

# **Late Colonialism and Post-Colonial Development in Africa: A Comparative Historical Analysis of Former Italian Africa**

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## **Abstract**

Recent research shows that European colonialism powerfully shaped long-run development in the formerly colonized world-regions. This paper analyzes the colonial institutions and development legacies of Italian colonialism in East and North Africa. The evidence shows that Italy established “settler colonialism” in areas conducive to colonial settlement and large-scale exploitation, and “enclave colonialism” in areas with fewer resource endowments and settlement opportunities. In the immediate aftermath of the colonial period (i.e., 1940s-1950s), settler colonialism had positive effects economic development, whereas enclave colonialism exerted a negative impact on economic prosperity. However, both settler and enclave types of Italian colonialism had strong negative effects on human wellbeing. During the long-term postcolonial period (post-1960), the effects on postcolonial development in each country had been contingent on critical junctures, which variously destabilized, redirected, and/or transformed the colonial institutional legacy and associated development trajectories. In addition to illustrating the colonial institutions and development legacies of a least studied colonial regime, the analysis makes important contributions to ongoing debates on colonialism, institutions, and long-run development. It shows that a colonizer’s “national identity” *with* factor endowments was a critical source of variation in colonial institutions and postcolonial development in the former Italian empire in Africa, and that critical junctures in postcolonial history were important factors in redefining colonial legacies and long-run development. It finds little empirical support for dominant explanations emphasizing factor endowments *per se* or pre-colonial ethnic centralization as the most important determinants of colonial institutions and long-run postcolonial development.

This paper examines Italian colonialism and its legacies for long-run postcolonial development in the former Italian colonies of Eritrea, Somalia,<sup>1</sup> and Libya. Recent studies on European colonialism and long-run development in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in general (Engerman and Sokoloff 2002; Sokoloff and Engerman 2000; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2001, 2002; Mahoney 2003, 2010; Lange, Mahoney, and Vom Hau 2006)—and on specific colonial institutions such as land ownership (e.g. Banerjee and Iyer 2005), forced labor systems (Dell 2010; Lowes and Montero 2020), and colonial education (e.g. Glaeser et al. 2004; Huillery 2009)—show that colonialism established economic and social arrangements with enduring effects on long-run development in the formerly colonized world-regions.

The renewed interest in colonialism and postcolonial development has scarcely paid particular attention to Italian colonialism.<sup>2</sup> This paper provides the first systematic comparative-historical analysis of Italian colonialism and its development legacies in East and North Africa. I find that Italian colonialism had varied effects on postcolonial development despite—or perhaps because of—its relatively shorter duration since Italy was a late-comer in the Scramble of Africa and departed relatively untimely in the early 1940s. In the immediate aftermath of the colonial period (1940s-1950s), whereas Eritrea and (to some degree) Libya were far more developed economically than Somalia, all three colonies suffered from low social development by comparative colonial standards. Today, Libya falls in the “upper middle-income” category, Eritrea in the “low-income” category, and Somalia is one of the world’s poorest low-income countries. What is the effect of Italian colonialism on these postcolonial development outcomes?

Italian colonialism, I argue, had development legacies that varied across geography and time but its effects on long-run development had been conditioned by critical junctures in each country’s postcolonial history (see Table 1). The argument proceeds in three analytical steps. In the first, I identify *settler* and *enclave* ideal-types of Italian colonialism since the late-nineteenth century, and explain why one type rather than another was introduced in a given colonial territory. Economic historians underscore “factor endowments” in colonized areas as key determinants (Engerman and Sokoloff 2002; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2001, 2002), while

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<sup>1</sup> In this analysis, post-1960 Somalia encompasses formerly Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland. Ethiopia is excluded from the study because Italian rule was too brief (1936-1941) to exert the sort of enduring effects on long-run development this paper is concerned with.

<sup>2</sup> Notable exception include recent quantitative analysis by Mattia Bertazzini (2019). This applies to earlier comparative studies of colonialism as well; see, for example, Fieldhouse (1966) and Brett (1973).

comparative-historical sociologists emphasize ‘liberal’ or ‘mercantilist’ national economic orientations of colonizing powers as the most important variable to understand variations in European colonialism and long-run postcolonial development (Lange, Mahoney, and Vom Hau 2006; Mahoney 2010). In his seminal study of colonialism in Africa, Crawford Young similarly emphasized the colonizers’ “national identity” as “predisposing factors” in their colonization strategies (1994, 87). I draw on both theoretical approaches to argue that the national orientation of Italy *with* factor endowments defined its policies towards colonial settlement, investment, and administrative penetration. Because of demographic pressure and industrial demands for new markets and raw materials at home, Italy introduced settler colonialism in areas conducive to colonial settlement and large-scale exploitation (Eritrea and Libya), and enclave colonialism in areas with fewer resource endowments and settlement opportunities (Italian Somaliland).

In the second step, I analyze the development effects of settler and enclave Italian colonialism in its immediate aftermath, i.e., 1940s-1950s. Whereas settler colonialism had positive impact on economic growth through the development of commercial agriculture, modern infrastructure, and expanded state administration, enclave colonialism led to minimal economic change and postcolonial progress by virtue of sheer colonial neglect and extractive plantation economy. However, in general Italian colonialism had strong negative effects on human development (i.e., per capita income, life expectancy, and literacy) because of poor social-service delivery, ethnoregional and/or sectarian conflicts, and, especially with the settler type, the racial exclusion of natives. I exploit regional differences in colonization and postcolonial development in each colony and country to maximize the discovery of further evidence.

In a third and last step, I explore whether Italian colonialism exerted path-dependent effects on long-run socioeconomic development in the post-1960 period. This depended on critical junctures in the postcolonial histories of the countries that have had significant implications for stability of the colonial legacy. In Somalia, since the critical event (state failure) occurred late after 1991, the colonial legacy had been locked in place to cause persistent poverty through path-dependent channels of a weak post-independence state, a mono-crop economy, and clan conflict. In Eritrea and Libya, the critical junctures transpired in the early-postcolonial period and consequently powerfully shaped long-run postcolonial development. The critical events involve the commencement of oil production in post-1960 Libya, which resulted in rapid but distorted development followed by stagnation in recent decades, and the revolutionary upheaval in post-

1961 Eritrea that led to economic decline followed by, after independence in 1991, remarkable (if uneven) socioeconomic progress. In each country, different sets of institutional and developmental legacies of Italian colonialism endured such historical turning points. Yet, the critical events partially or fully destabilized the colonial institutional legacies to cause major shifts in the development patterns that prevailed in the immediate aftermath of Italian colonialism.

The analysis builds on recent comparative-historical studies emphasizing national differences among European colonizers and the importance of a ‘broad array’ of institutions—other than property rights—for long-run development (Lange, Mahoney, and Vom Hau 2006; Mahoney 2010). I draw attention to “legal-administrative” institutions (i.e., state bureaucracy, police, courts), class structures, and ethnic or racial arrangements that took hold under colonial rule. Not only do effective legal-administrative states institutions guarantee property rights and functioning markets necessary for economic growth (Weber 1968; North 1981, 1990), but states with Weberian bureaucracies and autonomy from social forces can act as a “handmaiden” of economic transformation (e.g. Rueschemeyer and Evans 1985; Evans 1995; Evans and Rauch 1999) and social progress (e.g. Lange 2009; Lange, Mahoney, and Vom Hau 2006). Further, traditional elites linked to colonial rule blocked social progress by thwarting equitable resource distribution (Ibid.) or agricultural modernization (Kohli 1994; Koo 1987), while ethno-racial conflicts undermine state capacity (Lange 2009; Heldring and Robinson 2012) or broad social solidarities both essential for basic public-goods provision (e.g., Evans 1996; Singh 2011). I analyze economic and social development separately because the two are not necessarily inextricably linked (Sen 1999), and colonialism tended to affect human development through “partially separate determinants” or mechanisms (Lange, Mahoney, and Vom Hau 2006, 1415).

The paper elucidates the colonial institutions and development legacies of a less studied colonial regime. Additionally, it makes some key contributions to ongoing debates on colonialism, institutions, and postcolonial development. First, the analysis shows the analytical value of the national character of European colonizers as the principal source of differences in colonialism and postcolonial development as opposed to solely geographic conditions or precolonial ethnic centralization in the colonized areas. The analysis also bridges the conceptual divide between historical-sociological and economic-historical approaches by showing how Italy’s distinctive national identity *interacted with* specific factor endowments (i.e., moderate climate, agricultural land, and exploitable raw materials) to define its colonization strategies, institutions, and their

development outcomes. I find little empirical support for quantitative explanations emphasizing factor endowments *per se*, precolonial urbanization, or precolonial ethnic centralization as the most important determinants of colonial institutions and long-run postcolonial development.

Secondly, the analysis enriches the understanding of late colonialism and development in Africa in particular. It sheds light on small European colonizers (Italy, Portugal, Belgium) that have received, if any, marginal scholarly attention in recent studies. These powers wrought far-reaching and wicked colonial changes because, as Mamdani wrote, the “weaker, the less resourceful, and the less experienced a colonial power was, the harsher [and consequential] was the reality of its rule” (1996, 59; also, Young 1994). Moreover, Italian Africa decolonized before liberal principles of civil society, social welfare, and development were grafted, after 1945, onto the edifice of the ‘extractive’ colonial state in Africa (Young 1994, 163-9, 244-92; also Lee 1967). The analysis of former Italian colonies thus helps to fully appreciate the more adverse institutional legacies behind widespread developmental malaise, social conflict, and political instability in postcolonial Africa where ‘inclusive’ institutions were introduced belatedly.

Lastly, the analysis draws attention to critical junctures or events whose causal significance hardly receives attention in large-N studies or equilibrium-approaches to path-dependence. According to economic historians, the slave trade and colonial rule had locked African countries in somewhat irreversible path-dependent trajectories of “underdevelopment equilibria” (see Nunn 2007). However, for some countries, colonial history is “not a destiny” because certain intervening critical events caused “raptures” with the historical causation of colonialism and path-shifts in postcolonial development (Mahoney 2010, 189, 204; also, Lange 2009). To be sure, this is not to imply that colonial legacies are easily reversible or that all disruptive postcolonial events are critical turning points. Rather, dominant theories of long-run postcolonial development need to take agency and contingency seriously because certain postcolonial episodes, such as national revolutions, oil production, and prolonged warfare, can redefine or disrupt colonial legacies and thereby set countries on new development paths.

The analysis leverages extensive historical accounts and original data from historians, country studies, and governmental and non-governmental reports to identify causal factors and assess alternative hypotheses. I employ qualitative methods of cross-case comparison to identify causal patterns, within-case process tracing to validate causal claims and assess rival explanations, and counterfactual analysis to evaluate the significance of critical junctures.

Table 1: Colonial History and Major Postcolonial Episodes in Italian Africa

Country	Onset of Colonialism	End of Colonialism	British/French Military Adm.	Key Historical Events During the Post-Colonial Period
Eritrea	1879	1941	1941-1952	1952 – incorporation to Ethiopia <i>1961 – beg. of liberation war</i> 1974 – social revolution in Ethiopia <i>1991 – national independence</i>
Somalia	1889	1941	1941-1952	1952 – beg. of ten-year UN trusteeship 1960 – unification and independence 1969 – military coup/socialist revolution <i>1991 – civil war &amp; state failure</i>
Libya	1911	1943	1943-1951	1951 – national independence <i>1960 – beginning of oil production</i> 1969 – military coup/socialist revolution <i>2011 – civil war &amp; state disintegration</i>

## 1. Colonialism, Institutions, and Development

Three distinct approaches dominate studies of colonialism and postcolonial development. First, economic historians emphasize a wide range of “factor endowments” in colonized areas as principal determinants of colonization and varied postcolonial development outcomes. For instance, Engerman and Sokoloff (2002) argue that whereas areas with favorable soil, climate, and demographic factors were subjected to “extractive” institutions that hindered their long-run development prospects, regions with less attractive endowments were spared such inequality-enhancing institutions that allowed postcolonial development. Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001) similarly argue that European colonizers were more likely to settle and establish “inclusive” institutions (i.e., property rights) in areas with sparse populations and favorable disease climates, that, in turn, led to their long-run economic prosperity than wealthier areas with denser populations and less favorable disease climates (also, see Easterly and Levine 2016).

Natural endowments were indeed crucial in defining Italian colonization strategies. However, an exclusive focus on geographic conditions in the colonized areas ignores important variables engendering differences in colonial and postcolonial development patterns. A competing comparative-sociological approach has recently demonstrated that European colonizers differed in their “national identity” or economic orientation (i.e., liberal versus mercantilist), which, in turn, “had large consequences for the kinds of areas they preferred to settle, the extent of colonial institutional building they pursued, and, ultimately, the developmental legacies they left behind” (Lange, Mahoney, and Vom Hau 2006, 1413; Mahoney 2010). It exploits differences among, and within, various European colonial regimes to explain variations in long-run development. Yet, its

emphasis on “institutional complexity” of precolonial areas limits its analytical effectiveness to major colonial powers, such as the Spanish and British, in previous imperial epochs. European colonizers had superior organizational edge over relatively complex precolonial societies during late colonization of Africa compared to sixteenth-century Spanish or Portuguese conquerors that subdued and exploited with ease more organized polities in the New World. Therefore, this study focuses on national identity and factor endowments as key determinants of differences in colonial policies and future development.

Furthermore, sociological studies underscore the significance of a “broad array” of institutions than simply, as economic historians emphasize, property rights. The extent to which colonialism left behind effective legal institutions and capable states had immense effect on overall postcolonial development, while particular “ethnoracial” colonial structures “are especially important for explaining long-run social development” (ibid., 1415). I, therefore, not only draw attention to the political-economy of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Italy to fully appreciate its colonization policies, institutions, and implications for postcolonial development. But the paper also examines various institutional arrangements, especially effective legal-administrative institutions such as state bureaucracy, police, courts, arguing that states with effective and autonomous administrative organizations were preconditions for economic prosperity as well as effective provision of public goods essential for human development. I also examine non-state structures linked to the colonial past, such as landed elites, ethnoracial stratification, and ethnic conflict as important determinants of social welfare.

Finally, an ever-growing quantitative literature emphasizes precolonial institutions as predictors of contemporary development in Africa. It shows a strong positive correlation between precolonial ethnic centralization and postcolonial development proxied by basic educational, health, and infrastructure services (e.g., Gennaioli and Rainer 2007; Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2013). Others specifically conclude that the degree of “institutional congruence” between precolonial and colonial institutions explains variations in national-level economic growth (Englebert 2000) or local-level public goods distribution (Wilfahrt 2021).

This approach is particularly inadequate to understand variable colonial regimes and their legacies, which undergird differences in long-run postcolonial development. As seen above, different European colonizers reacted to precolonial institutions in different ways, thereby institutionalizing different administrative and political structures. As Mamdani (1996) argued,



strategies of direct and indirect colonial rule dominated in colonial Africa, which varied significantly between various European colonizers (Müller-Crepon 2020; also Crowder 1968; Miles 1994), with enduring legacies for postcolonial development (Lange et al 2006; Lange 2009; also Migdal 1998). Moreover, the “precolonial centralization” thesis conveniently downplays the fact that ethnicity and traditional authority—to the extent they influenced development patterns in postcolonial Africa—are in large part constructions of the colonial period with important cross-imperial differences (see Young 1965; Laitin 1985).

## **2. National Identity and Factor Endowments: New Theoretical Approach**

I develop a theory of Italian colonialism and postcolonial development that focuses on both the national identity of Italy as well as natural endowments in colonized areas. The two dimensions help to understand (a) the determinants of Italian colonization, (b) types of Italian colonialism, and (c) their effects on postcolonial development. The theoretical framework is based on the common fact that European colonizers were hardly “identical” in their institutions at the time of colonization and, for that matter, in the administrative, socioeconomic, and cultural institutions they established in the colonized areas. Their distinct national political-economic orientations and interests dictated the different areas they colonized, colonial institution-building, and consequently, their varied legacies for postcolonial development (see Mahoney 2010, 20-23; Lange, Mahoney, and Vom Hau 2006; also, Fieldhouse 1966; Lang 1975; Miles 1994; Pagden 1995; Landes 1998).

I draw on this theoretical tradition but bring into the analysis factor endowments as an important condition (see Fig. 1). The logic of the argument is that essential to assessing Italy’s colonization strategies, colonial institutions, and their postcolonial development consequences is to understand the interaction between its national features and geographic factors in the colonized areas. Based on this premise I develop three major hypotheses of Italian colonialism and postcolonial development. In the first hypothesis, Italy pursued different colonization strategies towards areas with different resource endowments because of its domestic political-economic conditions when it turned to overseas colonization in the 1880s (Fig. 1(a)). Late-nineteenth-century Italy was a relatively poor agrarian nation grappling with a rising population, urban unemployment, rural landlessness, poverty, and acute pressures of late industrialization. Political authorities viewed overseas colonies as outlets for surplus population, landless peasants, and source of raw materials and markets for domestic industrialization, besides elevating Italy’s



national power and prestige in Europe (see App. A1). Therefore, the principal drivers of Italian colonialism—an “empire of labor” (Veracini 2018)—were the settlement of urban unemployed, landless peasants, and industrial exploitation than a drive to exploit native labor or taxation.

Figure 1: A Model of Italian Colonialism and Postcolonial Development

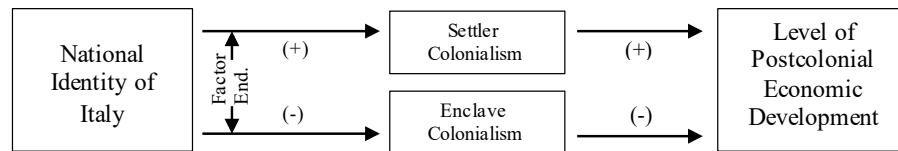


Figure 1(a) Types of Italian Colonialism and Economic Development

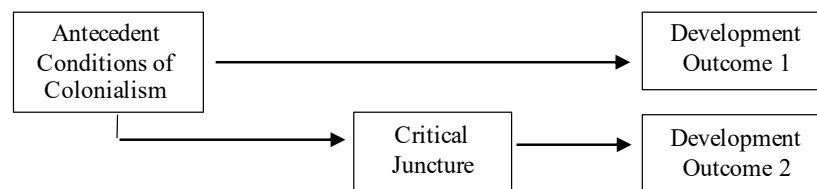


Figure 1(b) Critical Events and Postcolonial Development

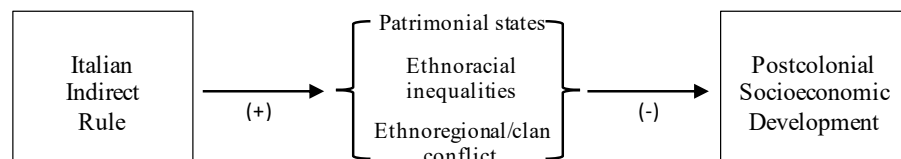


Figure 1(c) Italian Indirect Colonial Rule and Postcolonial Development

As a consequence, I argue, Italy sought to colonize extensively areas with mild climate, favorable disease environment, and vast agricultural lands, besides exploitable mineral resources. In the model, therefore, factor endowments are positively associated with extensive Italian colonization especially before the launching of aggressive colonization throughout the empire during the fascist period. I argue that Italy sought to imposed *settler* colonialism in regions (mostly in Eritrea and Libya) with geographic conditions favorable for settlement (e.g., moderate climate, low disease environment, agricultural land) as well as potential for large-scale exploitation of raw materials. By contrast, Italy established *enclave* colonialism in areas (i.e., Somaliland) that lacked comparable resource endowments overall or conditions favorable to Italian settlement. There is no denying that Italy—a financially and military weak power arriving late in the Scramble for Africa—generally settled for poorly endowed and sparsely populated territories. However, Italian colonization strategies were hardly invariable and were clearly adapted to a given area’s potential for colonial settlement, commercial and agriculture exploitation, and raw-material extraction.

Settler and enclave Italian rule also varied in the extent in which administrative institutions were developed, especially during the less ambitious, “liberal” pre-1922 phase of Italian colonialism.<sup>3</sup> In settler colonialism, extensive colonial settlement, land alienation, resource extraction, and the security and welfare of settlers required the establishment of more expansive administrative apparatus of police, security, and courts. In enclave colonialism, by contrast, such institutions should be less developed and spatially limited to areas favorable to plantation agriculture or mineral exploitation. As a consequence, whereas intensely colonized areas should experience expanded legal-administrative institutions in general, less extensively colonized regions should receive weak institutional implantation dominated by “indirect rule” structures (e.g., Lange, Mahoney and Vom Hau 2006; also, Mamdani 1996).

The second hypothesis is that the variations in settler, economic, and administrative policies of Italian colonization had variable effects on postcolonial development especially evident during the immediate postcolonial decades. I argue, as Fig. 1(a) depicts, whereas settler colonialism is positively associated with economic development because it favored agricultural commercialization, market expansion, and the construction of modern roads, railways, and ports; enclave colonialism is negatively linked because it left insignificant agricultural or infrastructural capital and ineffective legal-administrative institutions. Furthermore, settler colonialism supported the establishment of more effective legal-administrative institutions considered essential for functioning markets and the provisioning of basic public goods that enhance social wellbeing. Enclave colonialism, by contrast, favored the emergence of an extractive plantation economy based on few export cash-crops (e.g., cotton, coffee, sugar), which dooms long-run economic development (e.g., Beckford 1972; Mandle 1974; Ferleger 1985).

However, I argue that both settler and enclave subtypes of Italian colonialism are negatively linked to postcolonial social development. The economic stagnation and poor social services associated with enclave colonialism were obvious obstacle to improved human wellbeing. But Italian settler colonialism, too, had adverse effect on social progress, because it was characterized by inequality-enhancing, racially oppressive institutions (see Lange et al 2006) and by indirect rule shown to reinforce old social inequalities to thereby hinder more equitable income

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<sup>3</sup> The term hardly implies liberal colonialism that, as in the British empire, supported property rights, free trade, and representative institutions (see Mahoney 2010, 21). Critical studies (see App. A) of Italian society at the turn of the twentieth century have debunked liberal notions of pre-Fascist Italy.

distribution and public-goods provisioning. Moreover, weak state administration based on indirect-rule structures undermines effective public goods provision, limits educational and economic opportunities, and fosters ethnic and sectarian conflicts (see Evans 1996; Lange 2009; Heldring and Robinson 2012).

Italian rule was characterized by “indirect rule” institutions whose impact on long-run economic and social development is negative and enduring (Fig. 1(c)). Indirect colonial rule led to weak and predatory states in postcolonial Africa (Boone 1994; Reno 1995; Young 2012; also Migdal 1988) that could neither minimally guarantee property rights nor effectively engage in policy planning, capital investment, and infrastructural development. Moreover, indirect rule is detrimental to social development because it bequeathed weak and corrupt legal-administrative systems to provide basic public goods or eliminate structural inequalities (e.g., Lange 2009; Acemoglu, Reed, and Robinson 2014). It also leads to rigid ethnoregional, tribal, and sectarian cleavages, that foster elite conflicts and clientelism and thereby thwart socioeconomic progress (see Sandbrook and Barker 1985; Easterly and Levine 1997).

In the third hypothesis, I argue that the ways and extent Italian colonialism affected long-run development was contingent on critical juncture during the postcolonial period. Recent analysis has shown how critical events could reshape postcolonial histories and consequently redefine development trajectories inherited from colonialism (see Mahoney 2010; Lange 2009). As Fig. 1(b) shows, in the absent of such events in the early postcolonial period, the colonial institutional legacy and associated development outcomes are expected to persist in a path-dependent fashion. This should be true for Somalia because the critical event occurred much later and only reinforced the initial post-colonial outcomes. However, the commencement of oil production in Libya (1960) and a destructive independence war in Eritrea (1961-1991) during the early postcolonial decades dramatically shifted the development fortunes of both countries.

### **3. Italian Colonization Policies and Institutions**

To evaluate the above hypotheses, I construct new measures of Italian colonization strategies using archival sources and historical studies (see App. A1-A2). The qualitative estimates show that Italy established relatively rapid and effective colonization over regions with favorable resource endowments. In East Africa, this was the case with Eritrea, which showed potential for peasant settlement on the temperate central highlands, capitalist agriculture in the humid mid and lowlands, and exploitable tropical products, besides facilitating the commercial exploitation (and

ultimate colonization) of adjacent Ethiopia. Conversely, lacking comparable resource endowments, Somaliland promised neither peasant settlement nor large-scale colonial exploitation. Therefore, the royal government relinquished its small colonial possession in the Banaadir to commercial companies until 1905, when it began less intensive colonization of the area in hopes of commercial penetration of the Ethiopian hinterland. In North Africa, Libya was less endowed than Eritrea, but a Mediterranean coastal climate, agricultural potential, and proximity to the colonial metropole rendered it attractive for settler colonization. Consequently, Italy pursued a policy of “agricultural colonization” involving extensive settlement of landless peasants in Tripolitania and, to some degree, Cyrenaica.

The evidence of the colonies’ exports as well as number of settlers in the late-colonial period is consistent with the theoretical expectations. Whereas Italy sought to establish settler colonialism—or “demographic colonization”—over regions with conditions favorable for large settlement and colonial exploitation, it imposed enclave colonialism in areas lacking comparable exploitable resources or favorable settlement conditions. Regional variations within each colony are also consistent with these patterns (App. A3). The temperate Eritrean plateau, that became the colonial administrative and economic center, was favorable to smaller-holder Italian peasants and commercial settlement than the malarial western lowlands preserved for middle-class farmers or large capitalists growing tropical cashcrops. In Libya, northern Tripolitania and Cyrenaica’s Jabal al-Akhder region were similarly conducive for settler agriculture and consequently fell under extensive colonization than less-endowed, more arid parts of Cyrenaica and Fezzan regions. The evidence of Italian efforts and, after 1936, policies to colonize the Ethiopian highlands with favorable disease environment and agricultural land for large-scale peasant colonization is consistent with these findings (see Larebo 1994; Sbacchi 1985).

***Types of Italian Colonialism:*** Italian colonialism in Eritrea, Somaliland, and Libya, respectively, roughly corresponded to ‘mixed,’ ‘plantation,’ and ‘pure settlements’ colonies (see Fieldhouse 1966). However, even though Italian settler colonialism involving settlement was not limited to ‘pure settlements,’ there developed *settler* and *enclave* types of Italian colonialism during the late-colonial period that corresponded the distinct colonization policies. The difference between the two can be understood as *high* versus *low* levels of colonization measured using the size of colonial land domain (*terra demaniale*), settler population, and infrastructural and public works investments in each colony (Tables 3.1-3.3).

Table 3.1: Estimated Area of Crown Land (*terra demaniale*) & Land Granted for Cultivation (in Hectares)

<i>Colony</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Colonial land domain</i>	<i>Granted land area</i>
Eritrea <sup>a</sup>	1907	482,064	11,052
	1939	-	28,459
Italian Somaliland <sup>b</sup>	1909	46,800	5,526
	1939	-	64,937
Libya <sup>c</sup>	1922	9,313	3,612
	1940	347,671	227,977

NOTE: <sup>a</sup> Mesghenna, pp. 145; Taddia, 1984 [for 1907]. Sources differ, but up to 3% of colonial land was granted for cultivation (Mesghenna, p.148, ft.60). No accurate data available for colonial land for the late-colonial period; for granted area see Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, 1939, pp. 229-232 reproduced here after conversion to hectares using: <https://trustconverter.com/en/area-conversion/centiares/centiares-to-ares.html>. Negash (p.43) reports 22,335 hectares distributed to colonists in 1938, and Larebo (p.236) reports 23,343 hectares owned by companies in 1941. None provide the most accurate figure, but land domain in the late-colonial period was certainly small because commercial settlement displaced agricultural colonization in Eritrea.

<sup>b</sup> Hess, p. 111 [for 1909]; Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, 1939, p. 252 [for 1939]; Pankhurst, p. 93.

<sup>c</sup> Fowler, 1982, p. 122 [1922]; Fowler, 1969, p. 432 [1940].

Table 3.2: Estimated Size of Italian Settlers & Their Population Share<sup>c</sup>

<i>Colony</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Size of settler pop. (Total)</i>	<i>Share of settler pop. (Percent)</i>
Eritrea <sup>a</sup>	1921 <sup>d</sup>	3,901	1.00
	1939	72,408	10.6
Italian Somaliland <sup>b</sup>	1921 <sup>d</sup>	<1000	<0.50
	1939	<10,000	<2.00
Libya <sup>c</sup>	1921 <sup>d</sup>	18,093	2.90
	1939	119,139	12.5

NOTE: <sup>a</sup> Podestà, 2004, p. 348; Podestà, u.d., p. 13; Castellano, 1948. Figures exclude the Tigray region incorporated to Eritrea after 1936.

<sup>b</sup> Podestà (2004) estimates 19,200 Italians including the Ogaden region incorporated after 1936. More accurate figure is an estimated 8,000 (1939) as per the Four Power Commission, 1948c, p. 6.

<sup>c</sup> Camere di commercio, 1940/1941.

<sup>d</sup> Istituto centrale di Statistica del Regno d'Italia, 1931.

<sup>e</sup> Excludes military and state personnel, non-Italian Europeans, and biracial Italo-Eritreans, Italo-Libyans, and Italo-Somali.

Table 3.3: Estimated Colonial Investment on Roads, Railways & Public Works, 1913-1937 (in Lire)

	<i>Eritrea</i>	<i>Italian Somaliland</i>	<i>Libya</i>
Roads & railways	106,728,667	27,370,000	341,304,016
All Public Works & Utilities	247,075, 506	146,858,825	870,380,821

NOTE: The Colonial Office records obtained from Del Dott, 1946. The figures represent Italian State investments or “development expenditures” for colonization purposes, and exclude private investments and military expenditures.

Settler colonialism that emerged in Eritrea and Libya was characterized by large-scale land dispossession, significant settler population, and greater colonial expenditures. Italy pursued aggressive “demographic” or “agricultural colonization” in Libya through extensive agricultural land alienation and state-directed settlement of tens of thousands of landless colonists in the 1930s (Segrè 1974, 82-92). In Eritrea, although state-sponsored peasant colonization was abandoned in the 1900s, large land tracts were expropriated between 1890s and 1910s for commercial agriculture, including small to medium-sized settler holdings in the highlands for cereal and citrus-fruit farming, and large capitalist estates in the lowlands for tropical cashcrops, such as cotton, coffee, tobacco, citrus fruits, and bananas (Mesghenna 1988, 170-180). While Libya had the largest settler population among the three colonies, in Eritrea the settler population grew rapidly in the 1930s to constitute the largest share (43.8%, 1939) in Italian East Africa encompassing Somaliland and Ethiopia (Podesta 2011, 216). Yet, colonial settlement in Eritrea turned largely commercial and industrial in nature with settlers dominating trade, banking, and industry in major urban centers; hence, limited land dispossession during the late-colonial period.

Settler colonization also involved large colonial investments in modern transportation, communications, and public service infrastructures (Table 3.3). In Eritrea, a ‘colony of exploitation’ and settlement, policies of “capitalist colonization”—and efforts to turn the colony in to a launching pad for Italian imperial and commercial domination of the region—spurred extensive investments in ports, roads, railways, and communication networks (Tseggai 1986; Podesta 1998). The resulting light-processing industry turned Eritrea into an industrial hub of the empire with an advanced infrastructure and a large number of industrial and commercial firms (see App. B), a “clearing-house from which Italian manufactured goods were distributed to Ethiopia, the Sudan, and Arabia in exchange for the raw materials needed by Italian industry” (Trevaskis 1960, 36; also Strangio 2010). Similarly, colonial Libya received the largest share of colonial investments in roads, railroads, and public works due to Italian bid to transform the colony into Italy’s metropolitan extension or “fourth shore.” Since colonial policies were geared at settler agriculture, it saw the development of only modest modern infrastructure and a food-processing industry, nonetheless.

Enclave—or purely ‘planation’—colonialism that developed in Italian Somaliland was, by contrast, defined by minimal land expropriation, colonial settlement, and infrastructural or administrative development especially during the pre-Fascist Period. While no hopes of colonial

settlement were harbored from the outset, inauspicious efforts at agricultural development were abandoned after the paucity of agricultural land and native labor rendered concession agriculture unviable during the ‘liberal’ phase. As the dramatic rise in land concessions after mid-1920s indicates, Fascist Italy sought to exploit the colony through large sugar, banana, and cotton plantation projects in the Juba-Shebelle region in South-Central Somaliland. Therefore, receiving colonial expenditures nearly half that of Eritrea, Italian Somaliland was a colonial backwater with few settlers, little infrastructure (e.g., a sixty-eight-mile railroad), and an economy entirely dependent on plantation agriculture in the irrigable Mogadishu-Merca-Jowhar triangle (Hess 1966, 111-122, 163-170).

***Administrative Institutions:*** Settler and enclave colonialism also differed in the degree of colonial administrative influence and development. Extensive state planning and settlement policies contributed to the development of a more expansive, effective colonial administration in settler colonies, especially Eritrea where a territory-wide, “thorough grid” administration extending to the countryside consolidated early on (Young 1994, 153; Longrigg 1945, 132). Likewise, effective state administration emerged in Libya even though after late 1920s, spreading to the hinterland through kinship networks rather than a modern bureaucracy (Anderson 1986, 213). In enclave Somaliland, a territorial administration emerged only after the incorporation of northern protectorates and Jubaland in mid-1920s; besides, with a corpse of colonial officers half the size of Eritrea’s, the colonial administration was poorly developed and exerted superficial influence over Somali society (Hess 1966, 149-175; Fabian Bureau 1948).

Despite the variations in state capacity that went in tandem with levels of colonization, Italian colonialism was characterized by indirect-rule administrative with a miniscule bureaucracy, ethnic organization, and racial differentiation. As such, colonial administration beyond settler areas was limited in its reach including in Eritrea, where local government developed only in urban centers, and the district was “unknown” beyond the highland provinces, with the tribe forming the basic unit of colonial rule (Longrigg 1945, 135; Trevaskis 1960, 26-27). Without a coherent bureaucracy or representative institutions, colonial administration was “superimposed” on, and calibrated to, tribal structures, producing rigid, highly politicized ethnic, tribal, and sectarian configurations (Hess 1966, 101-109; Ahmida 2009, 103-140). Colonial authorities formalized and reinforced tribal authority where it existed, and as in Somaliland, invented it where absent.



Moreover, they coopted elements of the traditional ruling elite into colonial administration, entrenching precolonial class structures and power relations (see Mondaini 1941; Nadel 1945; Negash 1986). The late-colonial period also reinforced racial segregation and discrimination with, for example, native schooling restricted to elementary level (colonial education was practically absent in Somaliland) and health services were limited to urban and settler areas (Trevaskis 1960, 34; Negash 1987, 108-110; Appleton 1980).

#### **4. Effects on Postcolonial Development**

The empirical analysis of postcolonial development is organized into two distinct periods. This is necessary because separate focus on the early-postcolonial period allows for closer examination of the development legacies of Italian colonialism before critical events. On the other hand, some of the causal mechanisms (e.g., race, social class) operating during this period are distinct from those (e.g., legal-administrative institutions) that receive primacy in later decades. At this point, it is important to point that this paper considers allied military administration of the former colonies in the 1940s as neither a separate colonial system nor a discontinuity with Italian colonial institutions. The British (and the French in Fezzan, Libya) established caretaker administrations in each territory which, in accordance with the 1907 Hague Convention, maintained existing institutions, with minimal reforms that reinforced Italian administrative structures (see Longrigg 1945, 147; Trevaskis 1960, 24-29). In other words, claims of mixed colonial heritage are overstated except post-1960 Somalia to a limited extent.

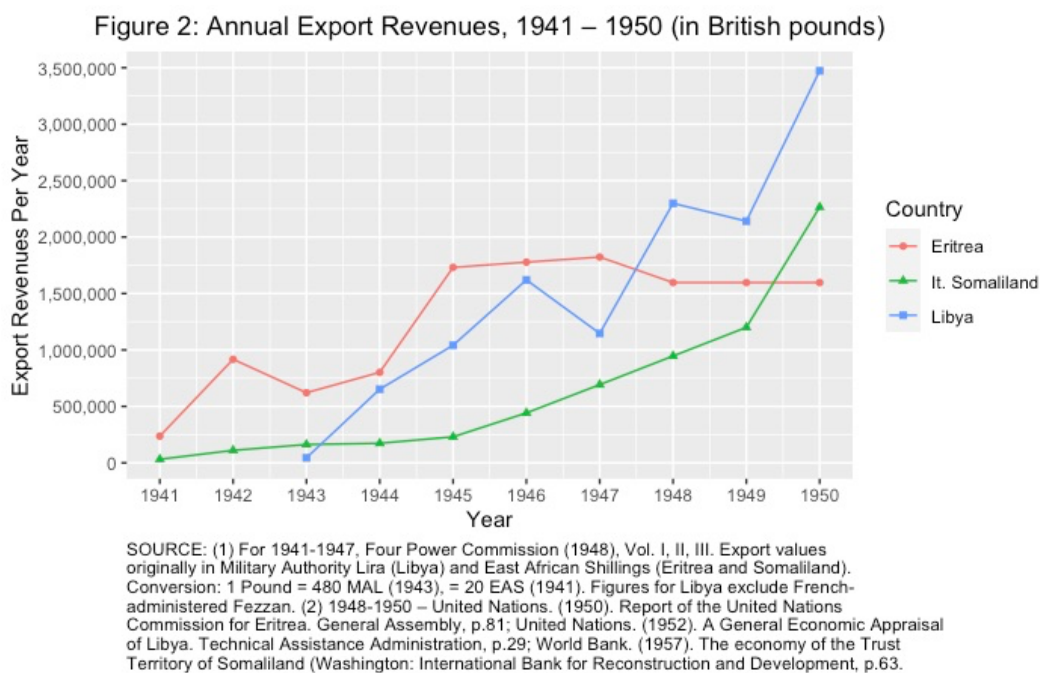
##### **4.1 Postcolonial Development: 1941–1960**

Italian colonialism had heterogeneous development consequences during the early-postcolonial period. Regarding *economic development*, whereas settler colonialism is positively linked to intermediate-high economic change, enclave colonialism is associated with low economic growth as measured by export revenues and national income estimates. As Fig. 2 indicates, Eritrea and Libya possessed higher export earnings in the 1940s, while Italian Somaliland, with barely one-third of Eritrea's export earnings, lagged by a wide margin.<sup>4</sup> Further, while Eritrea and, to some extent, Libya exported agricultural, industrial, and mineral products, Somaliland predominantly

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<sup>4</sup> The figures also hold for previous decades of Italian rule (see App. A2). Low figure for Libya (1943) indicates the severe consequences of the North African war for Libyan economy and agriculture.

exported hides and skins, besides bananas that became the most viable colonial cash-crop representing nearly three-quarters of exports in the 1950s (see Four Power Commission 1948a, 1948b, 1948c, appendices). In terms of income, Eritrea was also wealthier by post-war standards,<sup>5</sup> followed by Libya with intermediate national income and urbanization levels. Meanwhile, with its development prospects inauspiciously tethered to a plantation sector (see App. C1), Somaliland was economically extremely poor, far less urbanized, and with dismal development prospects, despite immense external assistance and political stability in the 1950s (Karp 1960, 123-145; IBRD 1957, 1964).



These outcomes were driven largely by two causal mechanisms. First, colonial investments to enhance settler agriculture and economic extraction resulted in the development of capitalist agriculture and integration into international markets. Consequently, Eritrea and Libya emerged with robust commercial agriculture, transport infrastructure, and light-processing industries, which boosted economic productivity and comparative advantage in trade. Colonial-era small-holding and large-estate farming left vibrant agricultural export sectors and relatively diversified economies crucial for economic growth. Eritrea, also inherited a robust processing industry that

<sup>5</sup> After its incorporation to Ethiopia, Eritrea was the most prosperous and industrialized region, with nearly one-third of the country's economy (see Tseggai 1981, 154; Negash 1987, 139).

made up 10% of GDP in mid-1950s, the fourth African country with manufacturing accounting for more than 10% of GDP (Austin 2010, 22). Consequently, Eritrea and Libya experienced sluggish economic growth during the early-postcolonial period as colonial investments dried up, settler agriculture dwindled, and industrial productivity shrunk due to declining local demand, capital deficiency, and in Eritrea, rising political instability (Trevaskis 1960, 103-113; Gebre-Medhin 1989, 82-106).

Basic infrastructure stimulated economic growth through improved agricultural productivity and access to markets (e.g., Jedwab and Moradi 2016). This is strongly underscored by the economic stagnation of postcolonial Italian Somaliland due in large part to the absence of a transport network for products to reach internal and external markets, besides a doomed monocrop plantation economy. The findings are consistent with recent quantitative analysis of long-run impact of Italian colonial roads in the Horn of Africa, which shows that areas closer to Italian-built roads had since the late-colonial period been significantly richer due to reduced transportation costs and increasing-returns effects (Bertazzini 2019). Italian colonial infrastructure was typically extractive but, like long-run positive economic effects of extractive sugar industries in Dutch Java (see Dell and Olken 2020), Italian colonial investments have direct and indirect positive impact on economic growth, industrialization, and consumption.

Legal-administrative institutions represent the second mechanism. The state in the settler colonies was more effective in policy implementation and public goods provision than in enclave areas during the colonial period. The consequence is that more effective colonial administration facilitated agricultural commercialization, urbanization, and market expansion than did property rights afforded to settler and promoted and protected by the state. Ambitious economic projects, planning, and capital investment by the fascist colonial state stimulated economic growth through—like the developmentalist Japanese colonial state in East Asia—the development of modern infrastructure, internal commerce, and export trade. In enclave Somaliland, the colonial state lacked both legal-administrative capacities and incentive to mobilize resources essential for economic investment and growth.

Italian rule nonetheless left generally weak legal-administrative structures because of, in large part, indirect-rule institutions reinforced under British administration of the territories in the 1940s, and in part the absolutist fascist state lacking in ‘infrastructural power’ (see Soifer and Vom Hau 2008; also Mann 1984) necessary for economic growth, social welfare, and stability. In

Eritrea, ineffective legal-administrative institutions—with decline in public investments—led to economic downturn after mid-1940s. Meanwhile, the state grew increasingly weak to enforce law, provide basic services, and contain rural unrest that crippled agricultural productivity (Trevaskis 1960, 36-42). In Libya, colonial indirect-rule institutions gave birth to an extremely decentralized, patrimonial state at independence (1951), which fostered ethno-provincial conflicts, rent-seeking, and patronage that hampered basic policy planning and implementation (Anderson 1986, 10-11). Somaliland under a UN trusteeship administration enjoyed increased public investments and political stability and consequently economic expansion since late 1940s. Yet, weak legal-administrative state institutions that fell victim to intense inter-clan competition and patronage—together with an enclave plantation economy—undermined government capacity for policy implementation and prospects for vigorous economic growth (see IBRD 1957, 40-51; Karp 1960, 146-159).

Yet Italian colonialism had generally strong negative impact on *social development* defined in terms of per capita income, literacy, and life expectancy. Available data indicates that Eritrea and Libya emerged with higher estimated per capita income (Table 4.1) and better basic public service infrastructure following colonialism (App. C2). So did regions with intensive colonization: highland Eritrea emerged with a higher urbanization and concentration of modern educational, health, and other social services than the poorer lowland regions with approximately 4.3% (1947) of urban population (Longrigg 1945, 138; Four Power Commission 1948a; Gebre-Medhin 1989, 153). Most striking was a rapid demographic growth among predominantly Christian, agricultural population of the highland provinces during colonialism (see App. C3). Likewise, with a robust export sector and public expenditures (Lindberg 1952, 46-53), post-1945 Tripolitania had higher living standards and three times more schools and health services than Cyrenaica and peripheral Fezzan combined (UNESCO 1952, 19-32).

Table 4.1: Estimated Per Capita Income (\$), 1950-1960  
(RANKING 1 = HIGH)

	1950	1955	1960
Eritrea <sup>a</sup>	40.0(1)	42.0(1)	44.0(2)
Italian Somaliland <sup>b</sup>	22.0(3)	25.0(3)	42.0(3)
Libya <sup>c</sup>	35.0(2)	40.0(2)	120.0(1)

NOTE: <sup>a</sup> No separate statistics for Eritrea after 1950.  
Reported income is for Ethiopia; in fact, Eritrea's

income was about 10% higher than the rest of Ethiopia, see f.n. 10.

<sup>b</sup> Karp, p.34; IBRD, 1964. Actual figures: 1950[1952], 1960[1962].

<sup>c</sup> Wright, 1982; Higgins, 1953; World Bank, 1960. Actual figures: 1960[1958].

Table 4.2: Comparative Human Development Indicators, 1950-1960

	Life Expectancy <sup>a</sup> (RANKING 1=HIGHEST)		Child Mortality <sup>b</sup> (RANKING 1=LOWEST)	
	1950	1960	1950	1960
Eritrea	34.0(6)	36.7(6)	333(5)	305(5)
It. Somaliland	34.0(7)	35.6(7)	334(6)	312(6)
Libya	36.7(3)	38.9(3)	346(7)	316(7)
Angola	35.9(4)	36.9(5)	324(4)	297(4)
Mozambique	35.0(5)	37.9(4)	319(3)	273(3)
GB-Cabo Verde	41.6(1)	42.6(1)	255(1)	237(1)
Belgian Congo	39.0(2)	40.6(2)	281(2)	255(2)
Eastern Africa	37.4	39.9	296	271
Northern Africa	42.3	45.8	317	273

NOTE: <sup>a</sup> Life expectancy at birth; <sup>b</sup> child deaths for younger than five years old per 1,000 live-births.

SOURCE: UN Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2019*, Online edition. Rev. 1. Dep. of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019.

However, all three Italian colonies were marked by relatively low social development during this period, consistent with the theoretical expectations. The former colonies suffered from acute shortages of teachers, schools, clinics, physicians, and lawyers in the early-postcolonial decades—a direct developmental impact of social neglect, deprivation, and widespread racial exclusion of natives during the colonial period (UN 1952, 234; IBRD 1957, 16; Farley 1971, 84-85). Further, from a comparative perspective, Italian Africa maintained significantly lower life-expectancy, higher child-death, and lower adult-literacy rates than the rest of sub-Saharan Africa under late-colonial rule.<sup>6</sup> As Table 4.2 indicates, it also featured poorer figures in these measures and overall living standards than Portuguese and Belgian colonies, considered the most underdeveloped in late-colonial Africa.

Three institutional mechanisms seem to have linked Italian colonialism to extremely poor human development. First, racial policies excluded natives from basic public services. Libya and Eritrea were as nearly poor as Somaliland because the greater the settler population was, the more pronounced were inequality-enhancing institutions. Racial exclusion from public goods and discriminating labor, land, and market regulations—together with the resulting dual economies—

<sup>6</sup> Adult literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa: 9.3% (1938), 19.5% (1960) (de la Escosura 2013).

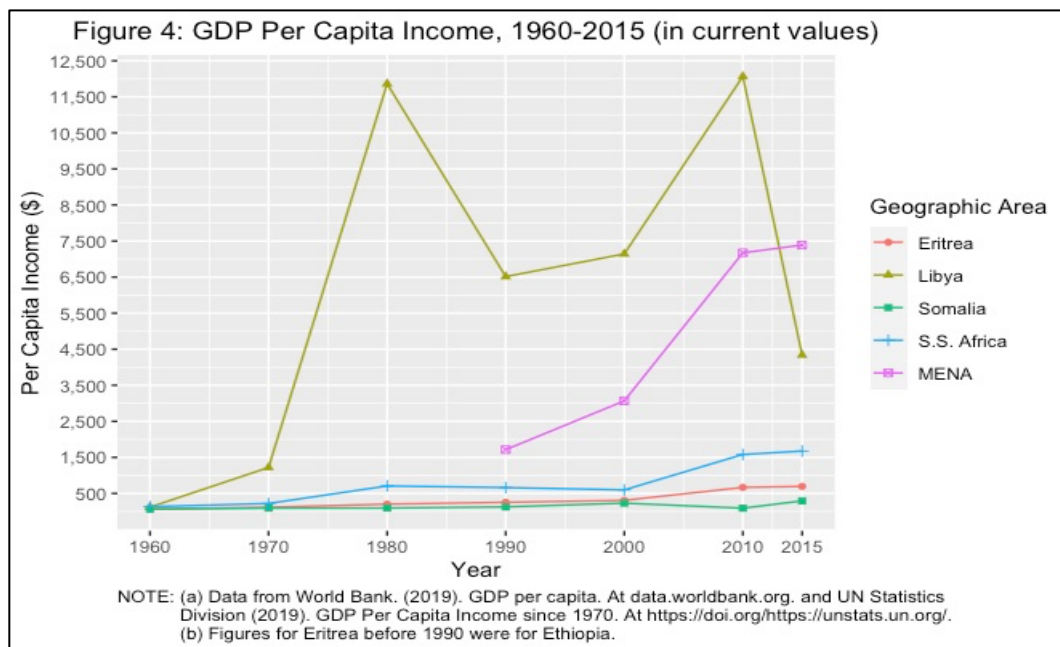
led to native pauperization as in Southern African settler colonies (Palmer and Parsons 1977; Acemoglu and Robinson 2010). This was especially the case in Libya because of extensive land dispossession and decline in indigenous agriculture (Bertazzini 2022) that—with prolonged violence and social dislocation under colonialism—had devastating effects for human progress. Somaliland had the most adverse legacy of public goods because of colonial neglect, but it emerged from colonialism less unequal owing to a largely egalitarian precolonial social structure and the absence of racial exploitation associated with larger settler populations.

Second, social progress was also hindered by legal-administrative institutions that progressively weakened with lack of reforms and rapidly diminishing settler population. Indirect rule impeded the development of state administration necessary for providing education, healthcare, and clean water. This was exacerbated by the decolonization of Italian Africa with despotic, fascist state structures devoid of principles of political inclusion and social welfare that marked late-colonial reforms in British, French, and Portuguese colonies elsewhere. These factors arguably offset potential social benefits of declining racial discrimination and expanding native access to public goods after abrupt termination of Italian colonial domination.

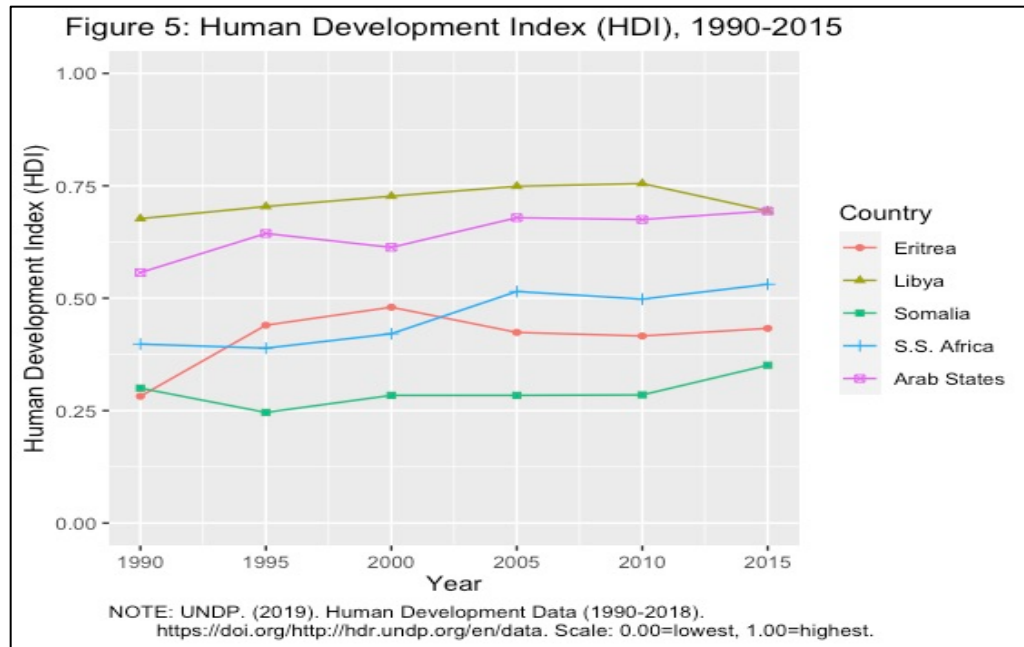
Last, indirect rule undermined social development through another channel, i.e., divisive politico-administrative institutions that produced highly politicized ethnoregional and tribal structures as loci of social mobilization—a legacy manifested in extreme social fragmentation and conflict in all three cases in the colonial aftermath (see Anderson 1986; Iyob 1994; Lewis 2002). The totalitarian fist of the fascist colonial state also precluded the evolution of civil society above narrow racial, ethnoregional, and sectarian affiliations. These legacies led to deep societal polarization and conflict that further undermined poor public-goods provision and consequently stifled human development. Social progress depends, particularly in contexts of state ineffectiveness, on “ethno-racial” harmony that encourages equitable resource distribution and social mobility (Lange, Mahoney, and Vom Hau 2006, 1446), and broad-based social solidarities that enhance collective action and government responsiveness. Relatedly, Eritrea and Libya emerged with rural class structures with powerful traditional ruling elites (administrative chiefs, nobility, landlords, and clergy) that controlled local institutions, access to land and public goods, and exploited the lower classes (Gebre-Medhin 1989, 64-67; Farley 1971, 137).

## 4.2 Postcolonial Development and Critical Junctures: 1960-2010

Whether the development patterns analyzed above persisted long-term depended largely on critical junctures during the early-postcolonial period. In the absence of a critical event in Somalia, stabilization of the colonial legacy led to persistent poverty in the post-1960 period. Moreover, a delayed critical event—i.e., post-1991 state failure and civil war—served to reinforce the country's trajectory of postcolonial social and economic underdevelopment (see Fig. 4-5). On the other hand, in Eritrea and Libya the colonial legacy was partially or fully disrupted by mid-century critical events that led to new path-dependent development trajectories. As Fig. 4-5 indicate, the commencement of hydrocarbons in Libya (1960) that partially destabilized the colonial legacy caused rapid socioeconomic transformation before stagnation and decline in recent decades. By contrast, in Eritrea the onset of an independence war (1961-1991) caused a rupture with the historical legacy of Italian colonialism and thereby led a steady progress during the post-1991 period following a period of decline and stagnation.







The above historical events represent critical junctures in the sense that they generated outcomes that pertinent theories could neither have predicted nor explained (see García-Montoya and Mahoney 2020). One economist lamented before oil discovery: “If Libya can be brought to a stage of sustained growth, there is hope for every country in the world” (Higgins 1953, 37). Within a decade, however, oil revenues propelled the country from the poorest to an “upper-middle income” nation in North Africa. By contrast, post-1961 Eritrea suddenly entered a period of prolonged economic decline and stagnation, inheriting at the revolutionary war’s conclusion “enterprises that were non-operational; an agricultural sector that was severely disrupted by the war; a damaged infrastructure; and health and educational facilities that were destroyed” (World Bank 1994, i-ii). Meanwhile, Somalia too underwent further decline and worsening development conditions with state failure in 1991. The outcomes were unexpected considering orthodox economic theory upon which Higgins’ assumptions were premised. Economic historians understand such unpredictable shifts as contingent outcomes (a defining feature of critical events) because such an outcome contradicts the predictions of neoclassical economic theory (see Mahoney 2000; García-Montoya and Mahoney 2020). Counterfactually, barring these events, Eritrea would most likely have maintained its higher development status than a relatively poorer Libya while, considering broader trends in Africa, post-1991 Somalia could have made some considerable gains albeit an adverse legacy.

In the following analysis of stability and shift in long-run postcolonial development, I trace change (and continuity) in the institutional mechanisms—i.e., legal-administrative institutions, ethno-racial inequalities, and social conflict—previously shown to link Italian colonialism to varied development outcomes. I use newly available data on state capacity, ethnic fractionalization, and social capital as proxies for the state and social institutions (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: State Capacity, Social Polarization, and Social Capital  
(RANKING 1 = HIGHEST)

	State capacity (2016) <sup>a</sup>	Ethnic Fraction. (2003) <sup>b</sup>	Social Capital (2016) <sup>c</sup>
Libya	1.00(2)	0.79(2)	1.00(3)
Eritrea	6.00(1)	0.65(3)	2.00(2)
Somalia	1.00(3)	0.81(1)	3.00(1)
S.S. Africa	-	0.66	-
MENA	-	0.45	-

<sup>a</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016a, b, c. The values reported here are from BTI's indicator "Monopoly on the use of force", one of several indicators of "stateness" variable that measures the state's exclusive control over the use of legitimate violence within its territory, state legitimacy, separation of state and religion, and administrative effectiveness in the scale of 1 = low stateness to 10 = high stateness.

<sup>b</sup> Alesina, et al., 2003, pp. 163, 185, 186, 188.

<sup>c</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016a, b, c.

#### 4.2.1 Path-Dependence and Persistent Poverty in Somalia

In post-1960 Somalia, the colonial legacy stabilized to lead to path-dependent stagnation in most standards of economic and human progress. Today, the country is among the world's poorest countries with the "worst" human development conditions and soaring inequality (*GINI* = 0.48 [2010]) in Sub-Saharan Africa (ADB 2013, 3; UNDP 2012, 29). As seen earlier, Somalia did not inherit from colonial rule the kind of pervasive extractive economies and inequality-sustaining institutions or entrenched traditional elites, as in Eritrea and Libya, particularly adverse to human progress. But a weak patrimonial state, acute clan/ethnoregional conflicts, and a monocrop plantation economy subject to the vagaries of world markets were sufficient conditions to hinder long-term development.

The postcolonial state encompassing former Italian and British colonies lacked both internal coherence and societal autonomy requisite for effective planning and intervention. The double colonial legacy of despotic, but weak, legal-administrative institutions was reproduced by the 1961 constitution that provided for a decentralized and autonomous local administration (Hooglund 1993, 159; Tripodi 1999, 379). This, together with polarizing multiparty politics and

the paucity of human-capital, hindered the development of a coherent bureaucracy capable to pursue import-substitution policies or effectively implement development projects. Likewise, the state lacked institutional autonomy as elite and clan competition over power and public resources fostered patronage, bureaucratic corruption, and vote-buying, exposing the state to conflicting social pressures and factional interests. The post-independence state thus lacked the institutional capacity and independence for raising tax revenues, planning, and invest for development, which require “strong, coherent states willing and able to compel their societies to delay gratification until successful economic development is achieved” (Laitin and Samatar 1987, 107-108).

Regarding social development, independent Somalia was free from repressive landed elite or crippling social inequalities that hinder human development. Yet poor social capital—and weak state capacity—were sufficient to thwart the provision of basic educational, health, and other social services, and thereby social progress. In the 1960s, civil society mushroomed under parliamentary democracy, while investments in education, health, and other social services expanded (see IBRD 1971). Yet, rampant clannism and growing social fragmentation undercut broad social solidarities that improve government efficacy or provide informal social protection, and thereby enhance human wellbeing. Clan and regional competition also precluded the development of “synergistic” state-society relations that support more effective and expansive public goods provision by complementing and reinforcing the state’s legal-administrative capabilities (e.g., Evans 1996).

The country experienced short-lived socioeconomic progress in the early 1970s precisely because of institutional reforms that improved state capacity and social capital. The Barre revolutionary regime’s efforts to professionalize the bureaucracy and to eradicate corruption and clannism (Samatar 1993, 37-38; Hooglund 1993, 159-160) dramatically improved the state’s legal-administrative capabilities to enforce law and carry development programs, including greater investment in infrastructure, agriculture and irrigation, animal husbandry, and rural cooperatives and resettlement, that dramatically stimulated economic growth. The regime also introduced progressive social reforms, especially mass literacy that rapidly expanded school enrollment, expanded healthcare and rural electrification, and measures for gender and other social equalities. With social capital boosted by the state’s push for increased popular participation, anti-clannist crusade, and self-help programs, the reforms significantly boosted literacy, gender equality, and social mobility (Laitin and Samatar 1987, 82-88, 110-118).

The reforms were nonetheless ephemeral and ineffective to transform deeply embedded institutions. Thus, after 1976, Somalia entered a period of sustained economic decline. First, state capacity further eroded when “mismanagement and corruption” replaced revolutionary “vision and enthusiasm” (Ibid., 119) and, with clan identity becoming the principal basis of administrative recruitment and resource distribution, sectional interests influenced policymaking. Bureaucratic corruption, popularly known as the “Italian factor,” reached endemic proportions, hollowing out the state internally and vitiating its external autonomy in a self-reinforcing mechanism. Second, weaknesses of a colonially-inherited plantation economy—i.e., dependence on mono-crop exports, unstable world commodity prices, and aid dependency—worsened the economic consequences of an ineffective state and declining rule of law in the 1980s. By 1990, as the banana sector faltered, the national economy had reverted to its precolonial roots of livestock exports, which came to represent 90% of export earnings that rendered state revenues vulnerable to external shocks, while manufacturing, with none emerging from the colonial period, was arguably the least developed in the world (Laitin 1993, 146-148; Laitin and Samatar 1987, 122).

Social progress during this period was incremental at best due to worsening economic crisis and diminishing public goods. Equally important, however, social capital deteriorated as political repression shattered associational life, and inter-clan conflicts further diminished social solidarities. Entrenched clan-based networks of the colonial period formed the sole basis of political and social mobilization and participation whether in the formation of political coalitions, the appointment of civil service, the allocation of national resources, and accessing economic and social opportunities (Laitin and Samatar 1987, 155). Despite Somalia’s striking cultural homogeneity, the colonial legacy fostered high, clan-based social fragmentation and conflict ( $EF = 0.81$ ) that worsened the adverse social effects of rapidly declining national income and dwindling public goods.

The post-1991 period has been one of developmental stagnation and, in some respects, reversal of paltry socioeconomic progress. These outcomes were largely driven by the same mechanisms in previous decades but mediated by state collapse and an ensuing generalized civil war. Seen as a belated critical juncture in the country’s postcolonial history, these political events—themselves an endogenous outcome of a colonially inherited weak state and insidious clan conflicts—which resulted in drawn-out, anarchic violence in southern and central Somalia (see App. E for map). After 1991, while unabated violence, statelessness, and socioeconomic

destruction persisted in southern Somalia, technically the core of Italian colonization, political order was restored, since mid-1990s, in the northern quasi-state regions of Puntland (the periphery of Italian colonialism) and Somaliland (former British Somaliland).

The disintegration of state authority reinforced the country's path-dependent trajectory of underdevelopment, besides producing new development patterns and inequalities. Somalia's HDI and per capita income fell from 0.30 to 0.28 and from \$836 to \$795, respectively, between 1990 and 2001 (UNDP 2001,198). The national economy ceased to exist as the state's historically inefficient planning, enforcement, and regulatory frameworks fell apart, while human wellbeing regressed as basic public goods vanished, compounded by a fragmented social capital and generalized conflict. Therefore, from both comparative and historical perspectives, Somalia suffered socioeconomic decline and stagnation—and reversal in certain development indicators—for over two decades contrary to neoclassical economists' claims that complete market liberalization and private sector revival after state failure stimulated economic growth (e.g., Leeson 2007; Powell, Ford, and Nowrasteh 2008). It became one of the world's poorest, with the “worst” human development conditions, and one of Africa's top ten inequality rates ( $GINI = 0.48$  [2010]) (ADB 2013, 3; UNDP 2012, 29). Gradual, but halting, socioeconomic recovery since late-2000s is precisely linked to slow expansion of central state power and corresponding improvements in the rule of law, public administration, and public goods.

Second, the persistent and worsening poverty following the critical juncture of state failure had been largely limited to the former Italian Somaliland. As subnational HDI scores in Table 4.4 shows, southern Somalia—the center of Italian colonization with better economic basis and social infrastructure than the rest of country during the postcolonial decades—fell behind central and northern parts of former Italian Somaliland, the colonial periphery that emerged with poorer postcolonial development conditions. As early as 2001, central-northern Somalia (excluding former British Somaliland) had about one-third higher per capital income, better infrastructure, and advanced social services than southern Somalia. In 2010, with the exception of the Banadir area surrounding Mogadishu, the remaining administrative regions in southern Somalia maintained higher poverty rates, infant mortality, and lower educational and healthcare services compared to central and northern regions or the British Somaliland (UNDP 2001;UNDP/World Bank 2003; UNDP 2012, 30-33).

Table 4.4: Subnational Human Development Index (HDI)  
for Southern, Central, and Northern Somalia

Rank	Administrative Region	Regional HDI (2015)	National Geographic Region
1.	Banadir	0.433	Southern
2.	W. Galbeed	0.429	Somaliland
3.	Sanaag	0.419	Somaliland
4.	Bari	0.402	Puntland
5.	Awdal	0.374	Somaliland
6.	Nugaal	0.353	Puntland
7.	Mudug	0.350	Central
8.	Sool	0.316	Somaliland
9.	Gedo	0.308	Southern
10.	Lower Shebelle	0.304	Southern
11.	Togdheer	0.303	Somaliland
12.	Middle Shebelle	0.294	Southern
13.	Lower Juba	0.281	Southern
14.	Bakool	0.276	Southern
15.	Bay	0.276	Southern
16.	Hiran	0.270	Southern
17.	Galguduud	0.261	Central
18.	Middle Juba	0.216	Southern

Source: Global Data Lab, "Sub-National HDI," [hdi.globaldatalab.org](http://hdi.globaldatalab.org).

The colonial legacy is indeed indirectly linked to this outcome through the endogenous collapse of state and ensuing generalized civil war. But there is little data to reliably infer that the sharp regional variations are causally directly related to differences in colonial rule. Two seemingly plausible explanations exist, nonetheless. First, social historians in fact associate the extractive institutions (i.e., land dispossession and forced labor) and inter-clan violence that turned southern Somalia into an epicenter of overlapping class and clan conflicts following state collapse to the colonial legacy deeply rooted in the south. The postcolonial state, like its colonial predecessor, expanded commercial agriculture in close association with landed elites through land expropriations and coercive labor mobilization, which set the stage for land invasions, evictions, and enslavement of Bantu tribes in the 1990s (De Waal 1996; Besteman 1999). This in turn generated a negative feedback mechanism of warlordism, rent-seeking, and conflict perpetuation that impoverished southern Somalia.

Second, and related, the economic and social backwardness of southern Somalia might be an outcome of its colonial status. Comparative-historical sociologists show that formerly colonized areas subjected to intensive levels of colonialism by non-liberal colonizers as Italy tend to lag in postcolonial development than those, like northern Somalia, that received less intensive illiberal colonization (see Lange, Mahoney, and Vom Hau 2006). In other words, ironically the least

colonized northern and central parts of the country were spared extractive institutions of enclave Italian colonialism with the overall result being that these regions eventually surpassed the southern areas in terms of socioeconomic progress.

#### **4.2.2 Critical Junctures and Postcolonial Path Shifts**

##### *a. Libya: Oil and Distorted Development*

The critical events of oil discovery in Libya and independence war Eritrea dramatically redefined both countries postcolonial development trajectories. In the Libya context, petroleum revenues set the country in a path of rapid socioeconomic development but marked by distorted patterns of economic growth and human progress. Initially, the country enjoyed one of the highest and fastest increases in national income, urbanization, and human wellbeing in the developing world. After 1980, however, it gradually stagnated after national income shrank by 40% in late-1980s and suffered a development reversal after 2011, falling to the bottom of “upper middle-income” category.<sup>7</sup> While its economic growth was entirely oil-dependent, social development had been fraught with major lags and gaps. For example, despite higher income and free universal education and healthcare, the country maintains a life expectancy as low as the MENA average, high gender inequality, and an HDI in par with resource-poor countries, such as Tunisia and Jordan, in the region (World Bank 2006, 2009; UNDP 2019).

The post-1960 Libyan economy became monopolized by hydrocarbons that its post-1960 development trajectory is singularly attributed to oil rents. However, the rapid and distorted patterns of national development cannot be sufficiently understood without the institutional legacies of colonialism that mediated the role of oil. The exogenous shock of oil wealth provided a surfeit of developmental and redistributive resources, but its impact was moderated by embedded institutional mechanisms that underwent limited change save rapid transformation of inherited class and ethnoregional inequalities. Oil wealth generated socioeconomic contradictions that produced a socialist revolution in 1969, which in turn destroyed the ruling Sanussi nobility and allied conservative landed elite to establish a redistributive system under the Free Officers regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi. The latter’s socialist wealth redistribution, the emancipation of women, and expansion of subsidized social services to rural areas drastically reduced social and rural-urban

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<sup>7</sup> See World Bank. 2016. “New country classifications by income level: 2016-2017,” <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-country-classifications-2016>.



disparities (see El-Fathaly and Palmer 1980; First 1980; Berry 1989). Consequently, even after the *Jamahiriya*'s egalitarian tenets diminished, pre-2011 Libya was the most egalitarian Arab, OPEC, and upper-middle income country (Hassine 2014). Comparatively low social inequality (*GINI* = 30.7) and striking regional equality, however, obscure high gender inequalities in Libyan society as oil-wealth reduced economic and political opportunities for women (e.g., Ross 2013, 111).

Oil rents simply reinforced the other institutional legacies of colonialism (i.e., weak state and ethnoregional conflict) that in turn distorted oil-driven national development. First, contrary to claims otherwise, the state was weak before oil—and grew weaker afterwards—to leverage staggering petroleum revenues. Oil rents had a lock-in effect on colonial legal-administrative institutions. The result was that the monarchical state was a decentralized patrimonial system embodied in a Royal Household at the top and powerful families and tribal leaders controlling local power; favoritism and family connections dominated administrative recruitment and promotion, and public office was “indistinguishable” from private interests. The state also lacked autonomy from society as family, tribal, and regional interests controlled state institutions and policy. Consequently, the first national development plan promulgated in 1963 floundered because of the state's incapacity for policy implementation, data collection, and policy coordination. As oil rents swell in late-1960s, the weak federal state was unable to effectively invest or broadly distribute revenues through expanded public goods provision, public housing, or credit (Anderson 1986, 255-60; Farley 1971, 228-9). Consequently, economic change became oil-dependent, as oil came to account for over 70% of GDP and 99% of export revenues in 1971 (Lenaghan, 1989, 118), and social development was uneven. Traditional elite control over the state and bureaucratic rent-seeking exacerbated preexisting class and geographic inequalities that led to the monarchy's 1969 revolutionary overthrow (Farley 1971, 227).

The Free Officers' regime played up popular perceptions of a despotic colonial state to dismantle already weak administrative, regulatory, and planning state institutions, and to promulgate, in 1977, the stateless *Jamahiriya* or “state of the masses” (Vandewalle 1998, 85-114; Harris 1986, 63-80). Moreover, oil compounded the deconstruction of legal-administrative state institutions by allowing the revolutionary elite to buyoff popular support. As in the kingdom, oil-rents rather augmented distributive and coercive state apparatuses as the revolutionary state evolved to a conveyor of “coercion and distributive largesse,” a *rentier-distributive* state—whereby government revenues derived from oil were distributed as patronage to buyoff citizens'

obedience (Vandewalle 1998, 63; also, Karl 1997; Ross 2013)—devoid of legal-administrative capabilities to steer development. In effect, prior to its 2011 collapse, the state was a fragmented hodgepodge of formal and informal institutions without a coherent bureaucratic, legal, and regulatory mechanisms (Vandewalle 2008; Mattes 2008). Libya maintains poor legal-administrative institutions (see Table 4.3) with particularly extremely ineffective central government, rule of law, and regulatory institutions.

This had strong negative effects on socioeconomic development. Economic decline in the 1980s is correlated with world oil-price falls, but the prolonged stagnation thereafter is closely linked to state weakness. Despite massive oil revenues, the state failed to implement import-substitution industrialization and economic diversification while the revolutionary regime pursued “highly idiosyncratic” policies with little regard for real development needs or property rights; and the bureaucracy-less state, that controlled the economy after late-1970s, was too vulnerable to social pressure to develop, regulate, and implement sound economic policies (Vandewalle 2008, 23-5; Meblawi 1987; Karl 2007). Economic liberalization since the 1990s also repeatedly faltered as regulatory and administrative mechanisms were literally absent to ensure a functioning market, enforce contract, and provide a social safety-net. Moreover, despite free universal education and healthcare and a crusade for social equality, social development had been distorted: life expectancy as low as the MENA average (2010), high gender inequality, and an HDI in par with resource-poor Tunisia and Jordan (see World Bank 2009; UNDP 2019).

Second, oil wealth led to uneven development by further reinforcing ethnoregional divisions that blocked the emergence of broad-based national and social solidarities. Under the monarchy, narrow family, tribal, and territorial allegiances precluded the emergence of broad social and national solidarities, dampening even social progress despite spiraling oil revenues. These cleavages undermined development policy and effective public goods provision as narrow interests dominated state resources, and rent-seeking dictated state policy (El-Fathaly and Palmer 1980, 28-35; Anderson 1986, 257). After 1969, revolutionary campaign against regionalism and tribalism initially boosted social capital, and revolutionary popular participation and new broad-based social solidarities enhanced state capacity and collective action, resulting in energetic development drive and improved basic services. In recent decades, however, already low social capital declined with progressive depoliticization and disempowered of society after mid-1970s, the atomization of associational life, and thorough “re-tribalization” of Libyan society (Anderson

1986, 268). Like Somalia, despite its relative social homogeneity, pre-2011 Libya was marked by high societal fragmentation ( $EF=0.79$ ) compared to MENA regional (average  $EF=0.45$ ) or ethnically heterogeneous but less fractionalized Eritrea.

Low social capital and declining state provision of basic services were sufficient conditions for stagnant and declining human wellbeing in recent decades (see Fig. 5). Despite low levels of social inequalities, Libya has lagged its neighbors in several key social indicators since 1990s due in large part to poor social capital that compounded the effects of a weak central state authority, and more so after its collapse in the past decade. Libyan society lacked social solidarities above tribe and region as reflected by high social fractionalization and tribalized mobilization during the 2011 uprisings and the multifaceted conflicts that ensued, all deeply rooted in the colonial and postcolonial past (Perroux 2019; Lacher 2013). As the state and its distributive apparatus crumbled, society fell back to narrow family and tribal affiliations and competing local councils and militias. Consequently, Libya, with an HDI and other key national development indicators lower than resource-poor Tunisia and Jordan (UNDP 2019), fell in 2016 from an upper to a lower-middle income country.

#### *b. Eritrea: Independence War and Developmental Decline*

In the Eritrea postcolonial context, the critical juncture of liberation war both redirected the country's postcolonial development trajectory and significantly transformed the colonial institutional heritage. In the short-term, revolutionary turmoil since early 1960s prompted a general decline in economic and human progress; prolonged warfare undercut the colony's advantages in infrastructure, export agriculture, and global market integration, thereby causing sustained economic decline. In late-1980s, Eritrea fell from a rich colony in late-colonial Africa to one of its poorest countries, with a national income considerably lower than the Sub-Saharan African average. Not only had the country suffered from infrastructural and human-capital decline, industrial relocation, and revenue transfers to poorer parts of imperial Ethiopia (Tseggai 1981, 161-168), but conflict also hindered the development of "inclusive" institutions, such as the rule of law and property rights, that stimulate economic growth.

The nationalist war also led to initial decline in human development. Strengthening the state's coercive apparatus at the expense of developmentally vital infrastructural power, war thwarted the development of a legal-rational administration and fostered ethnoregional conflicts

that undermined public goods development. Eritrea's integration into imperial Ethiopia—a polity with quasi-bureaucratic institutions dominated by a landed aristocracy—also led to the “re-feudalization” of postcolonial state and society, which undermined a miniscule modern bureaucracy, re-empowered anti-modernization landed elites, and reinforced inequality-sustaining social structures of colonial rule. Some marginal gains in human wellbeing were made only after the 1974 Ethiopian social revolution which led, with the destruction of old state and class structures, to the consolidation of a highly autonomous state with a strong bureaucracy that embarked on redistributive reforms, health and educational modernization, extensive rural development campaigns, and social mobilization that enhanced basic social services (e.g., Keller 1988, 213-239; Clapham 1988, 45-64). Therefore, some of the colonially inherited state and social structures adverse to socioeconomic development were attenuated or fully transformed during the liberation conflict to permit some significant, if uneven, human progress.

Long-term, the critical juncture of national revolution had positive impact on national—especially human—development after 1991. As Fig. 4-5 indicate, national income almost doubled and HDI increased by nearly one-fold, one of the highest changes in sub-Saharan Africa, between 1991-2010 (World Bank 2002; 2008). Structural reforms by a revolutionary leadership in the 1990s further strengthened legal-administrative institutions, weakened the traditional elite, and buttressed social capital. First, while the war and revolutionary mobilization itself produced a highly centralized, powerful state, new administrative reforms—particularly the dismantling of deep-seated divide-and-rule administrative structures and traditional authorities (Tronvoll 1998, 463-470)—and expansion further enhanced the state's effectiveness and autonomy over powerful societal forces. Thus, the state managed to thoroughly penetrate society and, among other tasks, reform land ownership, abolish social and gender hierarchies, expand modern education, health, and other basic services to rural areas and historically marginalized regions, and to implement ambitious national developmental programs. This resulted in remarkable advances in human wellbeing that, by 2015, Eritrea became one of less-than-handful African countries that achieved key health (and educational) development milestones (ADB 2014).

Second, revolutionary upheavals and post-revolutionary nation-building overturned highly unequal rural social structure that emerged intact from Italian colonial rule. The resulting weakening of powerful social forces (especially traditional and landed elites) and enhanced state autonomy “afforded the state considerable autonomy to pursue policies independently of any

dominant class” (Makki 1996, 482). The new state maintained relatively high institutional capacity (see Table 4.3) and, infused by the new leadership’s developmental ideology, was able to effectively launch development policies which, although less successful in the economic domain, remarkably improved human wellbeing through strong emphasis on inclusive development, social equality, and extensive public investments in education, healthcare, and poverty reduction that particularly favored rural areas and hitherto poorer regions of the country (Makki 1996, 491-495; World Bank 1996, 22-35; World Bank 2002, 5-15, 28-40).

Finally, revolutionary mobilization and post-revolutionary nation-building also contributed to social progress by ameliorating deep-seated ethnoregional and sectarian schisms, and thereby enhancing social capital. Intensive popular mobilization in the liberation struggle as well as a national service program and grass-roots policy participation in the aftermath of independence, all enhanced social cohesion and national-level societal solidarities transcending narrow affiliations in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith society. Despite enormous underlying social heterogeneity, Eritrea today maintains the lowest levels of social fragmentation and conflict ( $EF = 0.65$ ) among former Italian colonies. Strong social capital in turn facilitated synergistic state-society relations that made possible state-accumulation of development capital, broad community mobilization for public and national development projects, and the diminishing of gender and other forms of social discrimination.

Since mid-2000s, Eritrea experienced slow and inconsistent socioeconomic change in conjunction with weakening legal-administrative institutions, rent-seeking, and declining social capital. Diminishing state infrastructural power and social embeddedness created insecure property rights and extensive rent-seeking that thwarted economic growth, besides government monopoly over the economy that suffocated the private sector (see Giorgis 2014; Kaplan 2016). On the other hand, repression on associational life and growing societal rifts eroded social capital which, along with declining public goods provision (World Bank 2008, 44), hampered progress in human wellbeing, see Fig. 5. Whether such setbacks have anything to do with the colonial legacy remains an open question. However, the problem of development with post-revolutionary states is rarely one of state weakness or class oppression. As Eritrea demonstrates, the “forces that allow post-revolutionary regimes to build states rapidly—the removal of opposition and political control of a mobilized population—stifle civil society [and social capital] and therefore limit the long-term effectiveness and durability of states” (Lange and Rueschemeyer 2005, 252).

It is noteworthy that certain development patterns in contemporary Eritrea appear to bear enduring legacies of colonial rule, which underscore the continued influence of colonialism on various aspects of long-term development. Subnational HDI in indicate that, today, highland regions (or *Kebessa*) that emerged with better social services and consequently higher living standards during the colonial aftermath still maintain higher human development indicators (see Table 4.5). Other geographic regions, save the South Sed Sea province, that fell under low Italian colonization—and that consequently emerged with poorer public goods infrastructure—continues to lag in human wellbeing despite overall national social development in post-1991 Eritrea.

Table 4.5: Subnational HDI for Post-Independence Eritrea

<i>Province</i>	<i>HDI (2005)</i>	<i>HDI (2015)</i>	<i>Level of colonization (Geog. region)</i>
Central	0.57	0.62	High (Highland)
Southern	0.41	0.43	
Anseba	0.39	0.42	Intermediate (Midland)
Gash Barka	0.32	0.34	
N. Red Sea	0.35	0.37	Low (Lowland)
S. Sed Sea	0.42	0.45	

Source: Global Data Lab, “Sub-National HDI,” [hdi.globaldatalab.org](http://hdi.globaldatalab.org).

## 5. Concluding Discussion

Italian colonialism has varied and enduring consequences for postcolonial development. Whereas Italian settler colonialism exerted positive influence on economic development (i.e., Eritrea and Libya), plantation-based enclave colonialism in Italian Somaliland had strong negative economic consequences. However, both settler and enclave rule maintained strong negative relationship with social development due to poor social-service delivery, ethnoregional and sectarian conflicts, and, with the former, racial oppression. In the long-run, after 1960, the postcolonial development effects had been contingent on critical junctures. In Somalia, the colonial legacy led to path-dependent underdevelopment through mechanisms related to weak patrimonial state and fragmented social capital—an outcome compounded by state collapse and civil war after 1991. In Libya and Eritrea, critical events in the early postcolonial decades destabilized the colonial legacy and thereby redefined development trajectories. Whereas the commencement of oil production after 1960 resulted in rapid socioeconomic development followed by stagnation in recent decades in Libya, on one hand, liberation war after 1961 in Eritrea led to initial decline followed by marked, if uneven, socioeconomic progress with dismantling of the colonial structural legacy, on the other.

The analysis highlights three mechanisms undergirding adverse developmental legacies of late colonialism in Africa. First, as postcolonial Somalia highlights, colonial policies of low-cost revenue extraction, monocrop economies, and state marketing boards have had devastating consequences for sustainable economic change (e.g., Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2002; Austin 2010; also Rodney 1972; Bates 1981). Second, consistent with qualitative studies that emphasize state institutions rather than property rights, ineffective legal-administrative institutions associated with colonial indirect rule hindered future development because of patrimonialized postcolonial states with poor organizational autonomy or societal embeddedness to mobilize resources for economic change or to provide basic social services. Finally, divisive indirect-rule structures and racial repression left pronounced social cleavages, entrenched ruling elites, and deep social inequalities that undermine equitable income distribution, broad-based social solidarities, and thereby postcolonial human development. Barring the premature termination of Italian rule, therefore, inequality-enhancing settler-colonial institutions would likely have caused enduring social inequalities, deprivation, and violence in Eritrea and Libya as in Southern Africa (see Heldring and Robinson 2012; Palmer and Parsons 1977).

The significance of the argument is limited to late colonialism in Africa, particularly to less studied, minor European colonizers, such as Belgium, Portugal, and Germany. However, the analysis makes few broader contributions to ongoing debates on colonialism and long-run development. First, it lends strong support to comparative-historical scholars who contend that European colonizers reacted to geographic conditions or institutions in the colonized areas in varied ways, and as such, their national identity is critical to understand differences in colonization and postcolonial development. Yet, as economic historians emphasized, the analysis of Italian colonial policies indicates that factor endowments (related to low disease environment, temperate climate, and agricultural land) were an important factor. Consequently, various measures of precolonial development (i.e., population density, urbanization, and centralized authority), that appeared crucial in previous epochs in relationship to British, Spanish, and Portuguese colonialism, scarcely defined patterns of Italian colonization in any systematic manner. Moreover, native labor and taxation, that drew mercantilist European colonizers to more densely populated areas, were less important considerations in Italian colonization strategies preoccupied with overseas settlement of Italian labor and peasants.



Relatedly, and second, I found no strong positive relationship between precolonial ethnic centralization and postcolonial public-goods provision as quantitative studies suggest. Italian settler colonization, administrative development, and infrastructural investments were principally, if not solely, driven by resource endowments favorable to colonial settlement and exploitation. As such, development outcomes are rather linked to colonial economic policies, racial structures, as well as administrative institutions devised to promote economic exploitation and settlement. In fact, much like the French, Italian colonizers obliterated precolonial entities, weakened traditional elites, and reconstituted ethnic and tribal constructs.

Finally, most scholars consider the legacies of colonialism as irrevocably enduring, arguably immune to historical contingency and human agency. I found that certain critical junctures in postcolonial history can cause ruptures with the colonial past to generate long-run decline or progress. This is not to suggest that colonial legacies are easily reversible; for instance, oil-driven development in post-1960 Libya is indirectly linked to the colonial legacy because hydrocarbons (an exogenous shock) only partially transformed preexisting state and social structures. In fact, oil reinforced colonially inherited weak legal-administrative institutions contrary to claims that oil rents are the original cause of Libyan state underdevelopment. Conversely, the revolutionary episode in Eritrea dislodged Italian colonial institutional and developmental legacies. This not only underscores the significance of contingency vis-à-vis more deterministic colonial geography and history. It also informs theoretical debates over the causal role of critical junctures vis-a-vis antecedent conditions. Some critical events, like oil rents in Libya, can be either necessary or sufficient for the given outcome where preexisting “critical antecedents” play equally important causal role (see Slater and Simmons 2010); other events like national-social revolutions in Eritrea can be necessary and sufficient for the outcome, negating the causal power of antecedent conditions.

The analysis challenges traditional views of Italian colonialism as ‘too liberal,’ ‘gentle,’ or ‘too short’ to have significant—much less benign—long-term consequences. Italian rule was illiberal even before the Fascist period, leaving in place wicked legacies for long-run socioeconomic and political development. Besides, temporal duration is not as important as the “national identity” of colonizers in contexts of much more exploitative colonizers. In relatively shorter time, Japanese colonialism dramatically transformed precolonial state and class structures in Korea and Taiwan, facilitating rapid industrialization during post-war decades (Kohli 1994; Koo

1987). Scholars thus need to pay greater attention to small, short-lived, less paradigmatic colonial regimes in Africa. Overall, effective colonization in Africa lasted few decades but, left enduring legacies because it “totally reordered political space, societal hierarchies and cleavages, and modes of economic production” (Young 1994, 9).

The paper laid out an analytical framework and concepts to systematically assess Italian colonial institutions and their development legacies. New efforts should, on one hand, fully appreciate the implications of specific Italian colonial institutions (e.g., race policies, land ownership, education) and, on the other, leverage preliminary comparative insights on Italian colonialism and political development (see Anderson 1988; Noor 2021) to uncover the historical roots of state failure and protracted conflicts following episodes of abortive democratic transitions in Libya and Somalia in recent decades.

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