jackson (1987).

[ii] Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making", in Charles Tilly (ed.), The Formation of National States in Western Europe, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975. Hereafter: Tilly (1975).

[iii]Jackson (1987).

[iv] Tilly (1975).

[v]Jackson (1987). pp. 536.

[vi] Ibid.

[vii] Crawford, "Criteria for Statehood in International Law" pp. 98. Quoted in: Ibid. pp. 532.

[viii] Tilly (1975). pp. 77.

[ix] Ibid.

[x] Ibid.

[xi] Ibid.

[xii]Ibid.

[xiii]Ibid. pp. 13.

[xiv] Ibid.

[xv] Ibid. pp. 77.

[xvi] Ibid.

[xvii]Ibid.

[xviii] Ibid. pp. 30.

[xix] Ibid. pp. 74.

[xx] Ibid.

[xxi] Ibid. pp. 42.

[xxii]Ibid. pp. 23-24.

[xxiii] Ibid.

[xxiv] Ibid. pp. 42.

[xxv] Bolanle Awe, "Conflict and Divergence: Government and Society inNigeria" African Studies Review 42 (3)

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(December 1999). Hereafter: Awe (1999).

[xxvi]Jackson (1987).

[xxvii] Awe (1999).

[xxviii]Tilly (1975).

[xxix] Awe (1999).

[xxx] G.L Beer, African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference (New York: Scribners, 1923), pp.65. Quoted in:Jackson (1987). pp. 525.

[xxxi] William Reno, "Congo: From State Collapse to 'Absolutism', to State Failure" Third World Quarterly 27 (1) (2006). pp. 49. Hereafter:Reno (2006).

[xxxii] Awe (1999). pp. 6.

[xxxiii] Ibid.

[xxxiv] Robert Fatton Jr., "Haiti: The Saturnalia of Emancipation and the Vicissitudes of Predatory Rule" Third World Quarterly 27 (1) (2006). Hereafter: Fatton (2006).

[xxxv] Ibid.

[xxxvi] Rodney Bruce Hall, "National Collective Identity" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[xxxvii]Jackson (1987).

[xxxviii] Quoted from: Ibid. pp. 531.

[xxxix] Ibid.

[xl] Ibid.

[xli] Tilly (1975).

[xlii] Ibid.

[xliii]Jackson (1987). pp. 528.

[xliv] Walter Rodney, "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1972).

[xlv] Ankie Hoogvelt, Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The New Political Economy of Development (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). Hereafter: Hoogvelt (1997).

[xlvi]Reno (2006).

[xlvii]Jackson (1987).

[xlviii] Robert H. Jackson, The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States (Oxford,: Oxford University Press, 2000). pp. 10.

[xlix] Fatton (2006). pp. 119.

[l] Hoogvelt (1997).

[li] Ibid.

[lii] Fatton (2006).

[liii] Awe (1999) pp. 10.

[liv] Fatton (2006). pp. 123.

[lv]Jackson (1987). pp. 527.

[lvi] Ibid.

[lvii] Ibid.

[lviii] Quoted in: Peter Evans, "Predatory, Developmental, and Other Apparatuses: A Comparative Political Economy Perspective on theThird WorldState" Sociological Forum 4 (4) (December 1989). pp. 570.

[lix] Awe (1999).

[lx] Ibid. pp. 12.

[lxi] Tilly (1975). pp. 24.

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