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SELECTED ISSUES OF THE WORLD SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE 20th AND 21st CENTURIES

Abstract. This paper presents the most important dilemmas concerning socio-economic development worldwide, especially the matters of wealth inequality between countries in «the South» and «the North», and also controversies over colonisation and decolonisation. In the paper we present numerous examples illustrating the lack of an explicit division of the world into the poor South and the rich North. We also take re-colonisation into consideration, as a concept of transformations in the contemporary world that is suggested in modern researches.

We are now past the decolonisation period, and currently none of the old colonial empires owns colonies in the common meaning of the word. However, the topic is still relevant, as we can still hear mentions of so-called post-colonialism, and the swirling economic discussions still have to take into account history, geography and the ideological background.

Keywords: socio-economic development; social inequalities; colonisation; de-colonisation; re-colonisation; poverty.

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КЛЮЧОВІ ПИТАННЯ СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЕКОНОМІЧНОГО РОЗВИТКУ СВІТУ у ХХ та ХХІ СТОЛІТТЯХ

Анотація. У статті окреслено найважливіші питання, які стосуються суспільно-господарського розвитку країн у світі. Особливий наголос зроблено на питаннях бідності та багатства країн Півдня і Півночі. Показано відмінності між колонізацією та деколонізацією, запропоновано новий підхід до розгляду реколонізації, що представлена в літературі як концепція змін сучасного світу. Наведено численні приклади, що свідчать про неможливість однозначного поділу світу на бідну Північ і багатий Південь.

Ключові слова: соціально-економічний розвиток; соціальна нерівність; колонізація; деколонізація; реколонізація; бідність.

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КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ СОЦИАЛЬНО-ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО РАЗВИТИЯ МИРА в ХХ и ХХІ СТОЛЕТИЯХ

Аннотация. В статье продемонстрированы важнейшие вопросы, которые касаются социально-экономического развития стран в мире. Особое внимание уделено вопросам бедности и богатства стран Юга и Севера. Показаны отличия между колонизацией и деколонизацией, предложен новый подход к рассмотрению реколонизации, которая представлена в литературе как концепция изменений современного мира. Приведены многочисленные примеры, свидетельствующие о невозможности однозначного раздела мира на бедный Север и богатый Юг.

Ключевые слова: социально-экономическое развитие; социальное неравенство; колонизация; деколонизация; реколонизация; бедность.

Introduction

For more than two hundred years now, economists have been trying to answer the following question: why some countries have become rich, while other remained poor (Piasecki, 2008) [1]. In this paper, the term of poor South will be used interchangeably with the «third world countries». It is assumed that most of third world countries are located in the southern hemisphere, and relations with these countries are referred to as North-South relations. These countries are mostly former colonies. Among them, there are countries located in Latin America, which regained their independence at the beginning of the 19th century, and most of the remaining ones became independent after the World War II, mostly in the 1960s. However, we should bear in mind that some former British colonies, like Singapore, Hong Kong (included in statistics outside the People's Republic of China) or Japan colonies – South Korea and Taiwan – are now among very rich countries. P. J. O'Rourke referred to Hong Kong in the following words: «It is not easy to find out why a not overpopulated, rich in resources and peaceful country falls into poverty. On the other hand, it is easy to explain how a land full of conflicts, overpopulated and with no natural resources has come into wealth» (O'Rourke, 2006) [2]. The discussed issues caused at the beginning of the 21st century many controversies, problems and economic dilemmas, which will be the subject of analyses in this paper.

The Rich North – the Poor South – contentious issues

International relations in the second half of the 20th century revolved around the confrontation between the communist East and the capitalistic West, whereas the beginning of the 21st century will most probably be dominated by a division into the North and the South.

The end of Cold War confirmed the growing tension between rich and poor countries. Confrontations between the rich and the poor have grown in strength in developing countries. As regards the international sphere, there are the following oppositions: The South and the North, capitalism and the Third World, the global high finance and the anti-globalisation movement, etc.

There is a widespread idea that the South with its overpopulation, conflicts associated with international terrorism, poverty, debt and religious fanaticism will constitute the greatest problem for the industrialised North (Psikozub, 2000) [3]. The development of the South is not just a matter of the perseverance of local communities, but is connected with peace and global security. Every «barefoot revolution» can change from a peaceful initiative into a radical manifestation of armed violence.

However, one should be warned not to adopt oversimplifications broadcast by commentators from the North regarding the nature of these systems, which appear to be pushing them to a position of ongoing subordination and inferiority. The West saw democracy and parliamentarism as a cure for backwardness and underdevelopment, and the then USSR propagated socialism as the only way out of poverty. This corroborates the profound ignorance of the rich North in respect of the very complex and difficult problems of the poor South.

One of the fundamental and most controversial stereotypes is the view that the main source of conflicts between the North and the South was their considerable diversification in terms of wealth. However, in the South we have richer countries than some of the countries in the North, in which many people are poorer than those in the South. Is it really the case? Are Australia, New Zealand, Chile and Argentina (one of the richest countries in the world, which at the beginning of the 20th century was characterised by national income twice as high as in Italy, struck by an economic crisis at the begging of the 21st century and unemployment rate of 30%, currently struggling with enormous inflation-related problems – annual CPI growth amounting to 25% in 2013 (World Bank, 2014a) [4] located in the North?

In order to address the issue of inequality in assessing wealth at the national level, Gini index – a statistical measure of inequality in wealth distribution – has been developed (Gini, 1921) [5]. Among the countries with the highest values of social inequality, which in 2014 exceeded 0.65, there were Lesotho, the Central African Republic and other African countries.

Among the rich countries of the South there are both those highly diversified in terms of wealth redistribution, such as Chile 0.521 (ranked 15th in index value) and Argentina 0.458 (36), and countries in which development results are being distributed fairly evenly – New Zealand 0.362 (84) and Australia 0.303 (114) (World Bank, 2014b) [6].

The true problem consists in many countries being governed by despots or governments with constrained systems, which make even development impossible.

Now we tend to divide the world into three parts: capitalist countries – the First World, socialist countries – the Second World and less developed countries – the Third World. The disintegration of the Eastern Bloc meant the downfall of hope for a model of the economy alternative to capitalism. In such circumstances, the term Third World lost its sense. Every now and then a group of countries leaves other Third World countries and starts to quickly catch up with the global leaders. These are nowadays called emerging markets. The issue of the less developed (or undeveloped) world is neither dominant in the scientific and political circles, nor in the media or the public discourse, despite this world being home for more than 2/3 of the whole population. Apparently the aforementioned classes are not interested in the share in global population. The lack of genuine knowledge can be also observed in the field of scientific research, and is often applicable to the terminology.

Enormous regions are still, after 500 years, considered «emerging markets». While now they are «emerging» not from the sea horizon, but as places where one can make use of great capital and make much greater profit than from more troublesome trade.

We should ask ourselves a question, what has become of our world? After all the distinction between the First and Second World is no longer viable. Therefore, Jan Winiecki asks: «Has this difference been levelled or is it disappearing due to the victory of socialism which «chased away» the falling capitalism? Or has this difference disappeared as a result of the successful bureaucratic statism. Or maybe it disappeared due to well organised assistance granted by the Western world to the communist countries? If the Second World is trying to become more like the First World by adopting its economic philosophy, then we can put forward a «bold and innovative» thesis that the Third World will also benefit from shaping its institutions in the fashion of the First World, even more so as there are Third World countries which have already taken advantage of this» (Winiecki, 2001) [7]. It appeared that the market economy will be confined to the Western world and several Asian Tigers; however, it has taken over the planet and development has become global (Sorman, 2008) [8].

Differences in latitude are at the same time indicators of socio-economic development disproportions. The usage of terms like «the West» and «the East» to describe geographical areas is misleading and of an ethnocentric nature. North and south are characterised by generally recognised points of reference. Is it really so? Can we divide Europe in the same way?

Henryk Samsonowicz (1999) [9] highlights the importance of climatic borders, which in an obvious way separate, e.g. the Mediterranean countries from those located in the north. These observations are however not very important for a historian, a politician or an economist. «Certainly, within the framework of the European Union, the functions of Greece or Portugal are different from those of England and Benelux countries. The economic standing, among other things, of Serbia or Bosnia is certainly worse than this of Hungary or Poland. However, is Slovenia poorer than Poland, is its economy more underdeveloped? This is debatable. In the third, pro-soviet zone, the situation is even more complex. Surely, Ukraine fares better than Belarus and worse than Georgia. But if to discuss differences, they would be more noticeable on both sides of the border separating Islamic states from countries historically connected with Christianity».

Is it possible to make a division within one country? Let us illustrate this with the frequently evoked example of Italy. After the Unification of 1861, the Italian hopes of cultural, social and economic development mostly did not come true. The south of

the country was neglected and sunk even deeper in depressing poverty, and instead of securing an appropriate position in the new country it lost its dignity stemming from independence and local traditions (Barzini, 2001) [10]. The rich north and the poor south – this stereotype is still valid here. In the rating of Italian cities Sondrio is ranked 1st, ahead of Bolzano, Trento and Aosta provinces; Milan occupies a good 9th place, and Rome is ranked 21st. The southern province with the best score, L'Aquila, is only 41st. Foggia in Apulia is ranked the last. However, it may be surprising that one of the poorest regions in Italy – Calabria – located on the tip of the Italian «boot» is characterised by the highest number of cars and supermarkets per one resident. Of course, we know that this is due to the Mafia, whose revenue is not legally recorded.

But how can we classify countries located at the meeting point of the North and the South? S. Godzinski (2001) [11] shares with us the following example: «Mongolia can be regarded as a country located on the frontier of the North and the South. The northern neighbour of Mongolia, i.e. the Russian Federation, however, is not a synonym of the rich North, while the southern neighbour of the country in question, the People's Republic of China does not entirely fit our image of poor and impoverished countries of the South. We should also mention that the Mongolian economy has been developing over the last two years the fastest in the world, reaching a growth exceeding 18%».

Is it the problem of hunger that can explicitly divide the hemispheres? Well, actually not. The division into the satiated North and the hungry South is not accurate, as the largest nutrition problems concern the zone running along the equator or populations characterised by the lowest economic level in each and every country.

Moral and ethical problems can be observed not only in the relationship between the North and the South, but also in North-North relations. In light of current research, there are 34-40 million undernourished people in developed countries. Also, in Poland there are vast areas of poverty and need – 5 million Poles live in extreme poverty (Eurostat, 2012) [12].

There are many stereotypical views, and often the South-North conflict boils down to juxtaposing the poor and the rich regions of the world, represented by different national complexes. However, the poor and discriminated South lies everywhere, also in the richest national societies. This is the Fourth World of people distinguished by their ethnic distinctness, peripheral location, primitive administration in unfavourable ecological niches, and the inability to exert political influence on decisions that have a direct impact on them. These are called the indigenous peoples.

Yet another division line runs in the USA, due to compensation for the period of slavery. The advocates of the view that the United States of America is obliged to pay compensation to African countries argue that present-day American wealth was built by slaves, so their descendants should obtain their share of this wealth. According to K. Prendecki (2004) [13] this is not true, and the USA is rich not owing to slavery, but in spite of it. Indeed, the South was poor and underdeveloped, because unpaid slaves' work made production automation unprofitable. On the other hand, the North was industrialised due to the absence of slavery, which forced capitalists to replace workers with machines in order to cut the costs.

Moreover, migrations also do not take place along a straight North-South line. The most prevalent view holds that most migrations can be attributed to economic reasons.

However, one thing is certain: the North cannot exist without the South (this interdependence was once rather fairly called exploitation). Also the riches amassed by narrow classes of the South come from capital obtained directly using stock exchanges in the First World. As regards the «elites» of the South Wealth and poverty are not determined geographically, and can be also observed within separate societies. As noticed by S. Szykiewicz (2001) [14]: «The elites of the poor South are as rich as their Northern counterparts. They demand the redistribution of global wealth, but themselves are not willing to do the same at the level of their own countries».

Colonisation and decolonisation: advantages and disadvantages in public discourse

The political discourse in the European Union touches upon the assessment of the colonial and postcolonial times. There will be one compulsory history course book in the EU. The main idea behind this objective is to replace the national identity of future generations of EU residents with the feeling of affiliation with the united Europe. Europe's residents will get rid of their prejudices, which will prevent future conflicts. On the other hand, this means that inconvenient fragments of different nationalities' history will have to be passed over in silence. However, no country will allow its history to be marginalised, and all countries will fight for the most favourable presentation of their history. The most controversial topics include the Napoleonic era, the air raids of Allied forces during World War II, communism and colonialism.

Despite the fact that in the second half of the 19th century almost all major European countries were involved in the colonial race around Africa and Asia, their present opinions on that period differ substantially. The Belgians, Germans and French have apologised for colonialism. On the other hand, the British are still highlighting arguments advocating colonialism (order, security, education, technology and healthcare). Though Tony Blair has apologised, there are still voices defending colonisers and describing the circumstances after their leaving.

Nevertheless, the British defending colonialism is nothing new, and it boils down to the following arguments (Johnson, 1995) [15]:

- The United Kingdom governed 1/4 of the Earth in an autocratic, but sensible way. One could not compare the situation of the lands under British rule, with the cruelty of the Dutch, Belgians, Portuguese, French, Germans and Italians in occupied territories,
- Freedom of mobility and transport, freedom of speech and the press, free access to impartial judicature, and freedom of disposing of one's own life and property within the legal framework,
- Gladstone's rules of public finance administration were strictly observed in the governance of the Empire,
- Corruption at all levels of power was subject to merciless punishment,
- Religious and national tolerance was observed to a great extent (the British Empire was the largest Muslim country in the world, the largest country inhabited by the followers of Hinduism and Buddhism, and also the largest Protestant country with societies dominated by Catholics),
- Owing to Imperial officers, army and police dozens opposing nations could live in peace, and thanks to freedom of movement and quashing racial and religious rebellions, initially hostile communities were settling in many areas,
- The imposed standards in healthcare have contributed to revolutionary changes in average lifespan, a substantial drop in tropical diseases incidence, and an unquestionable decrease in infant mortality,
- Since 1989, more and more money has been allocated for economic development programmes.

Historian Paul Johnson concludes this by saying: «Thus the United Kingdom, guided by highly altruistic motives, became largely responsible for the three fundamental problems of the present-day Third World: ethnic and racial conflicts, the population explosion, and the belief in an illusory «foreign aid» panacea» (Johnson, 1995) [15].

Another prominent historian from Oxford, Niall Ferguson (2004) [16], stated: «Everybody has to admit – irrespective of what is said about the cultural impact or attitude towards other ethnic groups – that from the economic point of view, between 1850 and 1914, the British Empire considerably increased the wealth of people encompassed within its borders. An example of this may be the fact that at that time much more capital was flowing from richer countries to the poorer ones, than it was the case later on. The explanation is simple: European investors preferred to invest their money in Asian, African, South American countries when they were under direct or indirect influence of the British Empire, rather than after their becoming

fully independent. I would like to highlight that we need to differentiate between the political, cultural and economic impacts of imperialism. Many people talking about imperialism forget or simply do not understand this economic dimension».

According to Max Boot (2006) [17], a neoconservative American publicist: «There were some very profitable colonies, but many others were rather recipients of capital than its suppliers. The British made good deals in Rhodesia, South Africa and were very protective of these regions, but made no profit of Uganda, Nigeria, Sudan... The Empire was something more than just material gains. The British believed that they were creating not only a better world order, but also a better internal order in locations where they established their colonies and protectorates».

Sociologist Peter L. Berger (1995) [18] in his famous work *The Capitalist Revolution* speaks in a similar tone: «Proving that capitalist penetration as a whole was harmful to the economies of Third World a country is indeed very difficult. If we were to take Africa as our control area, we can assume that countries that experienced colonialism the least (such as Ethiopia) are in the worst economic situation, while those affected by it the most (such as Kenya), are in a much better condition. Even in the cases in respect of which we can mention colonial «exploitation», colonial regimes left material infrastructure (e.g. iron railways and motorways) and social institutions (e.g. modern bureaucracy and education system), which should be included as developmental assets in the postcolonial period. Even if we were to demonstrate (which is probably impossible) that the «exploitation» of colonies was at least partly the source of wealth of old colonial powerhouses (mostly of the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands), then such a justification would be entirely false in the case of several major industrial countries, which in the past were not among colonial metropolises (this applies mainly to the United States, Germany and Japan». Moreover, there is the rebuttal of the «Scramble for Africa» theory, questioned by many historians (Reyner, 2006) [19].

Similar evaluation disputes are reflected by public opinion champions. In many colonies, after the regaining of independence, real income per capita has decreased. There were numerous reasons for this, including civil wars, corruption, a systematic decrease in raw material prices (mainly of goods exported by former colonies), and economic growth which could not keep pace with rapidly increasing population. Citizens of Ghana, Malawi or Sierra Leone nowadays earn less than at the time of regaining their independence, and quite often they also live shorter lives (Leszczynski, 2005) [20].

Economist Jan Winiecki (2002) [21] indicated that «when comparing Africa with East and Southeast Asia, we should not forget that at the beginning of the 1960s – following the heritage of colonialism – Africa was richer than Asia». The residents of Africa now live shorter lives and earn less than in the 1960s, the decade of rapid decolonisation of the continent. At the time, the earnings of an average African doubled those of an average Indian, Korean or Chinese. The analysts and journalists were rather concerned about Asia, which was overpopulated and lacked the valuable resources found in Africa.

Conclusion

According to G. Kolodko: «(...) there are voices saying that even in the colonial period the situation was not so dire» (Kolodko, 2008) [22]. And here we reach the crux of the matter of solving this complex global problem. This is the most controversial topic, appearing mainly in political commentary journalism. However, there are a number of concrete examples, such as the Comoros, which regained independence in 1975. However, one island did not join the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros and a year later (2002) voted in favour of France, not desiring sovereignty or independence. What is more, «Wprost», an opinion-forming weekly, published an article with a controversial subtitle: «Only new colonialism can save Africa» (Jablonska, 2004) [23]. It presented the situation in Sudan, where the Government did not want to allow it (due to a conflict in Darfur) to become the first African country, from the territory of which the recolonisation of the whole continent would start. In the West we can see a return of a new imperialistic trend.

Western journalists are writing about African natives feeling nostalgia for colonialism in Sierra Leone or even the white minority regime in Zimbabwe (Easterly, 2008) [24]. Also the topic of neo-colonialism as part of tourism economics has become popular. The most important positive aspects include an improvement in balance of trade and revenue from taxes, as well as in the number of employed people and development opportunities for local entrepreneurs (Piraszewska, 2005) [25].

Another thing worth mentioning is an improvement in economic freedom. The American Heritage Foundation publishes the annual Index of Economic Freedom [26]. The main lessons learned from this report demonstrate that governments are not willing to let people freely dispose of their property, economic freedom is being restrained, and that corruption is running rampant. African countries are not able to develop because of their own governments. However, there are some African exceptions, where free market reforms have been implemented. We can observe this based on the example of Tunisia. This country, which was poor not so long ago, has found courage to implement a package of aggressive free market reforms. Over a dozen or so years, Tunisia has become the economic leader of Africa. Central planning is being gradually replaced by delegation of authorities and state-owned assets are being privatised. While in the 1980s nearly 90% of assets were the property of the State, today this amounts only to 30%. Owing to priorities like observance of private ownership, monetary stability, legal warranties for investors, etc., Tunisia today attracts foreign investments worth USD 14 billion a year.

We are now past the decolonisation period, and currently none of the old colonial empires owns colonies in the common meaning of the word. However, the topic is still relevant, as we can still hear mentions of so-called post-colonialism, and the swirling economic discussions still have to take into account history, geography and the ideological background.

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