Countering the Counterfactual: A Case for Rectificatory Justice for Colonialism

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Abstract

Rectificatory justice for colonialism has been, in recent years, included in the discussion of global justice. The idea is that former colonial powers acknowledge, apologise and make reparations for the harms caused during colonialism. However, there are some objections to rectificatory justice for colonialism. This paper examines one of the main objections, the counterfactual argument. This objection has been found to have some plausibility due to the difficulty in estimating the effect of past injustice on present conditions, as well as the claim that African countries did indeed benefit from colonialism. However, due to the exploitative nature of colonialism, it is reasonable to argue for rectificatory justice based solely on the harm caused, without having to conceptualise a world without the occurrence of colonialism. The aim of this paper is to claim that the harms of colonialism are partly to blame for the current global inequality and that rectificatory justice will go a long way in decreasing this inequality.

Keywords: Rectificatory justice, colonialism, counterfactuals, injustice, objectification, equality.
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Chapter 1- Introduction

1.1 Background

Rectificatory justice for colonialism has, in the last few years, gained some prominence in the discussion on global justice. Previously, discussions were almost exclusively focused on distributive justice. Aristotle is probably the first philosopher to make the distinction between these two types of justice. A major distinction between these two types of justice is their aims. The aim of rectificatory justice is to compensate or repair for harm done, while the aim of distributive justice is to achieve fairness in the distribution of resources. Both of these types of justice are relevant in global justice as both are concerned with the plight of the global poor and the reduction of global inequality. Collste (2015) writes that “a theory of global rectificatory justice is complementary to a theory of distributive justice” and it “offers additional motives for distributive justice” (p.180). However, other writers, such as Wenar (2006), have argued that since both types of justice would result in a redistribution of resources to the global poor, rectificatory justice is therefore superfluous. Overland (2005), also argues that the urgency of the need of the global poor is more important than attribution of responsibility for harm, because people in need are indifferent to where assistance comes from. He therefore avers that it is permissible to offer assistance to one whose need has not been caused by us rather than offering assistance to one whose needs have been caused by us, as long as this promotes equal or more good. However, he thinks that aiding people whose need we are not responsible for is supererogatory. For the injustice of colonialism, I think rectificatory justice has primacy over distributive justice. This is because “rectification is not based on charity but on rights” (Collste 2015, p.174). This is of particular importance as it provides the possibility of creating a more equal relationship between the former colonial powers and the former colonised countries.

If we allow that the current global order to a great extent mirrors colonialism, distributive justice fails to take into account that historical processes and injustice can be blamed for the current global inequality. Young (1990) as cited in Lister (2013) has argued that “debates about justice have tended to focus on the distribution of a narrow set of economic goods, neglecting relationships of subordination and domination that arise in the production of these goods, or that result from informal social norms and attitudes”(p.72). Rectificatory justice may overcome the shortcomings of distributive justice and “it’s perceived inability to acknowledge
and properly account for the special ties and commitments that characterise the lives of ordinary men and women” (Beitz, 1999, p.291). The reason for this is that it will require that former colonial powers acknowledge that they caused harm as well as make reparations for the lasting effects of colonisation.

Is colonialism to blame for the current global inequality and specifically for the underdevelopment in Africa? Some writers such as Pogge (2002), Miller (2007) and Collste (2015) are of the opinion that it does. All of the African countries, except Liberia (which was set up as a settlement for freed African-American slaves) and Ethiopia (which between 1936 and 1941 was annexed by the Italians) were colonised. Therefore it can be claimed that none of the African countries were ever completely free. 34 out of the 48 countries that the UN has listed as Least Developed, based on the three criteria of per capita income, human assets and economic vulnerability; are African. Can we therefore draw a causal connection between colonialism and the state of African countries? Pogge (2002, 2005) argues that the affluent nations contribute and at the same time benefit from the global institutional order that is responsible for the poverty in the world. Therefore, affluent nations are not only obliged to stop harming the poor, but to also compensate them.

The aim is not to entirely blame colonisation for the problems in Africa because “colonialism did not inscribe itself on a clean slate” (Loomba, p.21). African societies, just like any other societies, had their own problems which may or may not have allowed them to flourish. There are many other factors, besides colonisation, that have contributed to the state of African countries today. These factors include war and armed conflict, disease and corruption. Appiah (2006) is also critical of the simplification of the reasons why there is such global inequality and he writes, “the juxtaposition of western affluence with 3rd world poverty can sometimes lead activists to see the two as causally linked in some straightforward way, as if they are poor because they are rich” (2006, p.172). However, colonisation was a major occurrence in the history of Africa and it is not controversial to claim that it had a negative effect on the development of the continent. This partial responsibility is sufficient for a claim for rectification. Besides having an effect on development, colonisation did involve inflicting

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1 By ‘us’ Overland refers to the relatively well-off people in developed countries.
2 While a significant part of the world was at one point colonised, this thesis has chosen to single out Africa because Africa is arguably the place where poverty is greatest, and it has also been the focus of a great deal of academic debate
harm on the colonised and as Collste (2015) says, “it is sufficient to establish that a colony was subjected to grave and lengthy injustices to ground a claim for rectification” (p.145). A major stumbling block to the case for rectificatory justice is the controversy surrounding the effect of colonisation on the development of colonised countries. On the one hand, some writers such as Waites (1999) and Risse (2005), are of the opinion that on the whole, colonisation was beneficial for the African countries, while at the same time having very little impact on the development of the European countries. On the other hand, some writers such as Rodney (1981), are of the opinion that the underdevelopment in African countries, and other countries in the global South, is the result of the same processes that resulted in the development of the global North. These writers engage in speculating as to what the effect of colonialism was on colonised countries and they do this by applying counterfactual reasoning. Risse (2005) uses counterfactual reasoning and concludes that colonisation was beneficial for the continent while on the other hand, other writers such as Heldring & Robinson (2012) conclude that colonisation was detrimental to its development. Some writers such as Waldron (1992), however are reluctant to apply counterfactual reasoning to matters of historical injustice due to the difficulties involved in constructing a plausible counterfactual world. Despite this legitimate concern, it does not overcome the issue that colonialism by its very nature involved harm to the colonies. Therefore this difficulty does not warrant a refusal to attempt some sort of rectification.

The counterfactual objection to rectificatory justice for colonialism is controversial. One has to question the idea that a people, even after being subjected to exploitation, slavery and other kinds of harm, are still better off than they would have been without this period of exploitation and harm. This speaks a lot to the conception of these people, that they are an inferior other. This idea, that the outcome with colonialism is better than what the outcome would have been without it, also gives an undeserved moral status to the colonialist, that of a messiah or saviour. Self-determination is a right for all countries and this entitles them to decide on their own development.

Colonialism was described as a ‘civilising mission’ and it seems that it was based on Eurocentrism, the idea of European superiority and inferiority of other cultures. This idea was used to justify colonialism and to a great extent is the reason that some doubt is raised about the prosperity of Africa without colonisation. This is a major challenge to rectificatory justice for colonisation. Hansen & Jonsson (2014) write, “A racist and colonial epistemology deeply ingrained in global ideology here forecloses any possibility for Africa to escape its fate as the weaker part of the dyad, while it also forbids Europeans to forego their civilising mission. It
compels Africans and Europeans alike to repeat a predictable script where Africans perform as victims or villains while European aid workers, diplomats, oilers, bankers and military personnel are waiting” (p.11).

The discussion on rectificatory justice for colonialism in Africa is of particular importance taking into consideration the global inequality today. Due to this inequality, and taking into account the history that has led to this inequality, discussions on global justice ought to shift from an emphasis on distributive justice to include and in fact prioritise rectificatory justice.

1.2 The Problem
There are a number of objections to rectificatory justice and one of them is the counterfactual objection. Is there a case for this argument and how should we understand it?

1.3 Study Aim
The main aim of the study is to explore whether the counterfactual argument is important in the discussion of rectificatory justice for colonialism. More specifically, the paper will consider whether there can be other justifications for rectificatory justice for colonialism taking into account the current global inequality. This study therefore assumes that there is a strong causal link between colonisation and the underdevelopment of African countries (and other previously colonised developing countries).

1.4 Structure and method
This paper is divided into five chapters. Chapter 2 will focus on the theoretical aspects of counterfactual reasoning. It begins by discussing what counterfactual reasoning is and then highlights what is considered the problem with applying it to the issue of historical injustice. Conceptual analysis will be applied to gain an understanding of counterfactual reasoning.

Chapter 3 will explore the different perspectives on the counterfactual argument as applied to the specific case of colonialism in Africa. Reference will be made to the works of Risse (2005), Heldring & Robinson (2012) and Butt (2010). The objective of this chapter is to illustrate the problems and the possibilities of this line of argumentation for this particular historical injustice. Close reading will be used to evaluate the different counterfactual arguments on colonialism in Africa.

Chapter 4 seeks to make a case that the counterfactual objection to rectificatory justice is unjustified due to the fact that it may allow an injustice to go unrectified. This chapter also seeks to make the case that colonialism implied a European superiority over Africans and the
lack of acknowledgement of its harms merely emphasises this notion. It argues that the Eurocentrism that justified colonisation, still colours the discussion of rectificatory justice and consequently the debate on whether or not African countries are owed rectification. The chapter makes reference to Nussbaum’s (1995) Objectification theory to illustrate this claim. It ultimately argues that due to what Ypi (2013) terms as the failure of respect for reciprocity and equality, colonisation cannot be justified.

Chapter 5 concludes that developing countries are owed rectificatory justice. This is based on the assessment that African countries would have fared better in the absence of colonialism and that colonialism entailed harm to and unequal relations with the colonised.
Chapter 2- Counterfactual reasoning

2.1 Introduction to Counterfactual Reasoning

This chapter introduces the theoretical aspects of counterfactual reasoning. It offers an account of what this type of reasoning entails. The challenge to counterfactual reasoning as it is applied to the issue of historic injustice is also introduced. Lastly, it is concluded that despite the difficulties involved in counterfactual reasoning, it can be of some practical use for rectification for historical injustice.

Counterfactual reasoning is thought to be, by some authors, a useful tool in research (Nolan, 2013). Counterfactual reasoning tries to determine what would have happened if a certain event in the past had not occurred, or what might happen in the future, if a certain event occurs. It is referred to as “what if” thinking (Lebow, 2000) and the statements contain “would” in them (Nolan, 2013). Even though counterfactual reasoning is a subject of research in history and philosophy, it is said that individuals engage in counterfactual reasoning all the time.

Counterfactual reasoning is studied widely in psychology. Psychologists think that the consideration of the different outcomes is usually an attempt to find explanations for occurrences, allocate blame and to decide about a course of action for the future (Markman et al, 2009, Epstude & Roese, 2008, Mandel et al. 2005). The point is that counterfactual reasoning may allow people to learn from mistakes and therefore avoid them in the future. For example, after failing an examination, a student may engage in counterfactual reasoning by considering what they could have done differently to have avoided this negative outcome. If only she had studied the night before the test, she might have passed. So in the future, she may do that to avoid this negative outcome.

After a negative outcome, if a person engages in counterfactual reasoning and comes up with a better outcome than what actually happened, they are said to be engaging in upward counterfactuals (Markman et al, 1993 in Epstude & Roese, 2008). This entails imagining how things could have been worse and this type of counterfactual is said to make people feel better (Leithy, Robbins & Brown 2006). For instance, after being involved in a car accident, a person may think that “at least I did not get seriously hurt”. In contrast, if a person comes up with a worse outcome than what actually occurred, they are engaging in downward counterfactuals (Markman et al, 1993 in Epstude & Roese, 2008). For instance, after the car accident, the
person may think, “if only I had been driving slower, I may have avoided the accident”. It is thought that people engage more often in upward counterfactuals than in downward counterfactuals (Roese, 1997) and that upward counterfactuals are more useful as they prepare people for similar, future situations (Leithy, Robbins & Brown, 2006). Counterfactual reasoning is used retrospectively when one is considering different alternatives to the past and these types of counterfactuals are referred to as paradigm counterfactuals (Nolan, 2013). In this case, counterfactual reasoning is sometimes aimed at establishing causal connections between an event (antecedent) and an outcome (consequent). This can be done in two different ways. The first way, which is the most common, is imagining a situation in which the historical event is different and as a result, the present is different (Gilbert et al, 2015, Lebow 2007). The counterfactual takes on the form of “if – then” reasoning (Epstude & Roese 2008). The outcome in the real world in which a particular event occurred, is compared to the outcome in hypothetical world in which that event had not occurred. This is to determine if changing the event will change the outcome. For example, person A is robbed after leaving her flat. Leaving the flat is the antecedent and getting robbed is the consequent. In a counterfactual world, A does not leave her flat, and therefore does not get robbed. This can be represented as: If P, then Q, and if not-P, then not-Q, with P being the antecedent and Q the consequent. The implication is that, ‘if A had not left her flat, then she would not have been robbed’. In both worlds, the consequent is dependent on the antecedent therefore suggesting a causal connection. The second way is imagining a situation in which even though the historical event is changed, it does not change the outcome (Gilbert et. al. 2015, Lebow 2007). These scenarios are sometimes referred to as “semifactuals” (Gilbert et al, 2015). Whereas counterfactual thinking employs “what if” speculation, semi-factual thinking employs “even if” thinking. Consider this example: I take the bus to the airport and arrive there only to find that I have missed my flight. I may say that, even if I had taken a taxi to the airport, I would still have missed my flight. This is semifactual thinking. The consequent remains unchanged, despite changing the antecedent. This can be represented as: If P, then Q and if not-P, Q. The implication is that missing my flight has probably got very little to do with the type of transportation I take to the airport. Therefore, a difference between counterfactual and semifactual thinking is that in the former, both the antecedent and consequent are altered, but in the latter, only the antecedent is altered. However, both these types of reasoning play a role in establishing causality and it has been said that:
... it is important for perceivers to consider not only how mutations could have changed the outcome but also how alternative antecedent events might have led to the same outcome. Only then will perceivers be able to judge correctly the inevitability or the avoidability of an event and to grasp the causal structure of the situation. (Sherman & McConnell 1995 in McCloy & Byrne 2002, p.46).

If we take the real world to be represented by the statement: P, Q, the counterfactual would be if not-P, not-Q establishing that there is a causal link between the event and the outcome. The semi-factual would be if not-P, Q such that the outcome remains the same therefore the causal link between the event and the outcome is not immediately apparent.

Another reason why counterfactuals are useful is that they help people see that history is often contingent and therefore it reduces the tendency to see history as being determined. This tendency is referred to as “hindsight bias” (Nolan, 2013, Lebow, 2000). According to Lebow, hindsight bias causes people to think events that occurred as inevitable, even those that had been previously thought unlikely to occur. Counterfactuals therefore allow people to consider other alternatives that may have led to different outcomes (Nolan 2013, Lebow 2007).

Considering things that did not happen but could have happened may give a different perspective on causal connections and therefore prevent false assumptions. Counterfactual thinking is also often aimed at assessing an outcome to try to figure out how things could have been done differently, so that the outcome could have been avoided (Epstude & Roese, 2011, Van Hoeck et, al., 2014). In this instance, the real outcome is altered and this is aimed at finding an explanation for the outcome. For example, after a car accident, one can imagine a different outcome in which there was no accident, so as to find out how the accident could be avoided, for example, by taking a different route or by driving slower.

Assessment of the outcome may also lead to an understanding of the historical actor’s point of view (Nolan 2013). This means that one can metaphorically put themselves into the historical actor’s shoes to better understand their choices or situation. This is useful particularly where there is, for instance, a lack of empirical evidence. Putting oneself in another’s shoes will perhaps enable one to make predictions as to their choices or behaviour even when there is scanty information. However, this runs the risk of homogenizing historical experiences. For example, how can a privileged individual put herself into a disadvantaged persons shoes? It would probably be very difficult for the privileged individual to situate herself into the poor person’s particular reality.

Counterfactuals are also useful in the attribution of responsibility for an outcome and one way this can be done by determining if the outcome was inevitable, despite the actor’s actions.
(Nolan, 2013). If the outcome was likely to happen anyway, an actor’s share of the blame is diminished. For instance, if a hunter kills a rhino and it turns out that the species is now extinct, he is only partly responsible for the extinction because the species would be extinct anyway. Another way of determining responsibility is the intention of the action (Nolan, 2013). If a positive outcome was merely a happy accident from an actor’s action, she cannot be held totally responsible for the outcome.

Counterfactuals have useful application in historical investigation and for purposes of this paper, useful for the consideration as to the effect of historical injustice to present day outcomes. They can be used to reduce hindsight bias, understand historical actors’ viewpoints, make causal connections as well as attribute responsibility and blame for negative outcomes.

2.2 What is the relevant counterfactual?

For counterfactual reasoning to be useful, it is important to choose the true or plausible counterfactual. Lebow (2007) shows that a plausible counterfactual is one that is realistic, therefore does not violate what is understood to be possible. For example, a plausible counterfactual cannot go against the laws of nature. A plausible counterfactual must also have the likelihood of arriving at the outcome the researcher is looking into. That is, there should be a logical connection between the antecedent and the outcome.

A relevant counterfactual has also been said to be the most probable outcome, in the absence of the action in question (Butt, 2010). Butt quotes Kershnar who says,

> The purpose of the relevant counterfactual is to determine those effects that result from the injuring act. To do so, the relevant possible world should include the condition of a person wrongfully injured in the actual world in the most similar world in which the injuring act did not occur…Hence, we determine the conditions on the relevant possible world by assuming that the conditions in it are identical with those in the actual world up until the time of the injury, and then envisioning the most probable outcome if the injuring act had not occurred (italics in original) (p.6).

For instance, what would have been the most probable outcome if India had not been colonised by the British? Before colonisation, India had a thriving textile industry which constituted a significant proportion of the export market⁵. After colonisation, their textile industry declined. In the absence of colonisations, wouldn’t the most probable outcome be that their textile industry would have continued to thrive and expand?

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⁵ See India’s Deindustrialisation in the 18th and 19th Centuries
However, the difficulty in constructing a plausible counterfactual is one of the reasons that several researchers have expressed reservations as to using them. Waldron (1992) is one such writer and in the next section we shall be looking at his argument.

2.3 Counterfactuals and Historic Injustice

Waldron’s (1992) major objection to the counterfactual approach to historical injustice is that the present world looks very different from what it would have looked like had the injustice in the past not occurred. This may be referred to as the indeterminacy problem. Simply put, this problem refers to the fact that there are possibly an infinite number of events that could occur and it may not be possible to determine which ones would. Counterfactual reasoning leads to a number of different possible alternatives in relation to a particular event or period and, due to this conjecture and subjectivity, it is difficult to determine which counterfactual is the correct one. The difficulty is in determining which events would follow, in the absence of the injustice, as events would play out differently. Goldsmith (1979) captures this difficulty when he asserts that estimating what the present world would like “would require not only a full knowledge of actual history, but also an assessment of all the probabilities of all the alternative sequences of events had no injustice occurred’ (p.589).

It is easy to see the difficulty, because the estimation of what the present world would look like, would require calculating the probability of an event, and this calculated probability would determine the probability of the next event, and this probability would determine the probability of the next event, ad infinitum. This calculation would have to be done for all the alternative event sequences, which would not be an easy task. This objection assumes that the events in the real world and the counterfactual world would be radically different. However, the assumption in counterfactual reasoning is that the real world and the hypothetical world are quite similar except for the historical injustice. The two worlds can therefore be easily compared in order to establish the effect of the event in question. By implication, almost all the events that occurred in the real world would still hold in the counterfactual world. Therefore, the events that the probability of occurrence would have to be calculated for would not be as many and this difficulty would be significantly diminished. Also by applying the principle of prudence, which means that one ought to consider and balance the relevant factors, it is possible to make an assessment of what factors need to be considered.

Another reason for the indeterminacy problem, according to Waldron, is human choice, and how this autonomous individual choice would have affected the outcomes in a counterfactual world. He concludes, therefore, that even the best possible predictions of what the outcomes
would be without the historical injustice, would have no moral authority. While it is true that it
would be very difficult, if not impossible to determine the numerous permutations and
combinations of every individual human action, it is a mistake to focus so narrowly on
individuals and their choices. The matter at hand is reparations to a group of people for
injustice inflicted on them by another group of people, therefore individual actions should not
be what is relevant here. Instead, it should be on group actions. Group actions should be
relatively easier to predict. For example, in the case of slavery, it would be more worthwhile to
focus on the actions of the slaveholding society as a whole than on the actions of individual
slave holders. The group actions of the former would be easier to predict.
Waldron thinks that another problem with the application of counterfactual thinking to
historical injustice is that it would involve redistribution of resources based on only the
rational choices of some and not all of the people affected by the injustice, and this would be
unfair. He says, “Ultimately what is raised here is the question of whether it is possible to
rectify particular injustices without undertaking a comprehensive redistribution that addresses
all claims of justice that may be made” (1992, p.13). This objection is similar to one of the
oppositions to Nozick’s entitlement theory. For instance, Kymlicka (2012) contends that
majority of initial acquisitions are illegitimate and therefore recommends rejecting Nozick’s
theory if legitimate historical title cannot be ascertained or if rectification for any injustice in
acquisition cannot be done. According to Nozick, the legitimacy of an entitlement is
dependent on the legitimacy of the previous owner’s entitlement, whose legitimacy is
dependent on the previous owner’s entitlement and so on. If any of the owner’s entitlement is
not legitimate, any subsequent transfer even if just, voids the entitlement to the property. This
is the problem Waldron refers to. Rectifying a historical injustice may mean confiscating
property from owners who unknowingly bought property whose initial acquisition was unjust.
Therefore, in rectifying the previous injustice, another injustice is created. For example, I
purchase a second hand car and pay a fair price for it. It is then discovered that the car had
previously been stolen. Rectificatory justice demands that the car be restored to its rightful
owner, leaving me without a car and without the money I paid for the car. I then in turn have a
legitimate claim for rectification. The attempt at rectification ends up creating the very
problem it is attempting to solve.
Waldron goes on to suggest that because of current expectations, as well as changes in
background conditions, entitlements brought on by historical injustice fade over time. He
states that “after several generations have passed, certain wrongs are simply not worth
correcting (ibid, p.15). This idea is also echoed by Janna Thompson when she says that
common sense requires that there be a time limit on claims for reparation (2002, p.77) and by Nozick when he poses the question, “How far back must one go in wiping clean the historical slate of injustices?” (1974, p.152). While this idea does receive intuitive support, it is much less compelling to accept the supersession of injustice for cases in which historical injustice results in what Spinner-Halev terms enduring injustice, which he defines as “injustice [that] has roots in the past and continues to the present day” (2007, p.575). According to him, these are the historical injustices that require redress because if nothing is done about them, they will continue into the future.

Waldron does concede that some injustices have not been superseded by time and he writes, “…it may be that some of the historic injustice that concern us have not been superseded…But there have been huge changes… [and] we cannot be sure that these changes in circumstances supersede the injustice…but it would not be surprising if they did” (p.26). He ultimately says that most historical injustices have been superseded and consequently should not be rectified.

Counterfactual reasoning cannot be separated from the issue of rectification for historical injustice, and has been used by both sides of the debate. If the aim of reparation for historical injustice is to bring the victim to the position he would have been in, if not for the injustice, this will, by necessity, involve speculating about what the world would look like in the absence of the historical injustice. The next chapter examines how the counterfactual argument has been applied to the specific case of rectificatory justice for colonialism.
Chapter 3- Colonialism and counterfactuals

Counterfactual reasoning and the objections to applying it to historical injustice have been discussed in the previous chapter. The very nature of counterfactual reasoning is that it gives rise to different counterfactual worlds and therefore the challenge is in deciding what the relevant counterfactual is. This can be seen in the debate about the impact of colonialism in Africa. On the one hand, the counterfactual argument is that, in the absence of colonialism, African countries would not have fared any better and would have remained backward. This serves as one of the main objections to rectificatory justice for colonialism. On the other hand is the contrary counterfactual that they would have fared better. This chapter will examine both sides of the argument.

Collste (2015) argues for rectificatory justice for colonialism because he thinks that the current global inequality and global poverty are a legacy of colonialism. He asks, “Is there a connection between the fact that the world’s poorest nations are former colonies and some of the world’s richest nations are former colonial powers?” (p.19). Several writers have tried to prove or disprove that there is this connection. This is discussed in the ensuing section.

3.1 Colonialism and Upward Counterfactuals

Upward counterfactuals imagine a situation in which the outcome in the counterfactual world is worse than the outcome in the actual world. Risse (2005) makes use of this type of counterfactual when he writes about African colonisation. His paper is a reply to Pogge (2002), so his main aim is to tackle the idea that the global order is harming the global poor. Risse begins by assessing Pogge’s claim by comparing the world today and what it was like 200 years ago. His approach is utilitarian when he talks about the improvements in the last 200 years. He points out that there are fewer poor people today than there were then, life expectancy and literacy have risen and that things have improved greatly for the poor. He states therefore, in the general scheme of things, the global order does not harm the poor and should in fact be credited with improvement to their well-being. According to him, the world is not unjust, it is merely not completely just.

At first, seeming to follow Waldron, Risse is reluctant to use counterfactual reasoning to speculate on what the world would have been like in the absence of colonialism. He writes that assessing the relevant counterfactual would be impossible as a great deal would be dependent on autonomous individual action. He says that, although researchers who use counterfactual
reasoning try to reduce the amount of speculation by keeping all factors except the antecedent constant, this would not work in assessing what the world would be like because there is only this one world. Risse seems to dismiss the usefulness of the counterfactual argument. He further writes that uncertainty of using harm as a benchmark makes it impossible to say what the situation would be like, if the past had been different. He thinks that the counterfactual that countries would have been better off without colonialism may seem plausible only because the developing countries are compared to the industrialised countries. That is, since industrialised countries which had no interference prospered, it would be easy to conclude that developing countries, had they had no external interference, would have similarly prospered. He writes that this reasoning should be resisted because the reasons Europe was able to colonise Africa would be the same reasons that Africa, without colonisation, would be unable to prosper. He adds that even before colonialism, African countries “were already on a trajectory toward their current disadvantaged status” (p.12). If this was true, why didn’t colonialism interrupt this trajectory? His position implies that no matter what happened, the fate of African countries was determined, and were therefore doomed to not prosper. Did colonisation accelerate this damnation? This implication of determinism is troubling and it displays a hindsight bias. Hindsight bias as we saw in chapter 2 is the tendency to see events as inevitable.

Risse uses semifactual reasoning when considering the possibility that African countries could have fared better in the absence of colonialism. Semifactuals speculate a situation in which even if the precedent event in the counterfactual world is changed, the outcome remains the same. That a person should be held responsible for a situation in which she could have made a difference to the outcome is intuitively appealing. However, it would be difficult to assign responsibility for an outcome that would have occurred irrespective of the agent’s actions. This is what Risse seems to be doing. If we accept that African countries would not prosper, with or without colonialism, then the colonization cannot be held to be completely responsible for this lack of prosperity.

He also attempts to assess the counterfactual claim by considering two other claims, which he thinks are ‘more empirically tractable’. One claim is whether the developed countries are rich due to colonisation of the undeveloped countries. He states that these dependency claims are no longer credible and that developed countries prospered due to the benefits of industrialisation. Bernard Waites also holds this view, that “the exploitation of colonies played only a marginal role in the development of Europe” (1999 in Collste 2015, p.79). Industrialisation is said to have been propelled by the production of goods such as iron ore and
coal, which were not the goods Europe was exporting from Africa at the time. While it is true that European industrialisation is credited largely to European factors such as a shift to capitalism, industrialisation would not have been successful without raw materials for their industries and ready markets for the resulting products. It may also be beneficial to consider what would have been Europe’s developmental state had colonisation happened there. In contrast, Rodney (1981) asks the hypothetical question what Europe’s developments would be if it had gone through a similar situation to Africa’s. The consideration of this alternate may create a more sympathetic view to Africa’s plight.

The other more empirically tractable claim according to Risse is whether colonialism inflicted lasting harm. He argues that even though colonialism brought on exploitation, slavery and other kinds of harm, this does not mean that the past injustice continues to impose harm that outweigh the benefits colonialism brought to the colonies. He follows the Aristotelian idea that for a duty to rectify to arise, there must be both wrong doing and harm. He quotes the historian Braudel (1987) who writes,

> Education and a certain level of technology, of hygiene, of medicine and of public administration: these were the greatest benefits left by the colonists, and some measure of compensation for the destruction which contact with Europe brought to old tribal, family, and social customs. ... It will never be possible to gauge the full results of such novelties as employment for wages, a money economy, writing and individual ownership of land. Each was undoubtedly a blow to the former social regime. Yet these blows were surely a necessary part of the evolution taking place today. (p.14).

If the intention of the colonisers was to provide these ‘benefits’ to the colonised, it may be reasonable to weigh them against the harm caused. However, these benefits were merely incidental, as the intention of colonialism was not to explicitly provide them. For instance, education was provided to the colonised to benefit the colonialists. Rodney (1981) quotes a 1968 FRELIMO⁶ statement that says, “In the colonial society, education is such that it serves the colonialist….In a regime of slavery, education was but one institution for forming slaves” (p.205). Ziltener & Kunzler (2013) also say that education was mainly aimed at training officials for colonial administration and not at improving the knowledge of the natives. The development of railways and other infrastructure was mainly aimed at facilitating export and to make business possible for the colonialist, not to facilitate internal African trade and if it did, this was coincidental (Rodney, 1973). For instance, in Kenya (and several other
countries), the railway built during colonialism links the coast to places where goods for export were grown. As mentioned earlier (in chapter 2), intention is an important factor in the attribution of responsibility. According to Kant, a morally right action should not be judged from its consequences, but rather from its intentions. While an agent may be viewed as not being blameworthy for a self-serving action that resulted in incidental benefit, should the self-serving, incidental benefits by colonialists be weighed against the harms of colonialism? Is it really possible that without colonialism African countries would be worse off than they are today? Would a counterfactual world without colonialism be worse? Judging by the exploitative nature of colonialism and the harms it entailed, it is unlikely that the colonised countries would be worse off.

3.2 Colonialism and Downward Counterfactuals

Downward counterfactuals imagine a situation in which the outcome in the counterfactual world is better than the outcome in the actual world. This type of counterfactual is applied by Heldring & Robinson in their paper, *Colonialism and Development in Africa* (2012). They argue, that colonialism had a detrimental effect on development in Africa, is a plausible counterfactual and they think that it is reasonable to assume that Africa would have done better in the absence of colonialism. Their focus in the paper is on the impact of colonialism on the colonised and not on the colonisers.

They begin by considering what the development status of African countries was just before colonialism. On the one hand, there is the view that Africa was backward at this point in history due to the fact that it lacked certain things such as writing, the wheel and plow, the use of money, economic institutions, political centralisation and so on. However, this can be contested as there were several countries in Africa that were advanced on these terms before colonialism. For instance, Egypt had developed hieroglyphics and were using the plough before colonisation. Rodney (1982) also writes that when the first Europeans arrived on the East and West African coasts in the 15th Century, the developed parts of Africa such as Benin could be compared to Europe. On the other hand, Heldring & Robinson think it is important to consider what the trends were at this time with regard to political and economic institutions. Generally speaking, they think that there was the move towards changes in both institutions and this would have spurred development.

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6 FRELIMO was a Mozambiquan liberation movement founded in 1962 to fight for the independence of the country. It is still the ruling party in the country.
Heldring & Robinson (2012) say that colonialism in general had heterogeneous effects – some countries such as the USA and Australia seem to have benefited from colonialism while other countries did not. However, this heterogeneity is muted in the African case as there is not a similar success story. Even though Europeans brought technology to their colonies and data suggests that there was improvement in life expectancy and literacy, economic growth was very minimal. There was differing impact on the standard of living for the Africans and this depended on the type of colony. According to them, countries that had white settlement ended up with serious immiserisation due to the expropriation of land, which led to a decrease in living standards. On the other hand, there is some evidence that suggests that colonies without white settlement experienced increase in wages in the formal sector.

Even with this mixed impact of colonialism, Heldring & Robinson think it is important to consider the counterfactual of what the African circumstance would have been without colonialism. In the absence of colonialism, technology would have reached the continent through missionaries and trade, or the Africans would have innovated. They think also that countries that had, at the time of colonisation, a centralised system of government, would have continued in this political development which in turn would mean that they would be more developed today.

They conclude that even though there are difficulties in assessing what colonialism did to the African continent, “we find it difficult to bring the available evidence together with plausible counter-factuals to argue that there is any country today in Sub-Saharan Africa which is more developed because it was colonized by Europeans. Quite the contrary” (p.10). Taking into consideration that people generally strive for progress and that without interference of the nature of colonialism, it is not controversial to come to the conclusion that people would thrive.

3.2.1 The Philosopher or the Economist?

The counterfactuals considered by the two sets of writers result in two different outcomes. Risse thinks that even without colonialism Africa would not have fared any better. He goes further to suggest that, on the whole, Africa benefited from it. Heldring & Robinson on the other hand are of the opinion that it is plausible that Africa would have been more developed without colonisation. Who should we believe?

Heldring & Robinson’s argument seems to be quite convincing. They base their argument on several empirical studies done on the occurrences during colonialism. Their analysis on the

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7 This depends on who benefited because the opposite claim can be made for the native populations in these
effect of colonialism makes reference to historical facts making for a plausible argument. They make a comparison of Africa before colonialism and after colonialism to illustrate the impact of colonialism, both positive and negative. They ultimately conclude that colonialism had an overall detrimental effect.

Risse, on the other hand, seems to take for granted that the mere fact that developing countries are better off now, in terms of increase in life expectancy and literacy, than they were before colonialism, is a consequence of colonialism. He claims that Africa was already on an underdevelopment trajectory (without making reference to any empirical studies) and therefore, even without colonialism, Africa would be poor.

3.3 What is the relevant counterfactual?

Both Risse and Heldring & Robinson base their arguments on a counterfactual world in which the injustice of colonisation did not occur and then proceed to consider whether colonisation was beneficial for the colonised. Butt (2010) calls this suggestion, that the colonised countries in the whole benefited, the ‘counterfactual observation’. However, he thinks that it is an inadequate defence of colonialism. He reasons that we should not measure the present day utility of a particular nation and compare it with the utility of that nation at the time before the injustice. The problem is that this measurement does not take into account that during the period of the colonisation, the colonised suffered tremendously so their utility is less than it would have been in the absence of colonialism. If the lower utility during colonisation is taken into consideration, Butt thinks that it would not necessarily follow that colonialism was, in the whole, beneficial for the colonised.

Butt does not dismiss the counterfactual observation however, as it may be useful for the purposes of determining entitlement to compensation for historical injustice. He poses the question, “How can a claim for compensation be advanced for an event which has actually benefited the person making the claim?” (p.2). Collste (2015) also considers this question when he gives the analogy of two former colonies A and B that, after independence, go on to have different economic outcomes, despite suffering the same fate during the period of colonisation. A prospers economically but B remains in poverty, yet both could demand compensation for past wrongs. However, Collste thinks that it would not be necessary to compensate A due to its economic prosperity. Should A be denied rectification due to its prosperity? Perhaps it would have prospered more in the absence of colonisation?
Posner also writes that, “the duty to rectify is based not on the fact of injury but on the conjunction of injury and wrongdoing. The injurer must do wrong as well as do harm, and the victim must be wronged as well as harmed” (p.653). Therefore if the claim that, in the whole Africa is better off because of colonialism despite the harm inflicted stands, then a claim for rectificatory justice would fail.

The counterfactual observation provides a baseline for assessing whether the victim benefited or suffered from the historical injustice, and not just in terms of wealth but also in terms of general well-being. The result of this counterfactual, according to Butt, is that any benefit deemed to incidentally accrue to the victim, despite the exploitation, cannot be used to offset the harm. This is important because it concedes that benefit or harm should not be conceived only in terms of economic development or wealth. Instead, he also considers the effect of injustice on wellbeing\(^8\). This is crucial in the case of African countries as this thesis posits that colonialism inflicted a sense of inferiority on the African people. Even though it can be convincingly claimed that colonialism brought benefits such as technology to the continent, it may not be as easy to claim that it improved the general wellbeing of the people.

However, Butt moves away from the counterfactual observation and considers a different type of counterfactual. He claims that it may not be necessary to look at the most likely outcome had the injustice not occurred. Instead, for the case of colonialism and for other cases which involve exploitation, it may be better to conceive of a counterfactual world in which the victim’s and the offender’s interaction was just. The benefit of this approach is that the counterfactual world resembles the actual world more closely as the agent’s actions are similar in both worlds. Heldring & Robinson point out that contact between the countries would have continued without colonialism. There would have been transfer of knowledge and technology on more equal terms and as the interaction would not have been an exploitative one, both parties would have benefitted from this contact. Consequently, it is uncontroversial to assume that African development would have gone hand in hand with European development and the difference in development, if any, would not be as significant as it is today. Rodney (1981) points out that, “contact between different societies changes their respective rates of development” (p.33). Taking into consideration the development states of the two different continents, it can be claimed that Africa did contribute to the development of Europe and Europe contributed to the underdevelopment of Africa.

\(^8\) Butt does not define what he means by wellbeing but I take it to include social and psychological state.
This chapter has considered different accounts of what is the relevant counterfactual regarding African development and colonialism. If we accept the counterfactual argument, we have a reason to argue for rectification, because it is plausible to assume that African countries would have been better off without colonisation. However, both the different accounts take for granted that a European industrialised society is the ideal from which all other societies are measured. Secondly, we should be sceptical to counterfactual reasoning because what is more relevant is what actually occurred. The counterfactual argument is based on a Eurocentric perspective and in the next chapter we shall be looking at what this implies.
Chapter 4 - Eurocentrism and Colonialism

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it—that is in its northern part-belong to the Asiatic or European World...What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World’s History.” [Hegel, The Philosophy of History, 99.]

The previous chapter looked at the different counterfactuals regarding the development of Africa. It is concluded that despite the differing counterfactuals, it is reasonable to assume that Europe did have a developmental impact on Africa. Taking into account the development state of Africa as compared to Europe’s, this impact was negative. This chapter will be examining the possible reasons this claim is contested.

A common thread that appears in both sides of the counterfactual argument on colonialism is that the benefits such as economic development are talked about only in reference to a European perspective. The European way of life is thought to be a superior way of life and is consequently used as the baseline from which all other lifestyles are measured. The direct comparison of economic development between the two different societies fails to take into account the social, economic and cultural differences between them. This approach therefore does not consider the possibility that in its own terms, Africa was developed.

If development is to be thought of in terms of technological advances such as railways, and the wheel and plow, then it cannot be contested that Europe was more advanced than Africa at the point of colonisation. However, if we take development to mean, as Rodney (1981) defines it, a society’s increasing capacity to deal with its environment, it is less obvious. Development is not conceptualised as an absolute measure but rather as a relative one. Rodney also points out that generally, development phases are transient and will consequently give way to another phase. At the point of colonialism, Africa may have been technologically backward with reference to Europe, but this does not mean that this ‘development’ state would have remained the same. Trade was happening and this probably would have led to the exchange of technology, and the development gap may not have been as significant. There is also the likelihood that Africans themselves would innovate. Therefore, this direct comparison of the

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9 https://www.academia.edu/5259393/On_the_limit_of_spirit_Hegel_s_racism_revisited
state of development of the two societies simply fails to take into account the relative nature of development. The intention here is not to minimise the importance of these technological advances, as they did have a positive effect on life. The aim is to question the tendency to use one society’s ‘development’ as a baseline for the measurement of all other societies. This criteria is debateable because development ought to be seen as context-specific. Is development a ‘one-size-fits-all’ concept? The issue at hand, however, is the effect colonialism had on development. Why does it seem difficult to consider the possibility that Africa would have fared better without colonialism?

4.1 Objectification and Colonialism

The counterfactual argument against rectificatory justice claims that even in the absence of colonialism, Africa would not have developed and that colonisation was in the whole beneficial. Isn’t this tantamount to saying that colonisers were superior to the colonised? Should the counterfactual objection against rectificatory justice arise at all? Doesn’t the idea that Africa would not have developed without colonialism point to a conception that there is an inherent inadequacy in the African and the superiority of the European? The thesis posits that the colonised were and are still seen as inferior. Fanon (1965) in Zubriggen (2013) argues that “besides the subjugation of the colonised for the benefit of the colonisers, colonisation also involved the establishment of a race-based society with the culture of the colonised considered as inferior. Therefore, the colonised people were depicted as “sub-human, as wild savages who need to be tamed or suppressed, or guided, educated, and protected from their own folly or ignorance” (p.193). Memmi (1974) also shows that this dehumanisation of the colonised was necessary so that the colonisers could exonerate themselves and justify the oppression of the colonised. He writes,

Having become aware of the unjust relationship which ties him to the colonized, [the colonizer] must continually attempt to absolve himself...At the same time his privileges arise just as much from his glory as from degrading the colonized. He will persist in degrading them, using the darkest colours to depict them. If need be, he will act to devalue them, annihilate them...The distance which colonization places between him and the colonized must be accounted for and, to justify himself, he increases this distance still further by placing the two figures irretrievably in opposition; his glorious position and the despicable one of the colonized. (p.98-99).

Therefore, this created notion of inferiority is not only what justified colonisation but is also the reason for the idea that Africa would not have been able to prosper without external
interference. Consequently, there is a denial of responsibility or a lack of acknowledgement of the harms of colonialism. This view also has implications today and has an impact on the discussion on rectificatory justice for colonialism. If a people are no worse off, or are in fact better off than they would have been in the absence of colonialism, then claims for rectificatory justice would not have any grounds.

This notion of African inferiority persists in present times and is quite often seen in the depiction of the continent in the media. Memmi (1974) writes, “what is left of the colonised at the end of this… effort to dehumanise him?…He is hardly a human being. He tends rapidly towards becoming an object. As an end, in the coloniser’s supreme ambition, he should exist only as a function of the needs of the coloniser…” (p.130). The creation of the idea of European superiority versus African inferiority served to justify colonialism, still serves to justify it and to a great extent, the justification of the current global economic order.

Objectification is a theme most often encountered in feminist writing, but this thesis adopts Nussbaum’s (1995) objectification theory, to illustrate the different ways colonisation objectified the colonised. According to Nussbaum, objectification is “the seeing and/or treating of someone as an object” (p.251) and this can be done in one way or several ways simultaneously:

1. **instrumentality**: the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes. According to Nussbaum, this may lead to any or several of the other forms of objectification and is therefore the gravest form. The colonialists’ aims were to exploit the colonies for the benefit of their mother countries. To this end, they employed African workers to work for exceedingly low wages and in extremely poor conditions. Rodney (1981) writes that the wage paid was so low that it would not keep the worker alive, so he had to supplement his income by growing his own food.

2. **denial of autonomy**: the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination. An illustration of this lack of autonomy and self-determination is when Risse claims that even in the absence of colonialism, African countries would not have fared better. He seems to point to the idea that no matter what happened, African countries were doomed to be underdeveloped as Africans had no ability to control their own destinies.
3. **inertness**: the treatment of a person as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity. An example of this is shown in John Stuart Mill’s words (as quoted in Ypi, 2013) when he describes the ‘barbarians’, “[their] minds are not capable of so great an effort nor is their will sufficiently under the influence of distant motives … [therefore] nations that are still barbarous have not got beyond the period during which it is likely to be in their benefit that they should be conquered and held in subjection by foreigners” (p.169). This implies that the Africans had to have their decisions made for them as they were incapable of making them for themselves.

4. **fungibility**: the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects. During the scramble for Africa, colonialists drew arbitrary borders with no regard for the ethnic differences or similarities between the people forced within a boundary or separated by a boundary.

5. **violability**: the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity. This means that it may be deemed okay to injure or kill that person. Caroline Elkins, a historian who won a Pulitzer prize for her book on colonialism in Kenya, writes about the Kenyan detention camps and the violence there and says that it, “[included] public brutality, rape and starvation…and thousands died there” (2005 in Collste, 2015, p.62).

6. **ownership**: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold). An example of this is the treatment of the Africans in Congo under Leopold II, who ruled it as his personal property. The men were forced to work in the rubber plantations. To ensure compliance, there were incidences in which their women were held hostage until the men collected a certain amount of rubber (Collste, 2015).

7. **denial of subjectivity**: the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account. An illustration of this is the policy of assimilation the French applied in their colonies. Africans would not be considered as anything approaching equals to the French until they renounced their African culture.

All these forms of objectification were present during colonialism and had implications on how the colonised viewed the colonisers, as well as how they viewed themselves. The result of the colonised being objectified in these different ways has led to a feeling of inferiority. This inferiority has been referred to as a colonial mentality by David & Okazaki (2006 in
This domination and oppression results to what Bhargava (2013) terms epistemic injustice, which according to him is a form of cultural injustice. This type of injustice “occurs when the concepts and categories by which a people understand themselves are replaced by concepts and categories of the colonisers” (p.414). This refers to changing the way the colonised view themselves and their culture, to the benefit of the colonisers. The replacement damages the indigenous groups’ ‘epistemic framework’. Bhargava defines the epistemic framework as the “system of meanings and significance, by reference to which a group understands and evaluates itself” (p.414). According to him this framework is sustained by the group and is historical in origin. He distinguishes epistemic injustice from the other two forms of colonial injustice; economic and political injustice. However, he writes that economic and political injustice would not have been maintained without epistemic injustice. If people are dominated and oppressed, they internalise this oppression and begin to believe this negative view of themselves. This internalisation leads to negative consequences such as self-doubt, feelings of inferiority, and denial of one’s culture (Zubrigen, 2013).

The replacement of how people view themselves without regard for their feelings and opinions is an instance of injustice which certainly needs to be rectified. Also, if we grant that all humans are equal, treating them as mere objects is unjustified and therefore there needs to be rectification for this treatment.

4.2 Political Objectification

There is debate as to whether or not Africa is owed rectification for colonialism. One side of the debate thinks that since Africa is better off than it would have been without colonialism, it is not owed rectification. On the other side, they think that Africa would have fared better without colonialism. Counterfactual reasoning is applied by both sides of the debate. However, due to the intractability of the counterfactual argument, it may be necessary to put it aside and find another justification for rectification for colonialism.

The previous section made a case that colonialism entailed a problematic objectification of the colonised as it goes against the principle of equality. This objectification also entailed the

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10 The book is titled 'Britain’s Gulag: the Brutal End of Empire in Kenya.'
destruction of how the colonised view themselves and both of these give grounds for rectification.

Ypi (2013) also provides another justification for rectification for colonialism. She says that colonialism is wrong for many reasons, one being that it included the “burning of native settlements, torturing innocents, slaughtering children, enslaving entire populations, exploiting the soil and natural resources available to them, and discriminating on grounds of ethnicity and race” (p.162). Ypi makes a departure from what is most often thought to be wrong with colonialism, the argument based on territorial rights. She separates the issue of territorial rights from the wrong of colonialism because she thinks, like Kant, that everyone is entitled to the natural resources in the world and therefore they have a right to settle in any place. Therefore colonialism cannot be condemned solely based on the territorial argument. However, her argument fails to take into account that colonialism entailed displacement of people from land they were already occupying and using.

She thinks that another less talked about, but significant wrong of colonialism, is the unequal political relation that it entailed, that the colonised people were denied equality and reciprocity in decision making. She claims that the more familiar wrongs of colonialism would absolve from guilt the types of colonialism that did not involve brutality, slavery, mass murder and so on. Colonialism was practiced in different ways by different countries with some colonialists using a benign form of rule. However, Ypi says that colonialism in all forms entailed “morally objectionable political relations” (p.163). She endorses the Kantian claim that everyone is entitled to the natural resources in the world and therefore people have a right to visit any place. However, Kant criticised colonialism as was practised because it involved a “violation of standards of equality and reciprocity in setting up common political relations, and the consequent departure from a particular ideal of economic, social and, political association (Ypi 2013, p.174). Ypi considers the objection that the right to access to any place in the world was not available to native populations, and concludes that this shows the wrong of colonialism, that it entails an objectionable form of political relations and not that it goes against territorial rights. However, I think that due to this lack of reciprocity not only makes a case for the wrong of colonialism, but also a case for territorial rights. If the natives cannot have access to the colonisers’ land, it only follows that the coloniser should not have access to the natives’ land.
How can equality and reciprocity be achieved? According to Kant, “through the establishment of political institutions that allow people to relate to each other as equals, guaranteeing that their voice will be heard and that their claims will be equally taken into account when decisions affecting both are made” (Ibid, p.175). Besides equality and reciprocity, another important component is consent. However, Ypi is aware that in most cases, consent was coerced or negotiations were not carried out in good faith. She writes, “most historical instances of interactions between coloniser and colonised and most offers of political association culminating in signed treaties and contracts were far from exemplifying negotiations in good faith” (Ibid, p.181). By disentangling the issue of territorial rights from the wrong of colonialism, Ypi implies that rectification will not necessarily entail a return of land to the colonised and that rectification would entail a restructuring of the political relations between former colonizers and colonised such that they conform to standards of equality and reciprocity.

Ypi’s argument is of importance to rectificatory justice for colonialism as it focuses on contemporary relations between the colonised and colonisers. Colonialism entailed the instrumentalisation of the colonised as they did not have a say on the development of political institutions. These unequal relations created during colonialism are still evident today in the unequal global relations and in the policies of bodies such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the WTO (World Trade Organisation). Rectification will therefore entail remediying these unequal relations.

This chapter has argued that the colonisers objectified the colonised, and by implication did not treat them with equality or reciprocity. Also, the unequal political relations created during colonialism are still evident today. Both of these ground a claim for rectification as the historical and contemporary imbalanced relationships are morally objectionable.
Chapter 5 - Conclusion

“So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence”. Susan Sontag (2003)

This study has been aimed at considering the importance of the counterfactual argument in the discussion on rectificatory justice for colonialism. The thesis has also considered if there are other justifications for rectificatory justice. It has aimed to show that the counterfactual argument does ground a claim for rectification for colonialism. In addition, the fact that colonialism entailed harm to the colonised and that it also entailed unequal political relations, also grounds a claim for rectification.

Chapter 2 introduced theoretical aspects of counterfactual reasoning and what it entails. Objections to using this type of reasoning were discussed and it was concluded that it useful in the debate on historical injustice.

Chapter 3 considered the different ways in which counterfactual reasoning has been applied to the debate on rectificatory justice for colonialism in Africa. The two opposing sides on the debate were analysed and it was concluded that it is reasonable to assume Africa would have fared better in the absence of colonialism.

Chapter 4 posited that the reason the claim that Africa would have fared better is contested, arises from a Eurocentric which led to the objectification of the colonised as well as the unequal political relations that colonialism entailed. This also grounds a claim for rectification. The counterfactual objection against rectificatory justice mainly arises from a conception of European superiority and the inferiority of Africans. Due to this conception, colonisation is deemed to be on the whole, beneficial for the colonised and justifies the objectification of the colonised. Opinions are divided as to what is the relevant counterfactual with regard to the impact of colonialism. However, based on Heldring & Robinson’s plausible argument, it is found that Africa would have been better off without colonisation. Therefore, a claim for rectification for colonialism in Africa is legitimate.

Even if it is not the case that Africa would have been better off without colonialism, the harm caused is more relevant than speculating on what could have happened, and this also lays grounds for a claim for rectification. A major harm of colonialism is argued to be in the unequal relations between coloniser and colonised, besides the more obvious harms of
exploitation, murder and slavery. These unequal relations still characterise the global order and can therefore be termed as enduring injustice. It is argued that most historical injustices have been superseded by time. However, this is not the case with colonialism due to the state of former colonised countries.

A theory of rectificatory justice is complementary to a theory of distributive justice as it provides additional motives for redistribution (Collste, 2015). However, rectificatory justice will not only entail a redistribution in favour of the global poor, but also an acknowledgement and apology for the harms of colonialism. This acknowledgement and apology may provide the impetus for the restoration of more equal relations. Colonialism cannot be deemed to be over until there is this acknowledgement and rectification is attempted.

It is not controversial to claim that the whole discourse on rectificatory justice for colonialism is framed from a Eurocentric perspective. The control of the narrative only from this perspective, has the effect of impeding the discussion on rectificatory justice. After all, “the master’s tools cannot dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 2007, p.13). Consequently, efforts should be made to include African voices so that a different perspective is incorporated in the discussion on rectificatory justice and so that people harmed have a say in form and character of the reparations required.
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