



An OLS analysis of the impact of colonialism on inter-country differentials in slum incidence in Africa



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ABSTRACT

An ordinary least square (OLS) model is employed to examine the link between colonialism and slum incidence in Africa. Previous studies suggest a direct or positive link between these variables. This revelation is considered counter-intuitive. Consequently, the study reported here hypothesized a negative or inverse relation between the variables at the inter-country level. The analysis uncovered evidence supporting the hypothesized link. The findings suggest as follows. Given two types of countries, 'A' and 'B,' where the former experienced more intense colonialism, while the latter was less intensively colonized, 'A' would have a lower incidence of slums than 'B.' Thus, the conclusion that colonialism is associated with less, and not more, slum incidence. This relationship, at least within the context of the study reported here, holds true whether colonialism is operationalized in terms of the duration of colonialism, the level of colonial investment or the extent of colonially-induced urbanization. The strongest predictor of slum incidence as revealed in the study is the duration of colonialism. The population size of the main colonial city in 1960 came in last as a predictor of this phenomenon.

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Introduction

The colonial era ended in most parts of Africa more than half a century ago. Yet, the legacy of colonialism continues to reverberate in all development domains throughout the continent. The discourse on this subject varies widely but can be roughly grouped into three categories (Njoh, 2013). The first group encompasses works that are not particularly concerned with the direction of the link between colonialism and development. Works in this category simply use a broad brush to paint colonialism as having been either 'bad' or 'good' for Africa (see e.g., Amin, 1989; Bauer, 1972; Duignan & Gann, 1975; Rodney, 1982). The second group consists of works with some degree of specificity. These works link development outcomes in African countries to the nationality, hence, the politico-administrative proclivities of their erstwhile colonial powers (see e.g., Agbor, Fedderke, & Vieg, 2010; Bossuroy & Cogneau, 2009; Lee & Schultz, 2009; Njoh, 2000). The last group includes works focalizing on how the duration of colonialism affects a country's development profile (see e.g., Njoh, 2013; Njoh & Akiwumi, 2011).

Conspicuously absent from the literature are studies designed to demonstrate a possible link between colonialism and Africa's slum problematic. The only exception here is Fox's (2013) work which incriminated colonialism as a source of the problem. The dearth

of works on this subject is surprising given the preoccupation of colonial authorities with urbanization, an established trigger of the slum problematic (Arimah, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2009; Mangin, 1967). Therefore, the link between slums and colonialism is apparent. However, the task of establishing the nature of this link goes beyond theorizing. It requires extensive empirical analyses. The study reported in this paper was designed to help accomplish this task. In particular, the study employed the ordinary least square (OLS) model to determine the impact of colonialism on inter-country or international variations in slum incidence in Africa. What aspect of Africa's colonial experience explains inter-country or international differentials in the distribution of slums on the continent? My attempt to address this question begins in the next section by rationalizing the study and briefly reviewing previous works on the subject. Next, I discuss the theory and evidence purporting to explain the slum phenomenon in Africa. Following this, I present the data and their main sources. Next, I describe the variables and present the main findings of the study. I discuss these findings before concluding the paper in the final section.

Slums in Africa: previous studies, theory and evidence

By some accounts, the term slum was popularized as a slang characterizing 'back alleys' in Europe and North America in the mid-1800s (Harper, 2001). However, the term's existence as part of the lexicon in the discourse on human settlements dates further

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back to 18th century Europe. Here, the term was employed to characterize shoddily developed, overcrowded and disease-infested inner city neighborhoods (cf., Gilbert, 2007; Ward, 1976). These neighborhoods germinated and flourished in response to the housing needs of the industrial revolution. Since then, the term has been used in reference to 'heavily populated urban informal settlements dominated by substandard housing and squalor' (UN-Habitat, 2009). A useful and oft-used definition in the contemporary discourse on slums is that proposed by the UN-Habitat Expert Group Meeting (EGM). The meeting took place from October 28 to 30, 2002. According to this definition, "a slum is a contiguous settlement, where the inhabitants are characterized as having inadequate housing and basic services" (UN-Habitat, 2003: 10).

Slum settlements constitute inescapable features of the urban landscape in the developing world. They typically comprise squalid, dilapidated and inadequately serviced housing and commensurate structures suffering from different degrees of physical and functional obsolescence. In Africa, a majority of the urban population calls such settlements home. For instance, in Nairobi, Kenya's capital city, 60% of the residents are crowded into slums that occupy only 5% of the city's land mass (UN-Habitat, 2009: 1). Thus, the problems of slum dwellers are not confined to those commensurate with shoddily constructed and/or obsolescing housing structures. Rather, they include issues of relative deprivation especially with respect to access to critical factors of economic production such as land. Hence, while there may be questions concerning how to go about ameliorating slum conditions, there should be no question regarding the need to do so. In fact, there is no quarrel with the moral argument for improving and eventually eradicating slums. The case for ameliorating these conditions is clear and compelling. The objective of improving slum conditions is so crucial that it made its way to the internationally-established list of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Target 7 of the seventh of these goals requires the adoption of measures to assure environmental sustainability with a view to significantly improving the livelihood of at least 100 million slum dwellers world-wide by 2020 (UN.Org, 2014; Worldbank.org, 2014). Yet, unless the factors accounting for the proliferation of slums are well understood, efforts to improve them are unlikely to succeed.

However, it must be noted that the notion of slums remains nebulous. The term's ambiguity is partially a function of the fact that slums vary dramatically in terms of their size, location, physical and demographic composition. Yet, they can be broadly defined to include two main types of settlements. These include informally constructed units of improvised materials on the one hand, and professionally-constructed houses on the other. Settlements in the former category developed with no forethought or formal plan. Those of the latter group qualify as slums because they comprise units suffering from a serious lack of maintenance. The UN-Habitat seminal report on global human settlements, *The Challenge of Slums* (UN-Habitat, 2003), proffers a definition for slums that is useful for analytical purposes. According to this report, slum housing is any residential unit lacking basic amenities. These amenities include but are not limited to access to drinkable water and sanitation services. In addition, they include the absence of basic rights associated with housing such as secured tenure. In general, the UN-Habitat includes under the category of slums any human settlement comprised mainly of housing units that are incapable of meeting one or more of the following basic living conditions (UN-Habitat, 2014a, 2014b):

- Durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions.
- Sufficient living space, which means not more than three people sharing the same room.

- Easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price.
- Access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people.
- Security of tenure that prevents forced evictions.

Despite its broad appeal, this characterization contains a few flaws. One of these flaws has to do with the definition's vagueness. What does it mean to say 'private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people'? Another flaw relates to the characterization's Western bias. In this regard, it ignores the cultural preferences of non-Western societies. For instance, by tying the notion of space-sufficiency to 'not more than three people sharing the same room,' it ignores the fact that some cultures do not consider more than three persons per room as 'overcrowding.' For such cultures, it would be erroneous to consider more than three persons sharing a room as a function of insufficient space rather than a cultural norm. Also, the idea of 'durable housing of a permanent nature ...' has historically possessed a Eurocentric bias throughout Africa during and subsequent to the colonial era (Njoh, 2013). This is especially evident in the classification of human settlements comprising earth or mud housing units as slums despite their durable nature. This misleading classification is epitomized by statistics portraying the Sahel region, where such settlements are commonplace, as dominated by slum settlements (see Table 1). Those with first-hand knowledge of this region would agree that improvised buildings of non-durable makeshift materials such as cardboards, twigs, and grass are a rarity. Two main reasons account for this rarity. First, the scarcity of trees and grass makes building in such materials an unreasonable proposition. Second, the extreme cold and hot temperatures of the region negates the possibility of constructing thin walls. Consequently, the very poor adopt the rational option, namely using mud which costs hardly anything, for construction purposes. Apart from its affordability, mud proves exceedingly useful as a building material in the region because of its thermostatic qualities.

Another flaw in the conventional definition of slum is its attempt to incorporate questions of legality. Thus, a human settlement may be classified as a slum simply because it was illegally developed even if the units comprising it were structurally sound, spacious, and adequately serviced. Yet another flaw in the definition is its imprecision especially with respect to its proposed categorization schema. In one of its Feature/Backgrounder papers, the UN-Habitat suggests that slums also differ in terms of the trajectory they may assume (UN-Habitat, 2009). In this case, slums may be either on an upward or downward trajectory. Slums of the former category typically include human settlements containing owner-constructed structures at different stages of development, consolidation and improvement. The latter category often contains structures that at some point were sound but are heading toward physical and functional decay and obsolescence. Such a classification scheme cannot be helpful for analytical purposes since it provides no hard and fast rules regarding cut-off points among the categories. At what point does a building transition from being 'sound' to 'heading toward physical and functional obsolescence'? For the purpose of the present exercise, slums are taken to connote human settlements replete with units that are in contravention of more than fifty percent of local building code requirements.

By some estimates, as many as 863 million people, that is, more than a third (33%) of the urban population in the developing world lived in such settlements in 2012 (UN-Habitat, 2014a, 2014b, para. 2). The same estimates also reveal that most urban dwellers (61.7%) in Africa live in slums. With these statistics, Sub-Saharan Africa earns the dubious reputation of the region with highest proportion of its urban population living in slums. To contextualize

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