2. Historical processes of incorporation and development
2.5

Darfur

The periphery of the periphery

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The most salient feature of the current world-system is the hierarchical power that structures relations between a developed core and the underdeveloped periphery. Contrary to what has been claimed by modernization theories, peripheral countries are structurally constrained by economic and geopolitical pressures to keep reproducing their dominated status to the benefit of the center, which gains from the surplus produced by the periphery. Furthermore, this same unequal core-periphery relationship exists nationally between different provinces of national states at all levels of the nested world-system hierarchy, but the inequalities within national states tend to be much greater in the periphery.

The process of capital accumulation in the global capitalist development underwent three main phases. First, colonies were intensely decapitalized and their developmental capacities were largely weakened. Then, the weak social forces of capitalist development tried in vain to resist the onslaught of the industrial bourgeoisie in the center and its allies in the periphery itself, only to be totally annihilated in the third phase. In the last monopoly capitalist phase, the capacity to develop a peripheral national bourgeois class was severely hampered, consolidating thus the development of underdevelopment in many of the colonies.

Africa, like the rest of world regions, was incorporated into a single socioeconomic system: a capitalist world-economy, whose fundamental dynamic was a major influence on actors in all parts of the global system. The third phase of capitalist development differs from the former two in the sense that the imperial economic system enabled the center to put in place the formal framework for economic activity and, to a large extent, determine the character of development on the global stage. After a nominal independence, peripherized ex-colonies continued to be underdeveloped, often specializing in monoproduction of unprocessed raw materials for export to the core. This situation has contributed to the capital accumulation and development of the core at the expense of the decapitalization and underdevelopment of the periphery.

By 1750, the European metropolis felt the need to expand the outreach of capitalism. As industries were being established in the core, it became necessary to find new areas of primary production that could supply low-priced labor and land. Industrial expansion and the plantations in the periphery resulted in a shortage of labor, which justified the expansion of New World slavery and Africans were used to meet this demand. Eventually there was a growing demand for African land, together with indigenous labor to work on it for primary crop production. European powers eliminated any alternative indigenous sources of employment. Africans were thus
deprived of land, their main means of production. This introduced a fundamental change in the mode of production and the social organization of indigenous societies.

In the last part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, British hegemony was challenged by the rise of the United States and Germany and the spread of industrialization elsewhere. The British tried to meet the challenge by strengthening their colonial empire; they also attempted to co-opt the rising German challenge by giving the Germans some colonies in Africa. In 1884 at the Berlin Conference on Africa, the entire continent was divided up among the European colonial powers. The earlier phase of “informal empire,” which enabled the peripheral African areas to retain some of their sovereign political institutions, came to be replaced by a formal empire that annihilated all African sovereignty by the end of the nineteenth century. Africa had to produce enough cash crops to sustain the administrative costs of the colonial powers. The British Home Office instituted “indirect rule” based on the principle of Africans ruling Africans for the benefit of the core. This required the preservation and the strengthening of tribal power and traditional chieftaincy. Sudan and Darfur were not exceptions.

By 1916, Darfur was annexed to the Anglo-Egyptian condominium. From the outset, the colonial power focused on the riverine provinces of Sudan and assigned a handful of British officials the task of governing Darfur by Indirect Rule with the Powers of Nomad Sheikhs Ordinance. The 1922 Closed Districts Order declared Darfur a closed area to anyone without a government permit. This system promoted conservatism and denied education and economic development to the province. Yet, since the Native Administration needed indigenous clerks, some meager educational opportunities were granted to the co-opted tribal chiefs’ sons. As for development projects, riverine Sudan received the lion’s share, while Darfur and the rest of the South were excluded. The telegraph system did not reach Darfur until after independence in 1956. Roads were nearly non-existent and the modest economic activity focused on a low-quality animal husbandry. Even by Sudanese standards, Darfur’s income was very low in the 1930s. Famine and diseases were rampant. The infection and mortality rates were staggering. Politically, the parliamentary system, modeled after Westminster, empowered the Khartoum elite in the Sudanese capital and left little scope for the peripheral regions. Successive Sudanese governments kept reproducing the same political and economic inequalities.

The colonial legacy left a power system that guaranteed domination through tribally organized local authorities. Decentralized despotism, the generic form of the colonial state in Africa, would breed recurring political and economic crisis in post-independence Sudan. In 1956, the first rebellion broke up in the South, while the low-intensity and small scale outbreaks in Darfur would turn into violent battles in the 1980s and an open rebellion against the Sudanese state in 2003.