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The End of Empire and the Extension of the Westphalian System: The Normative Basis of the Modern State Order

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THE CASE FOR THE IMPACT OF NORMS ON DECOLONIZATION

Winston Churchill confidently remarked in 1942 how he had not “become the King’s minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.”¹ The French government similarly ruled out African independence for many years to come at the Brazzaville conference of 1944. The Dutch governor-general proclaimed proudly in 1937 that he expected Dutch rule over the East Indies to last another three hundred years.² Nevertheless, within two decades all their vast imperial holdings had dwindled to a few scattered territories. Those that remained had been granted considerable autonomy—and ultimately became fully independent as well. The sun had set on the empires that once held sway over the world.

The speed and ubiquitousness of the decolonization process demonstrates that this was not an isolated process relating only to the fortunes of individual powers. Small states such as the Netherlands and Belgium were ousted within fifteen years of the war. But more powerful Britain and France similarly lost vast territories in the span of only a few years. Only Portugal fought a rearguard action but eventually had to yield by 1974. The similarity across outcomes and synchronicity of events suggests that a broad systemic process was at work.

¹ Betts (1985:182).

² Van den Doel (1996:244).

Despite domestic differences within the various metropolises all West European countries (save Portugal) decolonized in the span of less than two decades.

Changes in the material conditions in the postwar period had something to do with it. Shifts in the relative balance of power between center and periphery made empire more costly. The economic benefits of empire also declined. Moreover, with a hegemonic United States opposing imperial preference schemes in favor of a liberal trading system, the West European powers could no longer claim their empires as their exclusive markets.

This essay, however, does not address such materialist accounts, even though they may be important elements of a theory of decolonization. I do not offer an explanation of decolonization *per se*. Instead I consider a rival explanation that stresses how normative changes within the imperial metropolises were the key causal variable. Can the decisiveness and pace of decolonization be explained by normative changes in the metropolises?³ This seems at least intuitively plausible. The historical record suggests that the metropolises had started to modify their justification for holding on to these territories well before the post-World War II era. Dutch colonial policy, once officially denoted as the “Policy of the Positive Balance Sheet,” had been reclassified as “The Ethical Policy” at the turn of the century.⁴ The British and French, in the interwar period, held some areas as “mandates” and later “trustee territories” rather than outright colonies. Other peripheries were reclassified as “overseas provinces.” The rhetoric had thus most certainly changed. Nineteenth-century jingoism and “white man’s burden” had become slogans of a bygone era.

Contrary to this literature, however, I argue that norms played a far more important role in the periphery than in the metropolises. Imperial capitals and populations were relatively untroubled with the moral rectitude of empire.

Moreover, much of the discussion on the impact of norms fails to distinguish between the different types of normative discourse, and does not clarify how they might have causal significance. Yes, norms mattered, but how did they matter, and what kinds of norms were invoked? I, therefore, link a discussion of the various types of normative discourse to an explanation of why normative concerns about empire played only a minor role in the imperial centers, but emerged as key mobilizing forces in the colonial periphery. Three factors determine the relative impact of norms: the internal consistency of a particular normative framework, the incentives for political entrepreneurs to champion

³ I use Doyle’s terminology. “Empire . . . is a system of interaction, between two political entities, one of which, the dominant metropole, exerts political control over the internal and external policy—the effective sovereignty—of the other, the subordinate periphery.” Doyle (1986:12). In this essay I interchange “metropole” and “center,” as well as “periphery” and “colony.”

⁴ Van den Doel (1996:153).

certain norms over others, and the feedback from the broader environment. In tracing the causal impact of norms on the retreat from empire and the extension of the Westphalian system, I hope to illuminate the dynamics behind decolonization and hope to contribute to a growing body of literature on the impact of norms.⁵

A TYPOLOGY OF NORMATIVE ARGUMENTS

While there is a large and growing body of literature that stresses the role of norms, this literature often interchanges different understandings of norms. I advocate distinguishing among three types: norms that delineate moral rules, norms that are part of taken-for-granted scripts, and norms that serve as guidelines for utilitarian purposes. In this section I further discuss how each of these types of discourse pertains to decolonization.

Norms as Moral Rules

Norms in this understanding refer to rules that distinguish moral from immoral actions and behaviors.⁶ They are internalized guidelines that substantively inform preferences. Norms are not derivative of exogenously postulated (material) interests but are independent determinants of preferences and behaviors.

This view of the causal impact of norms informs the claim that metropolitan democracies ultimately deemed democracy inconsistent with empire. At its core, argue the proponents of this view, democracy implies equal access to office, the right to choose one's political officials, and equality before the law. Contractual elements in democratic theory stress the reciprocal exchange between government and its citizens. Such contractual aspects are absent in the subjugation of colonial subjects to the imperial metropole. The former was expected to recognize rule, but did not receive the rights of metropolitan citizens. Hence, imperial rule was morally reprehensible.

This tension between the inequality of the colonial relation and the equality proffered by metropolitan democratic principles ultimately led to dissension within the metropole and delegitimation of the unequal and coercive imperial relation. Robert Jackson is certainly one of the most articulate advocates of this view:

⁵ See Finnemore (1993, 1996); Price (1995, 1998); Tannenwald (1999).

⁶ Finnemore similarly distinguishes between norms as rule-like prescriptions and as moral statements (1993:566). Goldstein and Keohane (1993:9) use the term "principled beliefs" for the latter category.

Underlying all these causes . . . was a fundamental shift of normative ideas and a corresponding change of mind on the part of most sovereign governments and the public opinion influencing them concerning the right to sovereign statehood.⁷

Adam Watson similarly claims that

“within ten years [of WW II] it had become clear to political leaders and to the majority of informed opinion in the democratic countries of the west that colonialism had by then become as unacceptable as slavery a century before.”⁸

Norms thus had independent causal force. They were not derivative of other (imputed) preferences but indeed formed metropolitan preferences.

It is worth pointing out that these norms were not endogenous elements of the Westphalian system. Recognizing territorial sovereignty as the constitutive principle of the international system does not imply that states must have democratic regimes, nor does it speak about the relations of the sovereign authority and the regions that make up the polity. If there were moral tensions, they were between empire and other principles that emerged within the West European states.

Norms as Taken-for-Granted Scripts

Norms can also be understood as a matrix of constitutive principles that govern the behaviors of members of a given social group. Group members accept and play certain roles that lend predictability to their behaviors and credibility to their statements. Entrants have little choice but to accept these existing rules and principles. Socialization into the script forms a *sine qua non* condition for entry and recognition.⁹

As with the previous understanding of norms (as moral precepts), this meaning gives norms considerable independent explanatory power. If actors take particular principles as a given, then such normative frameworks determine choices and preferences. Norms are not derivative of other presumed “real” interests and preferences, nor are they merely invoked to explain the residual variation of behavior that is not fully explained by more materialist accounts.

In this spirit, one might argue that the current script in the international system legitimates only sovereign territorial states as actors of that society.

⁷ Jackson (1993:129). See also Jackson (1990: chapter 4).

⁸ Watson (1992:295).

⁹ See the discussion of the concepts of taken-for-grantedness and social scripts in DiMaggio and Powell (1983); Abercrombie (1986); and Finnemore (1996).

Other actors are excluded.¹⁰ Hence, political elites do well to take the sovereign state system for granted, and structure their polities according to expectations and principles that govern the behavior of others.

Robert Jackson argues not only that empire is morally suspect but also that empire violates the sovereignty script.¹¹ Empire might be at odds with the constitutive principle of sovereign territoriality in two ways. First, it denies some actors legal equality, the premise contained in the sovereignty principle.¹² Subjugation of others to a colonial position, mandate status, or a euphemistic overseas territory, violates that equality. Second, sovereign statehood entails territorial delimitation of jurisdiction. Empire and commensurate expansionist policies suggest that the actor seeks to expand its sphere of hierarchical governance, and hence encroach on the sovereignty of others. The quest for world empire is the starkest representation of such behavior.

In a long process of maturation, sovereign territoriality has emerged as a key principle of international relations—often associated with the Peace of Westphalia but arguably emerging well before that, and only entrenched well after 1648. Hence, it has now acquired a taken-for-granted quality in that it informs individual actors' calculations and behaviors. The reinforcement of this script over many decades has made empire obsolete and illegitimate. Miles Kahler thus argues that empires have become less viable forms of organization as sovereignty has become more entrenched.¹³

The taken-for-grantedness has not only been reinforced by diplomatic practice and the repetitive interaction of states on the basis of territorial sovereignty, but also by international agreements and organizations. The United Nations charter thus delegitimizes imperialism—a trend that commenced with the League of Nations.

Norms as Utilitarian Conventions

A third approach stresses norms in the utilitarian sense. Norms serve functional purposes: They regulate behavior, reduce uncertainty by institutionalizing conventions, signal expectations, and reveal information.¹⁴ For example, the norm “cooperate with another, and punish transgression, but be forgiving,” might emerge as the consequence of iterative behavior over time.¹⁵

¹⁰ See Spruyt (1994); Thomson (1990).

¹¹ Jackson (1993:114).

¹² For discussions see Hinsley (1969); James (1986); and Benn (1967).

¹³ Kahler (1997).

¹⁴ For a similar understanding, see Garrett and Weingast (1993).

¹⁵ Axelrod (1981, 1984, 1986).

Contrary to the first two approaches, norms do not inform preferences. Instead preferences are postulated exogenously and norms emerge in response to those preferences. Norms are thus derivative of those preferences and the explanation of why they emerge must center on their efficacy and efficiency in meeting actors' interests.

This understanding of norms could very well acknowledge that normative discourse about the legitimacy of empire had shifted, as the two previous interpretations of the causal impact of norms on decolonization suggest. However, it would add that such norms must be explained by the preferences of actors and their changed calculations about the usefulness of empire. Moral appropriateness and taken-for-grantedness in this view are derivatives of established patterns of behavior over time. Because empires were once held to be useful (for security or economic purposes), they were subsequently legitimated as the general norm. Changing material conditions will thus lead to changes in preference structures and norm erosion, and to delegitimation of empire. Examining the change in discourse coterminously requires the analysis of material conditions surrounding the pursuit of empire.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE HISTORICAL RECORD

I examine the impact of each of these three types of normative arguments—the claim that colonialism was incompatible with democracy (and hence morally reprehensible); the argument that the state system constituted a taken-for-granted script that contradicted empire; and the view that utilitarian norms suggested alternative logics of organization. I do so by examining two cases of decolonization: the Netherlands' retreat from the Dutch East Indies, and French decolonization.

These cases allow us to run a variety of tests and comparisons. Robert Jackson argues, largely by examining the British case, that democracy was antithetical to empire and colonies.¹⁶ If so, then the democratic regimes in both the Netherlands and France should demonstrate a change in attitudes in the government and the general population about the moral rectitude of holding on to their subject territories.

He also suggests that sovereignty imposed a dominant script that challenged imperial rule. Again, both France and the Netherlands should have been subject to such rules. Both were members of key international organizations, such as the UN, that enshrined principles of sovereign self-determination. Indeed

¹⁶To be fair, Jackson acknowledges the strength of anticolonial sentiments in the East Indies and Indochina (Jackson 1990:82). However, this still does not clarify why moral sentiments in the Netherlands and France did not change. In fact it puts the question of why they did not change in even starker relief.

the Dutch had traditionally been ardent supporters of international organizations and international law. The French, of course, were one of the permanent members of the Security Council. One might thus have expected that these countries would accept the principles of self-determination that had been expounded at the dismantling of the German, Ottoman, and Austrian empires, and that had gained momentum in the interwar period. Did they indeed take the sovereignty/self-determination script for granted?

Finally, one might contend that instrumental calculations of declining benefits and rising costs of empire in general would change the previous justifications for empire. Such an argument should also apply to these two cases. Both countries had traditionally validated empire on utilitarian principles. Empire was morally justifiable because it improved the welfare and security of the home country. For France, the empire had been deemed essential for home defense and great power standing. The Dutch required that all policies in the East Indies be self-supporting and yield a positive benefit over costs for the mother country. Empire was considered legitimate and moral, and profitable to boot. The utilitarian perspective of norms should thus demonstrate a close fit between the changes in political discourse about the legitimacy and usefulness of empire, and a recalculation of the drawbacks and advantages of empire.

Jackson's view, and I do not take this as a straw-man perspective but as an insightful and potentially very powerful argument, presents the strong case for norms. He emphasizes the independent causal effect of moral sentiments and normative scripts. They inform individuals' preferences. The utilitarian perspective conveys norms' less independent explanatory power. Instead, the norms that individuals adopt show an elective affinity with material interests. (The latter are exogenously derived). France and the Netherlands pose "easy cases" for all of the three types of normative arguments—they were democracies, they ascribed to the sovereignty script, and they justified empire on functional grounds. Hence, they form good test cases.¹⁷

The Absence of Normative Concerns in the Metropole

Empire as a moral burden. There is little evidence to suggest that governments and societies in the Netherlands or France were particularly troubled with their subjection of distant territories. Quite the contrary: Despite the fact that both cherished fundamental democratic principles, democracy was not considered inherently antithetical to having overseas provinces (Algeria's status) or seeing distant territories as an integral part of the realm (as the East Indies). Among

¹⁷ For discussions of the logic of case selection, see Eckstein (1975); Lijphart (1971); Van Evera (1996).

the parties in both countries only the far left favored outright independence for the colonies. The left, however, was not propelled by liberal democratic principles of equality and self-determination but by Marxist views that imperialism was a logical consequence of capitalism. Opposing the latter implied opposition to the former. Moreover, liberal political rights were simply epiphenomena of more fundamental economic rights. The far left's opposition to colonialism was thus not a consequence of democracy but of anticapitalist sentiments.

The positions of the socialist parties were more ambiguous. Less inspired by Marxist doctrine, they entertained liberal democratic notions of equality and self-determination. Labor solidarity should also extend to those subject to employer exploitation in the periphery. Such principles, however, were constantly weighed against the apparent benefits of empire for the metropolitan labor force. Rapid decolonization seemed to clash with protecting the economic welfare of domestic constituents. The Dutch Labor Party thus favored decolonization in principle but they believed there was no need to rush to decolonization given the serious consequences for Dutch labor.¹⁸ Economic estimates (later proven to be incorrect) suggested that 14 percent of Dutch national income depended on control over Indonesia, and hence decolonization would impose considerable hardship on the socialist worker.¹⁹ It is true that socialist workers became more ardent supporters of decolonization after the war, but even then they were willing to compromise their position in exchange for participation in the metropolitan governments.

To their right, the Christian-democratic parties, the liberals, and more extreme factions, proved even less bothered by normative concerns. The Catholics and Protestants in the Netherlands opted for hard-line policies and police actions against the newly proclaimed Indonesian republic.²⁰

Similarly, the French centrist parties, the Socialists, and the Gaullists were more than willing to quell nationalist demands by force, most notably in Algeria and Indochina. Miles Kahler thus notes how parties outbid each other on the colonial issue, arguing not about the moral justifications of empire, but about who was responsible for the loss of the colonies. Ian Lustick reinforces this perspective of the French political situation in the 1950s when describing how politicians strove to create an image of "Greater France" encapsulating Algeria. Tony Smith notes "the stubborn colonial consensus that reigned from the Social-

¹⁸ Van Doorn (1995a:22, 23; 1995b).

¹⁹ Van den Doel (1996:248); Maddison (1990).

²⁰ Less well known than the French efforts to quell demands for independence, the Dutch deployed more than 150,000 troops in 1947 and 1948 to combat nationalist insurgents (Van Doorn 1995b).

ists to the Right.”²¹ Here too the Communists were the only ones who opposed empire outright.

The general electorate as well seemed relatively untroubled with maintaining its colonial presence. When the Dutch government launched the Second Police Action in December of 1948, it met concerted criticism from its western allies (England and the United States) and the United Nations. Nevertheless, surveys reveal that fully two-thirds favored the military actions despite international opposition.

French public opinion similarly seemed to suggest that opinion swung against those defeatists who spoke of retreat. De Gaulle acceded to power, not because people thought he would lead the country out of Africa, but because they believed he could resolve the impasse in domestic politics, and resolve the Algerian question.

In short, there was no dramatic shift in public opinion on colonial issues in either of these two democratic metropolises. If Jackson’s argument perhaps holds for the British case, the West European democracies, by contrast, did not question the normative validity of maintaining their subject territories by whatever means deemed necessary. Stronger even, the political discussions suggested a moral burden on the metropole to remain rather than pull out.²² The Dutch settlers (more than 200,000), business interests, and the pro-Dutch Indonesians, demanded Dutch presence. In France, the discussion centered around the obligation to the *Pieds Noirs* (about a million), and French sympathizers in the colonies. Abandonment was normatively unacceptable.²³

The not so taken-for-granted script. Nor did metropolitan governments surrender their colonies because they recognized that they violated the principle of sovereign territorial rule. They freely acknowledged that the principle of sovereign territoriality formed a constitutive rule of international relations. However, they denied that this implied decolonization.

As said, sovereignty entails that governments be supreme within recognized borders and have no claims to authority beyond such borders. Sovereignty is thus based on mutual recognition and juridical equivalence among states. Alternative governance structures might claim internal hierarchy but not territorial delimitation (e.g., theocratic authorities); or they might be neither hierarchical nor territorially exclusive (feudal organization). Indeed some political organizations need not be territorially fixed (nomadic institutions). Such

²¹ Smith (1981:106). See also Kahler (1984, 1997); Lustick (1993).

²² Betts (1985: chapter 2).

²³ Betts (1985:207)

political entities would thus violate the sovereignty principle. Older empires, similarly, would be incompatible with sovereignty. Pre-modern empires were largely universalist in their claims to rule. They recognized no limits to their authority and recognized no other authority as equivalent.²⁴

Modern colonial empires made no such claims. They recognized fixed territorial limits to their claims of jurisdiction. Subject territories were internally hierarchical (the metropolitan government ruled) and were externally represented by that same authority. They posed therefore no challenge to the sovereignty of recognized independent states. There was no contradiction between the sovereignty principle and control over the colonies—the latter were simply territories within the realm, even if they were not fully integrated.

Metropolitan policies, however, did contradict the principle of national self-determination.²⁵ If sovereignty meant that nations should be independent, as Woodrow Wilson claimed with particular regard to the remnants of Austria-Hungary and the Turkish Empire, then clearly modern empires violated that principle. But that principle was hardly taken for granted. Indeed, it is untenable in practice unless one argues that the roughly 3000 to 5000 ethnic groups that exist today should all constitute independent states.²⁶ Even apparently homogeneous nation-states are often recent amalgamations of different ethnic and racial groups.

One could, therefore, recognize and enshrine the principle of sovereign territoriality through a plethora of treaties and organizations to which both France and the Netherlands subscribed, while denying the principle of national self-determination. Sovereign territoriality constituted part of a taken-for-granted script; national self-determination did not.

This is not to say that there had not been any changes at all. We already noticed how the terms of political discourse regarding the colonies had changed. Indeed, the very term “colonies” had become suspect. They were relabeled as overseas territories or overseas provinces. Some of this was no doubt a semantic ploy to avoid violating international charters. Subjection of territories was passed off as an internal matter and hence falling under domestic jurisdiction rather than the *de facto* exercise of power of one state in the international system over another potentially independent entity. It was, however, not just semantics. Few metropolises espoused blatant exploitation, as in the nineteenth century. Instead, rational management of colonized peoples was the avowed aim. But, and this is key, the colonies were as of yet deemed unfit to be independent.

²⁴ Kratochwil (1986).

²⁵ Sovereignty can thus be contested in interpretations other than legal sovereignty. See also Barkin and Cronin (1994).

²⁶ Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawm (1990) mention those numbers.

To conclude, there is truth to the argument that the international system had moved towards further entrenchment of the sovereignty principle. Those areas controlled by the losing imperial powers of World War I, while not being granted independence, gained greater measures of self-governance as mandates. They were thus not simply incorporated as part of the victorious powers' other colonies. The international script, that determined what type of metropolitan rule was permissible, was thus changing. But here lay the rub: It left unanswered which territories were to be considered potentially sovereign entities. The modern sovereignty rule territorializes authority, it does not imply that such authority must be egalitarian or democratic.

Metropolitan powers thus regarded demands for secession as cases of civil, not international, conflict. Any attempt to suppress such sentiments did not constitute a violation of the sovereignty principle, since that principle only applied to the relation of internationally recognized independent entities. The taken-for-granted script was thus accepted, but considered inapplicable to these specific cases. Thus, metropolises could, with perfect logical consistency, repress nationalist sentiments *and* expect the international community to be on their side.

Utilitarian arguments for shifting norms. If neither France nor the Netherlands was swayed by moral quandaries of having overseas territories, and if neither thought that the principle of sovereignty precluded them from having colonies, is it nevertheless possible to argue that they changed their minds about the use-value and, concomitantly, the legitimacy of empires? Did they indeed change their views about the appropriateness of empire as an efficacious means of pursuing their states' interests, and did this lead to a shift in attitudes about the justifiability of empire?

At face value, given the changes in the postwar international conditions, one might have expected this indeed to be the case. England has since long calibrated the costs of empire against the costs of maintaining an imperial presence.²⁷ France, like England, had consistently derived military benefits from its overseas territories. Not only did its vast territorial holdings lend credence to the French claim of being a great power in the first place (the empire of prestige argument), but the colonies contributed in a very direct sense to the security of the metropole. Hundreds of thousands of colonial subjects had fought for France in World War I.²⁸ And going into World War II, French strategy still called for a stalling action on the European continent that would allow the metropole to mobilize thousands of Africans for home defense.²⁹

²⁷ Friedberg (1988).

²⁸ See Betts (1985: chapter 1).

²⁹ Kupchan (1994:222).

Given the failure of the imperial strategy in World War II, and given the advent of nuclear weapons as a key benchmark for great power status, one might expect that Paris would have developed a different understanding of the appropriateness of empire for military purposes. Changes in material benefits would thus correlate with a reevaluation of the premise that France needed to maintain such territories for sake of prestige, moral obligation, or whatever terms had previously been employed to justify France's imperial pursuits.

Nothing of the kind emerged. Instead, the metropole reemphasized the notion that France needed the empire to retain its great power standing. Counter to realist expectations it even drew down its home defenses to maintain its subject areas while a greater danger loomed on the European continent. A more sober-minded realist perspective would have expected that utilitarian calculi would have generated a different understanding of the need for empire, but such a change in attitudes and discourse did not occur.³⁰

Economic shifts might similarly suggest that empires might not be an efficient form of organization as well. If imperial preference schemes still seemed a viable alternative in the interwar period, particularly after the American Hawley-Smoot tariffs, the strategy had been made obsolete by Bretton Woods and American free trade. English domestic politics reflected such debates, between the imperial preference and Commonwealth advocates on one side and the liberal traders on the other.³¹

Moreover, the economic use-value of the colonies could be questioned regardless of the American success in spearheading a liberal trading regime with Bretton Woods and GATT. With growing economic interdependence in the decades before the war, some of the peripheral metropolitan commerce had started to shift to other participants. Indonesian trade, for example, had in the two decades prior to World War II switched decisively to Japan and the United States. In 1913 the Netherlands still accounted for 34 percent of the East Indies' exports and for 36 percent of its imports. By 1939 both these figures had dropped to 15 percent, while the United States had become the Indies' most important export market (21 percent of its total) with most imports (30 percent) coming from Japan.³²

Such factors could potentially have led to a reevaluation of the economic advantages of empire; neither one did. French economic interests were more concerned with rebuilding their domestic economy, and with the appropriate

³⁰For the Dutch the empire had never been a military resource, since it, as a small power, depended on alliances with greater powers (or neutrality) to maintain its defense. So for them not much had changed.

³¹Mansergh (1969:242–246).

³²Maddison (1989, 1990); Van den Doel (1996:234).

degree of government interventionism. The profitability of overseas investments and holdings figured only in the background, although French economic interest groups were more protectionist and colonial than the British.³³ The mythology of “Greater France” did not help. The French “cartieriste” position, the rational calculation of the costs and benefits of empire, was a minority position at best.³⁴

Rather than worry to what extent imperial preferences were antithetical to the principles of free trade and fair field, French policy aimed to incorporate special arrangements in the international agreements of which Paris was a part. French colonies thus had to have preferential access to the nascent European Economic Community.

The Dutch hard-nosed business sense would seem to make rational calculations more likely. After all, they had at one time labeled their own policy as one of the “Positive Balance Sheet.” But they continued to argue that losing the Indies would lead to economic catastrophe, with job losses mounting into the hundreds of thousands. These figures proved later inaccurate, and of course none of the calculations presented the opportunity cost argument (whether investments at home would be more profitable). But the figures provided a rationale for the Dutch presence.

Interestingly, Robert Jackson argues that “the military and economic relations between European states and their colonies from 1955 to 1959 were not very different from what they had been from 1935 to 1939.”³⁵ Hence, he suggests that normative changes in the metropole (that is, not in the sense of utilitarian guidelines) must have caused decolonization. Given the advent of the two superpowers and the Cold War, the occupation of many colonies by foreign powers during the World War II, and the emerging international trade regime after 1945, his starting proposition cannot hold. The international environment looked decidedly different. Two conclusions follow: first, material explanations for the withdrawal from empire might have considerable explanatory power, and hence the strong view of norms determining material interests does not hold in this case; second, at the very least, one would have expected changing instrumental calculations to lead to different justifications.

The Impact of Norms in the Periphery

Contrary to claims that the contradictions between democratic principles and the reality of colonialism challenged the West European colonial powers, these

³³ Smith (1981:109).

³⁴ Lustick (1993:151).

³⁵ Jackson (1993:130).

metropolises did not change their stance on the issues of colonialism and self-determination. Indeed, the very fact that the metropolises engaged in violent repression of nationalist movements—the Dutch in two Police Actions in the East Indies, the French particularly in Indochina and Algeria—already contradicts such an assessment. Thus, normative arguments go wrong in locating the impetus for imperial retreat within the metropole. Instead, the center of gravity lay in the nationalist capitals. Neither Paris nor the Hague was overcome by moral self-doubt. It was the periphery that reared up and used normative arguments against those very metropolises whence, at one time, such ideas as equality and self-determination had emerged.

The moral indignation with colonialism. If the metropolises were slow to see contradictions between democratic principles and colonialism, peripheral elites were far more aware of the hypocrisies of Western rule. Modernization of the periphery and the need to train local elites in Western governance exposed such elites to Western ideals of democratic equality, state building, and national self-determination. The indigenous cadres, some of which had been educated in the West, proved to be the primary suppliers of incipient nationalist leaders.³⁶

Gandhi in England, Ho-Chi Minh in Paris, Hatta in Rotterdam, all had first-hand knowledge of democratic politics at work. And they were painfully aware that such principles had not been extended to the colonies. For example, the Dutch utilized three different legal systems based on the ethnic origins of the individuals. (They recognized a European legal system; an Indonesian one; and an Asian, non-Indonesian framework.) Equality before the law applied only within the operative legal code.

The metropolitans did not only deny indigenes political rights. Locals also continuously confronted limits to their career paths. Even the English, more progressive than the French and the Dutch in this regard, only belatedly opened up their civil service in India. Education, and thus career opportunities, were restricted.³⁷ As Benedict Anderson notes, these artificial ceilings created a motivation for elite resistance.³⁸

Sovereignty as the taken-for-granted script. Nationalist leaders adopted the system of sovereign territorial rule from the West. Rather than resort to the pre-colonial forms of rule (such as clanship, patrimony, kingship), which either did not claim to be the sole locus of authority or which did not base their authority on territorial parameters, they adopted modern forms of public office and gov-

³⁶For a discussion of the origins of nationalist leaders, see Emerson (1967).

³⁷See Yasunaka (1970); Betts (1985:68f).

³⁸Anderson (1991).

ernance. The nationalists demanded juridical equivalence with the “advanced” metropolitan countries. Moreover, adopting western notions of sovereign territoriality enhanced their acceptance among the already existing states. As David Strang points out, new polities that received such classification had greater chances at survival than those not so defined.³⁹

But while adopting sovereign territoriality as the dominant script, they were far more cautious in accepting the principle of self-determination for all nationalist claims. While claiming the right of national self-determination as a rhetorical tool in the struggle with the metropolitan powers, they simultaneously denied those claims to indigenous groups within the territorial state that the nationalist leaders envisioned.⁴⁰ The Dutch were not incorrect in asserting that the nationalist (Javanese) claim for Indonesian independence subverted the possible independence of many areas and ethnic groups within the East Indies. Sukarno himself of course recognized that “the Dutch had invented Indonesia” given that it had never been a coherent political entity before. He was eager to lay claim to the entire territory as a unified state on the principle of sovereign equality with other states, disregarding local demands for true national self-determination.

French colonies as well built their new political institutions on the territorial parameters laid down by the metropole. National self-determination meant independence for the territorial unit constructed by the former imperial master, not self-determination for ethnic groups within that territorial unit. In short, the appropriation of the Western script was selective.

Moreover, international organizations provided fora for newly independent states to be heard.⁴¹ No surprise, therefore, that erstwhile colonies, such as Australia and India, became strong proponents of decolonization in East Asia. As their numbers grew so did their voting power, which in turn emboldened yet other quests for independence. The non-Western powers thus became the strongest proponents of the sovereignty script.

Norms as correlates of instrumental choices. As suggested by the two previous sections, utilitarian calculations influenced how political elites packaged certain norms or how they chose to disseminate particular interpretations. Such elites selectively used norms to rise to power.⁴² If they had been local inter-

³⁹ Strang (1991).

⁴⁰ Mayall (1990:120f).

⁴¹ Between 1945 and 1970 one-third of the ninety-eight cases brought before the UN involved decolonization issues (Jacobson 1979:212).

⁴² Snyder and Ballentine (1996) similarly suggest that political entrepreneurs may inflame particular nationalist discourses in newly democratizing states for strategic purposes.

mediaries who had been hampered by the glass ceiling in their careers, and who never could rise above the metropolitan representative, independence meant an end to artificial limits to their authority.

Independence not only entailed a rise in the domestic political hierarchy, but also conveyed international recognition of their status as leaders. Such legitimation enhanced their ability to retain office within their countries. Nationalist leaders were keenly aware of the dual status of sovereign authority. Not only does it limit other domestic claims to authority, but the international system—through mutual recognition of that sovereign—validates the sovereign as sole locus of authority in negotiating with the external environment.

This utilitarian use of norms does raise questions about the explanatory power of norms. Can one suffice with demonstrating that norms exogenously determine preferences or need one ascertain as well how they are related to the incentives and ability of elites to accept and “market” those norms? The argument presented here lends credence to the latter position. This does not reduce norms to mere epiphenomena. What may start as utilitarian calculi by individual actors to champion certain norms can, over time, take on the form of a given script. It does suggest that the impact of norms as moral guidelines or as taken-for-granted scripts cannot be devoid from accounts of the particular role they play in political agendas.

To sum up: the periphery rather than the metropolises invoked the normative arguments for decolonization, and they did so by turning Western principles against their rulers. Democratic ideals shaped how political leaders justified their resistance against the metropole. The existing constitutive rule of sovereign territoriality defined the range of international behaviors that nationalists could adopt, and entailed particular domestic strategies to simultaneously deny local ethnic and subnational claims. The international order empowered those individual political elites who were willing to play according to existing rules, while denying such status to others. Consequently, strategically motivated indigenes had incentives to adopt those behaviors rewarded by the system.

THE CAUSAL DYNAMIC OF NORMATIVE CONCERNS IN METROPOLE AND PERIPHERY

Some of the scholarly analysis has concentrated on demonstrating the independent impact of norms, rather than clarifying their causal origins. Nina Tannenwald, for example, demonstrates how normative concerns influenced behavior in directions that are not well understood by the realist paradigm.⁴³ Richard

⁴³Tannenwald (1999).

Price argues for a genealogical method and distinguishes this from causal explanation.⁴⁴

This essay supports the view that norms play an important independent role—they are not mere epiphenomena of exogenously postulated material interests. However, I argue that the acceptance of particular norms and their use correlate with utilitarian incentives to insert them into broad political platforms. Not content with merely tracing the relative impact of normative arguments in imperial metropolises and colonial peripheries, I suggest a general framework for studying how norms emerge as a causal factor influencing policies and preferences. The impact of particular norms will depend on three conditions. First, norms become politically salient when the relevant normative universe appears uniform. This makes it difficult to mobilize rival normative frameworks. Second, political entrepreneurs need to have strategic incentives to support and champion particular norms. This does not mean that the general population only adopts these norms on instrumental grounds. People might very well believe that certain principles constitute categorical imperatives and are just in and of themselves. However, the provision of such norms involves advocacy and the challenging of nonadherents, and thus constitutes in effect a public good. Individuals at large will thus free ride. The good will be underprovided unless there are individuals who are willing to bear the costs (in this case potential imprisonment or death for nationalist leaders) to advocate such norms. I hypothesize that without side payments (i.e., instrumental benefits) few leaders will champion such norms on ulterior motives alone.⁴⁵ Third, norms will spread when the international environment is permissive. Domestic normative frameworks require positive reinforcement from the environment in which they are placed. The domestic reinforcement in turn has a catalytic effect on other normative patterns.⁴⁶

I illustrate this causal dynamic by clarifying how conditions in the metropole worked against continuation of empire becoming an important normative concern, whereas peripheral conditions facilitated the use of normative discourse against the center.

Metropolitan Dynamics

Contradictions in the substantive content of ideas. If normative concerns played a role in British decolonization (the example of Gandhi's appeal to the British public comes to mind) such similar dynamics were not at work in other West

⁴⁴ Price (1995:84).

⁴⁵ For the general exposition of collective action problems, see Olson (1965).

⁴⁶ The logic is similar to Axelrod's explanation (1981, 1984, 1986).

European democracies. Instead they opted for repression of nationalist demands even after World War II. Why did normative concerns play such a minor role in the decolonization processes of these democracies?

The first reason lies in the moral ambiguities of territorial retreat. Was colonialism antithetical to democracy? Was empire at odds with the principle of sovereign territoriality? Was empire becoming less useful and on those grounds less justifiable? Such queries sparked other questions rather than provide for easy benchmarks to delineate inappropriate policies from others. For example, even if colonialism was at odds with democracy, it left unanswered what specific type of metropolitan governance was odious. The Dutch recognized the more egregious exploitation of the mid-nineteenth century and had overhauled their imperial administration. Paternalistic arguments and policies became more prominent. Similarly, the French mixed colonialism with its much vaunted “mission civilisatrice.”⁴⁷ So if all could agree that the nineteenth-century norms that justified blatant exploitation had changed, there was far less clarity on whether colonialism constituted such exploitation in the twentieth century. Indeed, independence in principle was not the issue. The question was rather whether the local elites were deemed capable of self-rule. Even if repressive and exploitative colonialism had become odious, the classification of what constituted colonialism in the pejorative sense was contested and hence open to multiple interpretations.

Normative arguments also played a relatively minor role in the metropole because arguments for decolonization conflicted with other moral concerns.⁴⁸ Paternalistic arguments were not merely instrumental calculations. They were in some respects perhaps even well intentioned concerns with the capacity of local indigenes for effective self-rule. There was also concern about the self-interested motives inspiring some nationalist leaders. (For example, the Dutch concern with Javanese dominance over the other islands influenced their decision-making, and indeed at least some of the non-Javanese shared those concerns.) Moreover, the nationalists had associated themselves with enemies of the metropole (Japan in particular during World War II, and the USSR thereafter). Combating nationalist demands thus justified fighting those who had made common cause with Imperial Japan during the war (in the Dutch case) or with communist powers (in the Indo-Chinese and Algerian cases).⁴⁹ Furthermore, loyalty to

⁴⁷ Betts (1985:190).

⁴⁸ Kathryn Sikkink somewhat similarly argues that human rights concerns only came to the forefront when other “more powerful clusters of ideas/interests had subsided” (Sikkink 1993:162). But note that this observation still requires one to explain why certain clusters become salient and others do not.

⁴⁹ Goto (1996).

the brethren abroad dictated that metropolitan powers maintain their presence. Abandoning kin to unscrupulous, self-serving, and nondemocratic nationalists would jeopardize their properties, indeed their very lives. If there were norms pushing for decolonization, there were also norms that suggested continuation of the imperial hold. Indeed, the correct course of action might be construed as the responsibility to stay in.

Finally, the impact of norms depends on their position within larger webs of significance.⁵⁰ The argument that normative shifts precipitated debates on decolonization presupposes that the metropole recognizes the other actor as distinct from itself. Hence, I have used the terms “core” and “periphery.” But as Ian Lustick points out, this very terminology is at stake.⁵¹ All states at some points in their history of state-building may be deemed “imperial” in how they incorporate distinct ethnic groups and local governance structures. Modern France, often used as an exemplar of a nation-state, only really constituted itself as such in the course of the nineteenth century. And while few Americans would see contemporary Arizona, California, or Hawaii as distinct and subject polities (and hence perhaps deserving independence) they were, of course, not part of the original federation. Successful state building requires the transgression of a Gramscian threshold. Polities that can successfully transgress such a threshold will integrate into a coherent entity. Core and periphery fade to become one entity. History covers the tracks of diversity.

Whether this was true for the French with regard to Algeria is a matter of debate. But to the extent that some Frenchmen and settlers saw Algeria as an integral part of France proper, the issue no longer was one of independence for a subject area, but one of secession from the home country. Algeria could not be regarded as a decolonization question in the same vein as sub-Saharan Africa could. The latter had not been considered part of the home country and, hence, could be incorporated in the normative discourse within the metropole and periphery about decolonization because both core and periphery recognized each other as such. If such recognition is not present, the very vocabulary of “decolonization” is considered inappropriate and nonsensical.

A comparison with the British in India might be illustrative. Why did normative concerns in the metropole perhaps play a greater role there? First, English paternalism contrasted with the French push for cultural assimilation.⁵² The

⁵⁰The term is Clifford Geertz’s (1973).

⁵¹Lustick (1993). While I agree with Lustick that part of the Gramscian move is to get metropolitans to identify the erstwhile periphery as part of the home country, I would argue that the Gramscian hegemony is only complete when the periphery comes to see itself as an integral part of the former core.

⁵²Smith (1981:98).

overall cognitive framework differed. Second, the nationalists in India had not exploited the Japanese war efforts to the same extent as some nationalists in Southeast Asia (as did Sukarno and Hatta in Indonesia). Third, British settlement in India was marginal. Dutch settlement in Indonesia, by contrast, was twice as high in absolute terms as British presence in India, despite having a much smaller metropolitan population base. The million or so “pieds noirs” in Algeria could similarly argue that they were entitled to continued metropolitan governance. In other words, alternative norms to the nationalist arguments were more difficult to deploy in the British case.

Few benefits for moral entrepreneurs. The contradicting strands within metropolitan discourse made it possible for political entrepreneurs to stress competing visions of appropriate behavior.⁵³ Given that the norms were substantively diverse, politicians could pick and choose among those that gave the greater political payoff. Those advocating decolonization and sovereignty for the colonies essentially catered to a constituency (supporters of nationalist demands in the colonies) that could yield them no benefit.

Political entrepreneurs that catered to metropolitan interests conversely had strong instrumental reasons to do so. Given that the military, economic groups with direct investments, and settlers were well-entrenched interest groups, claiming that continued metropolitan presence was necessary yielded political benefits. Moreover, these groups could easily overcome collective action problems because of their narrow interests and long-standing history of influencing metropolitan decision-making. The anticolonialists, by contrast, had far more diffuse benefits from decolonization, and far less experience in influencing policy, and were thus weakly organized. In other words, entrepreneurs had incentives to select normative claims to bolster their electoral success. The moral high ground was thus constituted as maintaining metropolitan presence until the overseas territories were deemed ripe for independence, meaning decolonization on the terms of the imperial power.

The international environment. It might be argued that the overall environment had shifted against the proponents of colonialism. After all, the United States and the USSR had both come out in favor of decolonization. The United Nations,

⁵³ One might phrase this in the terminology employed by Snyder and Ballentine (1996) who argue for the concept of a marketplace of ideas. Competing political entrepreneurs supply certain ideas, and the populace “purchases” these through its support for the preferred entrepreneur. In this context, imperialists had “brand loyalty” among their consumers, while their rivals faced diffuse, new, and thus undependable consumers.

moreover, apparently embodied similar sentiments. Consequently, international pressure should have gradually required the imperial powers to retreat and be forced to stop legitimizing their colonial practices.

To the proponents of empire, though, the situation was not that clear. First, they still saw viable means of resisting outside pressure. Britain was not convinced that the United States was guided by ulterior motives but believed instead that the United States planned to fill the void left by retreating European powers. The alternative was to join with others (France and intermediate states) to oppose American encroachment.⁵⁴ What held true for England, held *a fortiori* for France. In order for France to play the role of a great power it required an empire. Consequently, all American efforts to diminish the French presence had to be interpreted as attempts to elevate American standing at France's expense.⁵⁵

Second, American anticolonialism was tempered by its reluctance to see communist nationalists replace colonial governments. The United States thus supported French efforts in Indochina and later the Portuguese colonial wars. The Indonesian nationalists astutely disavowed such communist connections, and gradually gained American support against the Dutch. The Hague, however, continuously misread the British and American position, and believed that the latter two would support its efforts to maintain a presence in Indonesia.

International organizations, such as the United Nations, did act as conduits for opposing points of view. But as was the case with the Dutch misreading of their allies' position, the Netherlands thought that the UN (influenced by Britain and the United States—permanent members of the Security Council) would not actively confront its aims in Indonesia. France, more comfortable with its permanent seat, and convinced that its allies would not tolerate a loss to communist supported nationalists, correctly ascertained that international organizations would only exert limited pressure on Paris to retreat.⁵⁶

To sum up, for the metropolitans colonialism was not as tainted as one might believe. Multiple interpretations competed with each other. Political entrepreneurs had little motivation to oppose well-entrenched single-issue interest groups, and the pressure of the international environment to adhere to certain norms seemed modest.

⁵⁴ Fry (1997).

⁵⁵ Kimball (1991: chapter 7) discusses the tension between the Roosevelt Administration and de Gaulle on French colonialism. (Cordell Hull noted how Roosevelt's dislike of de Gaulle was visceral. Smith [1981:101].)

⁵⁶ Only by 1960 did the UN rule, through General Assembly Resolution 1514, against delay in granting independence on the basis of insufficient competence (James 1986:183; Mayall 1990:48).

The Impact of Norms in the Periphery

The internal coherence of norms in the periphery. Unlike metropolitan discourse, few consistent indigenous arguments could be made in support of continued colonial status. Indeed, local elites that did profit from metropolitan control weakened their position if openly acknowledging their debt to their colonial masters. Given local nationalist demands, the more local elites identified with colonial discourse, the weaker their position vis-à-vis their indigenous populations. If there was an independent indigenous discourse, it favored the traditional modes of governance—as for example, with the aristocratic elites in Indonesia. But given their association with the Dutch, the arguments to return to such modes of governance if the Dutch should retreat were hardly persuasive.⁵⁷ Moreover, traditional modes of legitimating authority were sometimes difficult to reconcile with state-centric, territorially based, forms of authority.

Finally, the colonies themselves did not accept the idea that they formed part of the metropolitan home country. Given their secondary legal status, and their lack of access to higher office, it was clear that they were not part of the metropole. Indeed, it was the differentiation between European and non-European which created the very identities that opposed European rule. Whatever ethnic background one had or whatever language one spoke, in being treated uniformly as different from Europeans, the indigenous peoples developed a unified identity. Racial categorization, status differentiation, etiquette, sexual mores, all served to distinguish European from non-European. All locals were “the other.”⁵⁸

Strategic benefits of independence. In view of the unambiguous nature of dominant norms in the periphery, that is, there was a clear preference for independence, political entrepreneurs did well to cater to this local constituency. There were unmistakable rewards for favoring arguments opposed to decolonization and stressing the right to independence.

Independence would mean the rise to power of previously disempowered local nationalists. The reward for successful propagation of such norms would be political office. Moreover, competing on a nationalist agenda provided entrepreneurs leverage against rival local elites who were leftovers from precolonial times, or power brokers pushed forward by the imperial power. Nationalists could thus easily outbid the traditional ruling elites. Additionally, running on a

⁵⁷ Van Doorn (1995:166).

⁵⁸ Given makes a general argument in analyzing European state-building. English repression of the various Welsh clans and their treatment as a coherent group (i.e., non-English) gave rise to a Welsh national consciousness where previously there had been none (Given 1990).

sovereign, territorial program, allowed leaders to create coherent identities and imagined political communities that previously had been disjoint. Consequently, they denied radical self-determination to ethnic groups in favor of an artificial notion of the nation, which happened to be coterminous with the borders drawn by the colonial powers. Claims to independence, as Mayall points out, were coterminous with nation-building.⁵⁹

Moral entrepreneurs thus had strategic incentives to favor particular interpretations derived from Western political discourse. The incentive structure even dictated outbidding and competing on nationalist ideas in order to best advance their position.

The permissiveness of the international environment. The postwar environment greatly facilitated the advancement of norms of self-determination and sovereignty. Both superpowers sought the support of nationalists, and hence indigenous elites could play one off against the other, depending on whose support was more forthcoming. Thus Indonesian nationalists, more convinced of American leverage over the Dutch than other nationalists were of American intentions, cracked down on communist elements within their ranks (in repressing the Madiun Revolt of 1948) and gained unambiguous American and British support.⁶⁰

While international organizations lacked the means to exert direct influence on the metropolises they did provide a forum to vent anticolonial sentiments. The superpowers, reluctant to counter such sentiments in international organizations, thereby provided voice to those states that had experienced colonialism themselves. At the very least such international fora worked as coordinating devices for the aspiring nationalists.

In short, the unambiguous nature of norms for decolonization; the strategic incentives for political entrepreneurs to take up specific interpretations of self-determination; and the permissive international environment, explain why the articulation of ideas championing sovereignty was far more influential in the colonies than in the metropolises. Not fundamental changes in normative stances in the metropolises but new claims from the periphery pushed the decolonization process.

CONCLUSION

This essay has addressed two main issues. First, it examined whether changes in normative stances in the imperial metropolises were a key causal variable of

⁵⁹ Mayall (1990:123).

⁶⁰ Reid (1974:143).

decolonization. My conclusion is that they only played a limited role in the metropolises, but worked as mobilizing devices for the periphery.

Second, not content with tracing the effect of norms on behaviors, I have advanced a general argument about the origin of norms as causal forces in political change. Careful analysis of the origin of norms need not reduce norms to epiphenomena—as mere reflections of instrumental calculations or exogenously postulated interests—nor should it engage in the impossible task of seeking the ultimate origins of ideas and moral standards. Instead, one should trace how, among the various sets of norms and ideas available, certain sets become key conceptualizations for mobilizing individuals and for providing a context through which individuals interpret and signify their own actions.

Certain configurations of norms become salient if they form part of a coherent whole and do not conflict with other strongly held normative frameworks. In order for such normative beliefs to become salient they, furthermore, need to be championed by political elites. Political leaders must perceive some individual gains in order to provide such public goods. In this respect my argument resembles that of Ikenberry and Kupchan (1990), who suggest that elite receptivity to norms is key to those norms becoming institutionalized as political practices. Finally, a permissive international environment will enhance the probability that such normative positions will take root.

The creation of the modern state system at the second millennium's end contains more than a bit of irony. The inventors of the principle of sovereign, territorial rule denied that same principle to the non-European subject territories. These former subjects, however, turned the principle against their colonial masters to obtain their independence. But in so doing they also participated in the final completion (and perhaps the high water mark) of the West European project: the full extension of the Westphalian order across the globe.

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