PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

# Reverberations of Empire: How the Colonial Past Shapes the Present

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## Abstract

Modern colonialism from the eighteenth century onward encompassed most of the world's surface. Today, the world is different. In theory at least, nation-states rather than empires and colonies are the global norm. The sorts of colonial conquests that mark earlier centuries appear to have ended. But does this mean colonialism in the past is not relevant for the present? Scholarly and popular discussions allude to the idea that past colonialism impacts the present, using a variety of terms like "legacies," "imprints," "vestiges," "ruins," or "afterlives." Yet existing scholarship has yet to fully clarify and catalog the specific processes and mechanisms that connect colonial history with its putative legacies. This essay, based upon the 2022 Presidential Address to the Social Science History Association, identifies and discusses four such processes and mechanisms or "modes of reverberation": (1) continued colonialism through simple reproduction, (2) the persistence of power through formal and informal institutionalization, (3) path dependent historical trajectories (or "colonial institutionalism"), and (4) colonialism's archive of meaning.

In July of 2020, officials in the city of Chicago authorized a stealth operation. The task: to remove the statue of Christopher Columbus in Grant Park and hide it in a location undisclosed to the public.[1] Under the cover of night, city workers removed the statue and stored it away "until further notice" – as the mayor's office declared. But why? Mayor Lori Lightfoot explained the next day that she had ordered the removal in the interest of "public safety" (Office of the Chicago Mayor 2020). The previous weeks had frightened city officials. A group of demonstrators including members of Black Lives Matter Chicago had been protesting the murder of George

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[1]The statue had been erected in 1933 to celebrate Chicago's 100th anniversary of the Century of Progress World's Fair, at the behest and with the help of Chicago's Italian American community who in turn objected to its removal.

Floyd by police. During one of their demonstrations, they putatively vandalized the statue. Then on, July 17, they laid siege to it. Violent affrays with police followed. The police prevailed. The statue remained intact. This is why Lightfoot removed the statue, in direct "response to demonstrations that became unsafe for both protesters and police" (ibid).

This incident can be seen as part of the larger series of challenges to public monuments. These range from challenges in Charleston, North Carolina – where Black Lives Matter activists protested statues dedicated to the Confederate Defenders – to Oxford, United Kingdom and the University of Cape Town, South Africa, where protestors denounced statues of Cecil Rhodes. The pattern is notable. The targeted monuments all represent histories of imperialism, colonialism, and their correlates: racism and slavery. But this in turn raises pressing questions: why should groups like Black Lives Matter care at all about these monuments to the colonial past? Ultimately, the monuments only *refer* to colonialism and imperialism; they are *not themselves* imperialism or colonialism. They are merely statues representing a colonial past that, presumably, is over and done with. Why, then, should people care about them? Empires have fallen. The past is behind us. The past is past. So, rather than fret about symbols from the past, should we not just focus on the present?

Many scholars would likely respond that debating symbols of empire from the past is worthwhile because empire has shaped and continues to shape the present. Colonialism is over, but the colonial past has left lasting legacies that impact societies today. Some scholars thus readily invoke this kind of thinking when they employ terms like "vestiges" of empire, "ruins" of empire, "colonial afterlives," the "reverberations" of empire, the "shadows of empire," or "colonial debris." The claim is simple: history matters. The problem, however, is while many scholars might readily concur that imperial and colonial histories are important because they shape the present, this is all too often an *assumption* that some scholars make. Consider the body of thought known as "postcolonial theory" that initially swept the academic humanities in the 1990s; or the academic trend of "decolonial" thought that has taken on heightened import in the Northern academy more recently. For all their theoretical insights, neither postcolonial theory nor decolonial studies systematically demonstrate through sustained empirical investigation the means or modalities by which colonialism shapes the present. Rather than offering genealogies of colonial legacies, most of this work assumes them. At most, the literature points to inequalities, institutions, or epistemes today and asserts that they are legacies of empire or that they are somehow the direct cause of past imperialism and colonialism. But it rarely *shows* it through historical investigation. Nor does it specify the mechanisms or processes by which the colonial past continues into the present. Imperial history matters, perhaps; but it is not always easy to clearly explain how and why.

There are newer works, mostly of the popular variety (especially in Britain), that purport to expose the import of imperial or colonial history upon the present (e.g. Puri 2021; Sanghera 2023). These works discuss a wide array of contemporary features of British society and connect them to the imperial past. However, as these works are written for popular audiences, they are mostly impressionistic rather than systematic and robust. They catalog a myriad of examples but stop short of clarifying the different ways in which or mechanisms by which the imperial past shapes the present. They allude or assume rather than explain. Ann Stoler's (2013)

skepticism of terms like "imperial legacies" or "reverberations of empire" applies well here. Such phrases, she bemoans, tend to be "deceptive terms that deflect analysis more than they clear the way" (2013: 7).[2]

It is exactly here, therefore, in this space of the taken-for-granted about empire and its legacies, where the present essay intervenes. The task is to explore some of the ways in which the imperial past matters in the present; that is, to consider how colonialism in the past impacts societies, social relations, institutions, economies, and polities today by uncovering the precise historical processes to which terms that we causally use – like "legacy", "vestige," or "reverberations" – refer. The related goal is to ponder how we might begin to *think* about, conceptualize, and study these reverberations. Which analytic categories might be mobilized or crafted to best understand imperial imports into the present?

For the task, I draw upon a variety of work by scholars in different disciplinary formations that offers empirical investigations into colonial legacies and traces various lineages of influence upon the present.[3] I also deploy various studies of colonialism and empire – part of the larger "imperial turn" in social science history since the 1990s and the "new" sociology of empire and colonialism – that do not directly confront the question of historical legacies but offer useful insights nonetheless (Cooper and Stoler 1997; Burton 2003; Go 2009; Pitts 2010; Steinmetz 2014). Using this work, I hope to clarify, conceptualize, and catalog some of the key paths of influence of the imperial past upon the present: the primary *modes of reverberation* by which empire matters today.

My focus is upon *modern colonialism*, largely in its Anglo-European variety. Early modern imperialism, especially in the form of chartered trading companies, has certainly left its mark on modernity, including on contemporary economic thought (Erikson 2021). The reach, power, and influence of the Chinese, Russian, and Ottoman empires has also been important (Endelman 2018). But it is impossible to cover *all* imperial legacies, *all* historical periods, and *all* empires. The analysis must be focused; hence this essay looks mainly at the legacies left behind by some of the largest Anglo-European empires (not least the British, US, French, and other European empires).

I mean to be relatively precise when I speak of "modern colonialism." By this term I refer to a sociopolitical relationship that is a subtype of imperialism. If "imperialism" is a modality of power by which one state or social actor exerts

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[2]Scholars have discussed why colonialism and imperialism happens in the first place (for a review of the literature see Go 2014; Edwards and Go 2019). But they have comparably more silent on the lasting outcomes of empire.

[3]For work that has tried to explicitly trace imperial or colonial legacies, see, besides the work cited throughout below, the essays in the volume by Schlichte and Stetter (2023), especially the chapter by Steinmetz, George. 2023. *The Colonial Origins of Modern Social Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, as well as Adelman, Jeremy. 1999. *Colonial legacies: the problem of persistence in Latin American history*. New York: Routledge, Burchart, Hans-Jurgen, and Johanna Leinius (Eds.). 2022. *(Post-)Colonial Archipelagos: Comparing the Legacies of Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Halperin, Sandra, and Ronen Palan (eds.). 2015. *Legacies of Empire: Imperial Roots of the Contemporary Global Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, and Gilbert, Paul, Clea Bourne, Max Halven, and Johnna Montgomerie (eds.). 2023. *The Entangled Legacies of Empire*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

unequal influence and control over another society or peoples, *colonialism* is one particular mode of such power. As opposed to "informal imperialism" or what Nkrumah famously referred to as "necolonialism" (Nkrumah 1966), colonialism depends first and foremost upon the declaration of sovereignty and/or territorial seizure by a core state over another territory and its inhabitants who are classified as inferior subjects rather than equal citizens (Osterhammel 1999; Go 2011: 5–12; Arneil 2023). *Colonial empires* thus consist of a single core state exercising direct control and declaring sovereignty over multiple territories and people.

While we could say that colonial empires have existed throughout history, colonialism has been a dominant mode of imperialism largely from about the eighteenth century through the twentieth century (Fieldhouse and Emerson 1968; Fieldhouse 1982). The European empires were the most powerful and extensive of these colonial empires. As Abernathy (2000) notes, the European colonial empires encompassed nearly all of the territory that would later become the 125 different countries of the world. But we should not neglect the United States colonial empire as well. This empire began as a continental empire that maintained a strict citizen-subject distinction, even in the territories of the western frontier before they became fully-fledged states. America's imperial state then extended overseas to encompass Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, Samoa, the Panama Canal Zone, and the US Virgin Islands, among other islands (Go 2011: 28–66; Immerwahr 2016).

As is well-known, the authority and legitimacy of these empires was challenged in the twentieth century. Anticolonial movements around the world fought for national independence, contributed to decolonization, and helped to topple most of the colonial empires in the world. It is in this sense that we can speak of "past imperialism" or colonial legacies. Most of the colonial empires have ended, and colonialism is no longer the dominant form of sociopolitical relations in the world. The official "colonial-ocene" at the global scale is over (though, as we will see shortly, this does not mean there are no formal colonies at all today). The question is this: what impact have these colonial empires had upon our present-day world and *how* have they shaped the present? At the risk of being overly schematic, I discuss four modes of colonial reverberation. Each refer to a distinct way in which the colonial past impacts the present: (1) continued colonialism through simple reproduction, (2) the persistence of power through repetition, (3) path dependence, and (4) colonialism's archive of meaning. These are not mutually exclusive, but they are analytically separable. They are meant to render different processes and paths visible, to chart the murky and nebulous field of imperial legacies, and make colonialism's impact analytically digestible.

## Continued colonialism through simple reproduction

The first mode, *continued colonialism,* pinpoints the most obvious way in which the imperial past impacts the present: in some parts of the world, the imperial past is not yet past; or, put differently, formal colonialism is not over. Despite the massive decolonization of most countries in the mid to late 20th century, some colonies still exist, reproducing over time. One of them is Palestine, which marks a continued settler colonial occupation by Israel (Khalidi 2020; Sabbagh-Khoury, 2023). But there are many more examples. Britain was among the largest colonial empires of

the past centuries and it still retains control over various territories. The government of United Kingdom lists fourteen such territories, including Anguilla, Bermuda, Gibraltar, Turks and Caicos, the Cayman Islands, and the British Virgin Islands. The total inhabitants of Britain's current possessions is about 300,00 persons. The largest is the Cayman Islands with 69,000 inhabitants. The combined area of the overseas territories is seven times that of the UK (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association 2023).

Similarly, France retains various *départements et régions d'outre-mer* (aka "DROM-COM" or "overseas departments and regions") with over 2.6 million inhabitants from French Caledonia in the Pacific to Saint Martin in the Caribbean and Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, and Réunion off the eastern coast of the African continent. Meanwhile, the United States still has so-called "territories" like Puerto Rico, Guam, Samoa, the Northern Marianas, and the Virgin Islands – which Donald Trump famously suggested the United States trade for Greenland (and Greenland, by the way, is in many ways still a Danish colony). By some measures, including population, the United States has the largest colonial empire in the world today (Raustiala 2009; Go 2011).

This is not merely ceremonial or symbolic colonialism. Just as with conventional colonialism, unequal power is exercised by metropolitan states. America's unequal control over Puerto Rico is seen in the fact that Puerto Rican residents can be sent to war by Congress and the President but they do not vote for either; and that control over Puerto Rico's economy remains ultimately in the hands of the US federal government. In this regard, Puerto Rico is like Guam and other U.S. territories: they have been declared by the Supreme Court to be "foreign in the domestic sense," with the U.S. Congress enjoying final control without representation from the territories (Burnett and Marshall 2001). Similarly, France's Southern and Antarctic Lands are overseas "territories" whose inhabitants administered by a representative of the French government, while French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, St-Pierre and Miquelon, Saint Barthélemy, and Saint Martin are administered by a Prefect appointed by the French government. Turning to the British empire, in 2009, the UK Government suspended parts of the Constitution of the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) due to charges of corruption, removing the constitutional right to trial by jury, suspending the ministerial government and the House of Assembly, and placing a UK-appointed Governor in charge of administering the islands. The United Nations thus considers at least seventeen territories to be "non-self-governing territories (NSGTs)." These are "territories whose people have not yet attained a full measure of self-government" (United Nations 2023: para. 1). This is also to say that these are territories over which unequal power is exercised.

Another example of continued colonialism are the ongoing relations between imperial governments and indigenous peoples. These were first formed during the colonial period but persist into the present, typically codified in treaties and laws that remain in effect today or whose effects remain today. This is a straightforward reproduction of settler colonialism that reminds us that settler colonialism is an "ongoing structure rather than a past historical event" (Nakano Glenn 2015: 52). Such colonial continuity is most palpable when we consider the territorial dispossession that was intrinsic to settler colonialism. The United States struck hundreds of treaties with Native nations between 1778, when the Treaty with the

Delaware was signed, through the Indian Appropriation Act of 1871, under Article II of the Constitution. The central objective of these treaties was the "extinguishment of aboriginal title over vast tracts of land to make way for white settlement" (Bacon and Norton 2016: 306). The result was large scale dispossession that has not been reversed. Today, as a recent study by Farrell et al. (2021) shows, 98.9% of the historical lands in the United States previously occupied by Indigenous people are now in the hands of settlers and/or the United States government (Farrell et al. 2021). This is a clear sign of continued settler colonialism. "It's not correct to talk about 'historical' colonialism," like colonialism is over," as one author of the study, a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, states. "Colonialism and land dispossession are *present* factors that increase vulnerability and create economic challenges for tribes" (Wade 2021).

## The persistence of power: the institutionalization of colonial instruments

Even when countries are no longer formal colonies and have become independent nations, the traces of colonialism persist. This points to another way in which the imperial past impacts the present: *the persistence of colonial instruments through historical institutionalization.* Colonialism involved the creation and use of various and often novel tools for rule. Some were legal instruments. Others were tactics of power created on the spot amidst of the urgency of conquest and colonial rule. As colonizers repeatedly used these instruments and tools, they were hitched to resources, institutionalized, and thus reproduced into the present day. These are thus akin to Sewell's (1992) notion of "schemas" that get effectively used, accrue resources and hence become part of lasting structures. In this way, artifacts of power developed and deployed during colonialism continue into the present across many parts of the world, even if formal colonialism in those areas has ended.

Current systems of coercion, from policing to armed forces, are the direct product of colonial occupation in most ex-colonial countries (Barkawi 2015; Eck 2018). Newly independent states did not overthrow these systems with decolonization; to the contrary they re-institutionalized them. Other systems and institutions have also been institutionalized through colonialism, either through formal or informal modes. Legal residuals of colonialism are paradigmatic of formal institutionalization: in some postcolonial nations, the repressive laws that colonizers initially created for their colonial projects linger whilst colonialism itself might be over (Ferguson 2022). In Kenya, Sections 162 and 165 of the penal code were initially created by the British and they remain intact to this day. These are laws banning homosexuality. Article 162 punishes "carnal knowledge against the order of nature" with up to 14 years in prison, while article 165 makes "indecent practices between males" liable to up to five years in prison. These laws were first imposed in Kenya by the British in 1897, and while they may be seen as dead letters and rarely enforced, they have in fact been used in the past decade to prosecute individuals. Meanwhile, police have used the laws as pretext to harass, punish, or extort money from LGBT people; or to deny services to LGBT people who are victims of violence (Human Rights Watch 2019). Other ex-British colonies have similar laws (Human Rights Watch 2008). Some have been repealed but others have not. Section 377 of

the Penal Code in India remained in effect all the way up to 2018. This law, created by the British Raj, is one hundred and fifty years old. Essentially criminalizing homosexuality, it prohibited and punished "carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal" with imprisonment up to life (Deswal 2019). It was only removed due to large-scale popular protests in 2018. Similar laws prohibiting homosexuality exist in sixty-nine countries, nearly two-thirds of which were under British colonialism at some point previously (Wong 2021).

Such legal residuals are evident in former imperial centers and not just in postcolonial countries. Why, for instance, is London today a financial center that attracts "everyone from Russian oligarchs to Nigerian billionaires to Saudi princes to take up residence" there, "driving up house prices and the general cost of living" (Koram 2022: 188–189)? The answer lies in British laws regarding so-called "non–dom" (i.e. non-domiciled) residents. The laws permit taxpayers in the UK to pay tax only on their UK income, not on income accrued from assets or investments abroad. These non-dom rules go back to the late 1700s when the British empire created them in response to colonial lobbies. The goal was to encourage British settlers to venture overseas and invest in plantations. An income tax law written in 1798 and passed by Parliament in 1799 is the root. It waived tax on incomes derived from enterprises in the Caribbean and elsewhere producing sugar, molasses, rum, indigo, coffee, and cotton using slave labor (Byers 2022; Savage 2023).

Another example is international law. The sovereignty doctrine upon which so much of international law is based – along with many other key concepts of international law – has colonial origins. Specifically, it emerged from the imperial search for a legal basis for colonial relations between the European and non-European worlds. European powers did not have a preexisting arsenal of international legal doctrines that they then applied to their relations with colonies. Rather their imperial projects amidst the colonial encounter first generated those doctrines which still serve as the silent scaffolding for international law today. As critical scholars note, this makes it all the more difficult for systemic justice to be addressed within the terms of international law (Anghie 2007). The very idea of territorial sovereignty to which the sovereignty doctrine is tied is also an artifact of colonial power that has been institutionalized. In medieval Europe, prior to the modern colonial encounter, the political landscape was largely constituted by jurisdictional or personal forms of authority, with territorial forms blended in, that often resulted in overlapping, non-exclusive and decentralized authorities. Branch (2012: 282) reveals that it was only with the so-called "discovery" of the Americas and subsequent colonial claims by competing European powers that territorial forms of authority – defined by exclusive, non-overlapping and "linear cartographic boundaries and homogeneity within those lines" – took precedence and become firmly institutionalized both in colonial domains and, then, eventually in Europe itself. A key feature of the modern state as we know it – that is, exclusive claims to territorial sovereignty – is thus a product of colonial power, and its repeated use over time has instituted it as an almost taken-for-granted feature of authority. The colonial roots are hidden.

The very boundaries of many postcolonial nations today are products of colonial power. Most boundaries were forged during the colonial period. They had less to do with natural boundaries than dynamics of inter-imperial rivalry and the whims,

interests, and longings of colonial powers. In some cases, the territorial divisions have been arbitrary enough to be pernicious, generating significant conflicts throughout the postcolonial independence period. In Africa, homelands that were partitioned during the colonial period suffer from more political violence today than non-partitioned homelands, even controlling for multiple other factors (Michalopoulos and Papaionnou 2016).

Along with these borders was the colonial institutionalization of identities, from racial and ethnic identities to tribes, castes, or other religious groupings. Colonialism did not invent these identities but they surely modified them and put them to use for political purposes, thereby tethering them to political structures or socioeconomic incentive systems and in turn hardening them in ways that still shape present-day postcolonial politics (Laitin 1986; Dirks 2001; Slater and Solfer 2020). Mamdani's (1996, 2020) work shows how European colonizers used indirect rule as a particular modality of colonial power which served to institutionalize and harden certain ethnic or ethnoreligious identities in colonial countries. After independence, those identities remained embedded in organizations and personal dispositions, in turn shaping subsequent intergroup conflict and violence (Mamdani 1996; Mamdani 2020). Similarly, Berda (2023) discloses how the British colonial bureaucracies of Cyprus, India, and Palestine relied upon a complex array of categories and distinctions in order to monitor, surveil, and control colonized populations and particularly mobile peoples. These categories and distinctions did not disappear even though British rulers and bureaucrats eventually left; they rather remained embedded in state organizations through and after independence. In all such cases, the impact of the colonial past upon the present follows the same logic: certain identities, classificatory schemes, and categories were codified and deployed as part of colonial rule and thus become solidified or hardened, remaining durable into the postcolonial period. The overall effect is that identities forged during colonialism or *for* colonial rule continue into the present, even though colonial rule in these countries is long over.[4]

Besides formal instruments embedded in law, state institutions or bureaucracies, empire also generated a range of new informal strategies of rule or new technologies, tactics, and techniques of coercion. Colonialism was a space of contact, collaboration, conflict, and exploitation but it was likewise a novel field of interaction necessitating innovation. This feature of colonialism has left behind multiple artifacts of power. While initially generated during and for colonialism, these have been institutionalized too. They have thus become part of our contemporary repertoire of governmental, political, or economic structures. They are continually deployed, even if in more transmuted or hidden form, and even if we are not always cognizant of them. They persist in society's imperial unconscious.

Many of these colonial traces are evident in the colonies themselves as well as in imperial metropoles. Through a process that Aimé Césaire (1955) called "the boomerang effect," colonialism touched *both* colonizing and colonized societies. Consider a common policing technique that you can find in almost any city in the United States and even in Europe: so-called predictive policing or "hot spot"

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[4]Citizenship laws and definitions have similar colonial origins. See, for instance, Hammer (2021).

policing. This is where police identify areas of the city that have seen high levels of crime so that they can increase their police presence and patrols in those areas. In the 1980s this was touted as a new approach to policing using sophisticated software but it emerged in American policing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was popularized by a man named August Vollmer, who was the police chief at Berkeley and then Los Angeles in the early decades of the century. Vollmer invented what was then called "pin mapping": placing pins on the map of the city where crime had occurred so that he could find "hot spots" of crime and distribute police patrols accordingly. But this early form of hot spot policing, pin mapping, was not invented by Vollmer out of thin air. Before he became police chief, Vollmer had served in the US army in the Philippine-American War; he had been part of a new elite army unit conducing search and destroy missions to hunt, capture and kill Filipino insurgents in the dark terrain of Luzon. To track the movements and bases of the insurgents, the US army had devised and perfected pin mapping, and Vollmer then brought this tactic back to the United States for policing (Go 2020). In this sense, predictive policing today has its origins in colonial conquest.

Other examples can be found when investigating the genealogies of international organizations today. Consider the World Health Organization. To regulate sanitation and health in their imperial domains, the core European imperial powers created international forums like the International Sanitary Conventions from which emerged new inter-imperial regulations on global health and colonial policies. White (2023) argues that a central strategy underlying these inter-imperial regulations and colonial health policies was "epidemic orientalism" by which colonial spaces and peoples, classified as the font of disease, were cordoned off from global circulation. Promoting global health meant protecting metropolitan citizens, and so imperial powers enacted health policies meant to create borders between colony and metropole so that metropolitan societies were not tainted and infected. These early inter-imperial regulations and colonial policies were further institutionalized in subsequent international regimes even after decolonization. Today, such "epidemic orientalism" continues to structure current international health policies promoted by the World Health Organization and most nation-states (White 2023).[5]

## Structural continuities through path dependency, or colonial institutionalism

While colonialism might be reproduced, and while its instruments of power might persist despite the end of colonialism, so too might the overarching structural relations or patterns of inequality attendant with colonialism continue into the present. This is a third modality of imperial reverberation: structural continuities through path dependency. I take this modality from the literature on "historical institutionalism" in political science that emphasizes the importance of historical

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[5]The United Nations as an organization also bears the imprints of the colonial past. See, for example, Murphy, Craig. 2015. "Imperial legacies in the UN Development Programme and the UN development system." Pp. 149–70 in *Legacies of Empire*, edited by Sandra Halperin and Ronen Palan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

path dependence, sequence, and timing upon outcomes (Steinmo 2008). There are varieties of historical institutionalism, but I import the basic idea that past institutions shape the present by making some historical trajectories or developments more possible than others. I suggest that the continuation of colonialism's structural relations might persist into the present through similar path dependencies. Drawing from the literature on historical institutionalism, another name for this might be *colonial institutionalism*. By this term I mean to refer to how colonial experiences, processes, or relations set the basis for path dependent trajectories that explain present-day structures.

Contemporary patterns of international inequality constitute a prime example. It is perhaps not shocking to note that the global structure of international inequality looks very much the same as it did during the period of high imperialism in the 19th century: European powers that colonized the world were wealthy then and remain comparably wealthy now, while most of the ex-colonies of those core powers remain at the lower rungs of the international economic hierarchy. There are exceptions, of course. India and China are powerful counterpoints. Yet, on the whole, these are exceptions that prove the rule. There is a remarkably persistent set of unequal socioeconomic global relations that replicate those of the colonial era. The economist Bairoch put it simply: "There is no doubt that a large number of structural features of economic underdevelopment have historical roots going back to European colonization" (quoted in Mahoney 2010: 253).

Path dependence helps us that this current international structure has its roots in colonialism. As a range of theorists and thinkers have long discussed – from Walter Rodney and Franz Fanon to World-Systems Analysis and Dependency Theory – colonialism facilitated the long-term extraction and appropriation of wealth (from bullion to natural resources and labor) from peripheral regions of the world, enriching metropolitan imperial societies. Such extraction and appropriation continues today in various forms, but it does so in the absence of formal colonialism. Instead it occurs through what Kwame Nkrumah (1966) referred to as "necolonialism": extraction and appropriation through the work of global corporations, aided by neoliberal economic policies imposed by international economic organizations or other forms of unequal control.

If formal colonialism does not directly serve to "underdevelop" ex-colonies today, though, it is nonetheless crucial because it set the tracks for these ongoing processes that perpetuate and exacerbate international inequality. Through colonialism, colonies were immediately placed into lower positions in the global division of labor and deprived of strong autonomous political institutions. Thus even after colonialism officially ended, the newly independent countries had already been set upon path dependent trajectories keeping them locked in place. Lacking internal wealth, capital, technology, and strong state capacities, they could not compete with wealthier countries like France, England, or the United States that were former colonial powers. Furthermore, the latter, though granting political independence, used their wealth and power to pressure ex-colonies into unequal trade agreements and arrangements that served to facilitate continued extraction and appropriation. Colonialism not only locked ex-colonial countries into historical trajectories of economic deprivation, it simultaneously paved the path for former imperial powers to maintain their wealth. Colonialism can be rightly seen as a

"historical cause", as Stinchcombe (1968: 104) might put it; that is, "a cause that produces an outcome that then persists in the absence of the cause." Meanwhile, the United States granted economic benefits to states like Taiwan and South Korea (capital and access to markets) in exchange for serving American geopolitical interests, enabling the new "Asian tigers" to rise in status while colonial deprivation in Vietnam and Indonesia served to exclude them from becoming one of the "Asian miracles" (Wade 1992; Kwon 2011; Gray 2014).

There are major differences in development *between* ex-colonial countries. Settler colonies like Canada, the United States, and Australia have fared much better economically those other British colonies; some colonies within the French empire have fared better in terms of socioeconomic development than others; and there is wide variation in Latin America's ex-colonial countries in levels of development. But even these differences can be traced to colonialism. Mahoney's (2010) work on Latin America is exemplary. Mahoney shows that levels of colonial penetration and the types of economic policies enacted by imperial powers shaped different levels of socioeconomic development in the colonies and different formations of elite power. Then, when those colonies became independent, those different levels of socioeconomic development and formations of elite power conditioned how those countries experienced further events and processes, leading all the way to present day international inequalities. This is why differences in levels of development across Latin American countries today look the same as they did during the colonial era (Mahoney 2010 see also Lange et al. 2006).

Variations in political development can also be understood by understanding colonial histories and the path dependent trajectories of postcolonial development that followed. Research by Lange (2003, 2009) shows that the particular type of colonial rule that the British enacted in Africa – whether "direct" or "indirect" – accounts for differences in postcolonial nations' political development. Likewise, Owolabi (2023) differentiates political-economic systems associated with colonialism and finds that "forced settlement colonies" have better developmental outcomes than conventional colonies of occupation. Path dependent trajectories of postcolonial development beginning in colonial structures holds the key to understanding these outcomes (Owolabi 2023). Edwards' (In Press) study of the "miracle" of political and economic development in postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago also reveals colonial institutionalism. Trinidad and Tobago had been ruled by the British for centuries before finding its relative postcolonial success. While the case would appear to overturn the theory that colonialism impacts present-day levels of development, Edwards shows that colonialism still matters, however in more complex ways than we might assume. Trinidad and Tobago's success lies in multiracial workers' movements during the colonial period who made successful demands upon the British colonial state for strong developmental institutions. The British colonial state conceded to the workers' demands partly because it was dependent upon the oil industry to run its empire. Workers' resistance in the forms of strikes and other acts that threatened to undermine the empire's economic engine. Edwards thus shows how path dependent processes explains the "miracle" while incorporating the agency of the colonized.

Colonial institutionalism and the associated logic of path dependence can also be seen in current trade and migration patterns. Typically, flows of capital,

commodities, and labor today are understood as rootless flows manifesting unfettered globalization. But many of these flows are embedded in imperial relations. France today trades heavily with its former colonies in Africa, as does Britain with its former colonies (De Sousa and Lochard 2012). Generally speaking, such flows between ex-colonies and former colonial powers have diminished slowly over time, but ex-colonies still trade disproportionately with their former colonial power (Head et al. 2010). Trade even spills over from former colonies to the former colonies' neighbors due to embedded colonial flows (Berthou 2017). The same goes for migration. Migration to Europe tends to follow the paths previously laid down by colonialism (Buettner 2016: 211–413). Notably, England's major immigrant populations are all from England's former colonies, not least India, Pakistan, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago among others (Patel 2021; Watson 2018). These trends reflect the fact that colonialism served to embed interests and relations in particular imperial circuits, creating the conditions for their continuation even after colonialism. Through this path dependent embeddedness, the flows and relations between societies and peoples that were created during colonialism persist even as formal colonialism has ended.

## Empire's archive of meaning, or colonialism's cultures

The final way in which the imperial past shapes the present is by serving as a cultural repository or *archive of meaning* that can be continually drawn upon by current social actors to shape perceptions and discourses. Colonialism did not only generate novel governmentalities, instruments, tactics, and forms. It also birthed or was attendant with meaning structures, novel modes of thought, new discourses and ideas, new knowledges, and emergent concepts and classificatory schemes that colonialism fostered or fomented. Racialized distinctions and racism, ideas about the "human" or discourses about "culture" and "civilizations," conceptions of "the Orient" as distinct from "the Occident," folk discourses about criminality or health – these and many other cultural schemas and discourses were part and parcel of colonialism. Institutionalized through colonialism, these discourses have been made available for subsequent generations. Past colonialism thus provides the groundwork for their repeated use and mobilization by social actors today.[6]

This is not dissimilar from the institutionalization of colonialism's instruments by which power is reproduced, as discussed above. The line between colonialism and the present is drawn through repeated usages over time and across generations. But empire's archive of meaning is different because it includes cultural schemas and various ideational elements of colonialism that might not have been instrumentalized explicitly by the state, and which then have been repeated and reproduced over time in non-state sectors (i.e. in society through social practice). As noted, for instance, racial or ethnic classifications were invented, codified, and institutionalized by the colonial state. But colonialism also came with other images and notions about difference that were put into practice by social actors. Empire thus

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[6]Included but not discussed here would be the way in which colonialism shaped the social sciences in metropolitan countries (Go 2009; 2013b; Steinmetz 2023).

bequeathed to us an entire discursive formation or *culture* replete with novel meanings that persist and continue to be drawn upon today, lodged in popular imaginaries, discourses, arts, culture, and even nationalism (Tinsley 2018).

The most obvious examples include some of the blatant and conventional racist stereotypes generated from and for colonial conquest. Racist tropes of Africans or indigenous peoples were part of the legitimating formations of settler and plantation colonialism (see also Nakano Glenn 2015). Folk ideas about the so-called "lazy native" in Southeast Asia or the images of romanticized savage were also fomented through colonial encounters. These and many other tropes or ideas persist today, having been repeatedly used by social actors since decolonization. In the United States we need only look at popular culture to see their persistence, but parallel images and schemas are evident across Europe too. For example, the image of Zwarte Piet or "black Pete" is trotted out during Christmas celebrations in the Netherlands. As Buettner (2016: 1–4) points out, this is an image from the colonial era that continues to be used and even celebrated.

There are also deeper epistemic forms and cultural schemas that empire generated and which persist. This is where Said's (1979) critique of Orientalism remains powerful still (Said 1979; Said 1995). As Said (1993) intimates, the binaries attendant with the discourse of "the East" and "the West," along with other essentialist dichotomies that imperialists deployed and institutionalized, have long penetrated academic knowledge while permeating popular discourse as well. And while colonialism has ended in many parts of the world, these discourses have not. Through their repeated use over time, they have become engrained in modes of thought and discourse the world over.

Indeed, the essentialist binaries have been *so* powerful that even some putatively anti-imperial movements used them and continue to use them today. Nativist "anti-western" and fundamentalist movements in the ex-colonial world deploy the very same Orientalist dichotomies of imperialists did, however in their case to construct the "west" as an evil Other deserving of violent rebuke. In *Culture and Imperialism,* Said (1993: xiii, 311) opined that "essentializations" have proliferated since colonialism; the Orientalist discourse of "terrorism" in the West and "varieties of religious and nationalist fundamentalism" in the "formerly colonized world" share the same discursive ground first cultivated by empire. "Thus Muslims or Africans or Indians or Japanese," Said warns, "in their idioms and from within their own threatened localities, attack the West, or Americanization, or imperialism, with little more attention to detail, critical differentiation, discrimination and distinction than has been lavished on them by the West. [ . . . ] Africanizing the African, Orientalizing the Oriental, Westernizing the Western, Americanizing the American . . . [this is] a pattern that has been held over from the era of classical imperialism and its systems" (1993: 311). Said thus charges all forms of "nativism," and the "tremendous *ressentiment*" that fuels it, as dangerous legacies of the culture of empire that must be critiqued. "To accept nativism," he argues, "is to accept the consequences of imperialism too willingly." It merely reproduces the "metaphysics of essences like negritude, Irishness, Islam and Catholicism" (1993: 228–229). Even nativist and nationalist anticolonial movements can thus be seen as legacies of empire whose traces remain today.

## From colonial past to anti-colonial present

This point about anti-colonial resistance allows me to head toward a conclusion. On the one hand, empire and colonialism indeed bequeathed to us a repertoire of meanings – a whole series of cultural schemas and discursive constructs – that have been continually used and re-used (along with an array of institutions and tools of power that persist into the present). Many of these schemas and constructs are repressive if not retrograde, such that they persist in some "anti-western" political movements in the ex-colonial world. On the other hand, the experience of colonialism also generated an array of anticolonial movements, anticolonial thinking, and anticolonial experiments that have not fallen prey to essentialist dichotomies and have instead struggled against them, just as they have struggled against the imposition of racialized and essentialized discourses. This too must be seen as a legacy of empire: the dialogic if not dialectical creation of anticolonial liberation movements critiquing the dark side of modernity and experimenting with novel forms of cosmopolitanism, creating transnational, cross-ethnic and transracial solidarities, and offering new political imaginaries and visions (Hammer and White 2018; Getachew 2019; Go 2013a, 2023). All of these have been generative reactions to colonialism that resisted and aimed to surmount colonial power. These anti-imperial and anticolonial traditions must also be seen part of empire's legacies.

Yet, these anticolonial legacies of empire do not reside in the most obvious of places. They are not readily seen in the apparatus of formal politics – in political platforms or campaign speeches of leaders around the world – nor are they sketched in the false utopias of fundamentalist leaders whether religious or technocratic (read: Elon Musk). They are rather lodged in pamphlets circulating among alternative social movements, in theoretical texts assigned in the few university classes that teach postcolonial theory and, most importantly, in the cries and struggles of explosive protests on the streets, like those that aimed to bring an image of Christopher Columbus down in Chicago's Grant Park. Such movements do not represent meaningless symbolic gestures but rather a continuation of the anticolonial tradition. And they are salutary reminders that, as long as empire persists today, and as long as its legacies remain palpable and its reverberations felt, so too will remain those movements aiming to undo empire's repressive power and persistent effects. Perhaps we social science historians should learn from these legacies of empire too.

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