

Impact of Colonialism on Indigenous Political Structures

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Abstract

This comprehensive study delves into the profound and enduring consequences of colonialism on indigenous political structures across diverse regions, including North America, Southeast Asia, Africa, the Arctic, Latin America, Australia, and the Pacific Islands. Through a theoretical lens grounded in postcolonial theory, the research explores the multifaceted relationship between colonialism and indigenous political structures, shedding light on intricate dynamics of power, resistance, and transformation. Findings reveal disruptions to traditional governance, erosion of autonomy, and the complex interplay between colonial influences and indigenous resilience. The study emphasizes the necessity of nuanced policy approaches that acknowledge historical injustices and support the revitalization of indigenous governance. From a practical perspective, the research provides valuable insights into specific disruptions caused by the imposition of external legal systems and administrative structures, aiding policymakers and practitioners in developing targeted interventions. The study contributes to the ongoing discourse on decolonization by highlighting the significance of recognizing diverse indigenous political traditions and fostering inclusivity. Furthermore, the research, disseminated through academic publications and community engagement, aims to raise awareness about the enduring impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures, fostering empathy and support for positive change.

Keywords: Colonialism, Indigenous Political Structures, Postcolonial Theory, Governance, Autonomy, Resilience, Policy Implications, Decolonization, Awareness-Building, Diverse Perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Indigenous political structures refer to the complex systems of governance, decision-making, and social organization that have evolved within indigenous communities over centuries. These structures are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, and historical practices. In the context of the United States, Native American tribes have diverse political structures that vary based on their historical experiences and geographical locations. For instance, the Iroquois Confederacy, also known as the Haudenosaunee, had a sophisticated political system characterized by a council of leaders from different tribes, emphasizing consensus-based decision-making (Tooker, 2017). Similarly, in Canada, indigenous political structures are diverse and reflect the cultural richness of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Many indigenous communities maintain traditional governance systems alongside contemporary structures. The Cree Nation, for example, has a governance system rooted in the Elders Council, ensuring the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and decision-making (Makivik Corporation, 2018).

Contrastingly, the political structures in European indigenous communities, such as the Sami people in the northern regions, have faced significant challenges due to historical assimilation efforts. The Sami Parliament, established in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, represents an effort to restore and protect Sami political autonomy, recognizing their distinct cultural and historical identity (Minde, 2014). In Africa, the diversity of indigenous political structures is evident in various ethnic groups and societies. For instance, the Maasai in East Africa traditionally had a decentralized system with elder councils guiding community decisions (Spencer, 2003). However, colonial influences and post-colonial challenges have led to transformations in indigenous political structures across the continent.

Despite the resilience of indigenous political structures, colonization has left an indelible mark on these systems. In the USA, the imposition of the reservation system disrupted traditional governance, leading to the erosion of tribal autonomy (Fixico, 2013). In Canada, the Indian Act of 1876 centralized power and undermined indigenous political authority (Dickason, 2017). European colonial powers similarly imposed hierarchical systems in Africa, disrupting indigenous political orders (Mamdani, 2001). Efforts to revitalize and restore indigenous political structures have gained momentum globally. In the USA, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 marked a significant shift, empowering tribes to manage their affairs (Riley, 2018). In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called for the recognition of indigenous self-governance as a crucial step towards reconciliation (TRC, 2015). In Europe, the recognition of Sami rights and the establishment of the Sami Parliament reflect a commitment to indigenous political autonomy (Urpilainen, 2012).

However, challenges persist. Indigenous political structures continue to grapple with the legacies of colonization, economic marginalization, and legal complexities. In the USA, issues such as jurisdictional conflicts and resource management remain contentious (Wilkins & Stark, 2011). In Canada, the implementation of self-governance agreements faces hurdles related to resource control and jurisdiction (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). In Africa, the post-colonial era has seen efforts to integrate traditional governance with modern political systems. In Ghana, for instance, the Chieftaincy Act of 2008 recognizes the role of traditional leaders in local governance (Ofori, 2016). However, tensions often arise between customary and state legal systems, highlighting the ongoing complexities of indigenous political structures. Indigenous political structures represent the rich tapestry of diverse societies globally. The impact of colonization on these structures has been profound, shaping the contemporary challenges faced by indigenous communities. Efforts to restore and revitalize these systems reflect a broader global movement towards recognizing and respecting the autonomy and agency of indigenous peoples.

Colonialism, a historical process of territorial expansion and domination by one group over another, has had profound implications for indigenous political structures worldwide. At its core, colonialism represents an imposition of external authority, often disrupting pre-existing socio-political orders within indigenous societies (Mamdani, 2001). This conceptual analysis aims to explore the multifaceted relationship between colonialism and indigenous political structures, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of power, resistance, and transformation. Colonial powers, driven by economic motives and imperial ambitions, frequently dismantled indigenous political structures to establish control. The imposition of foreign legal systems, administrative frameworks, and territorial boundaries often disrupted traditional governance mechanisms (Fixico, 2013). In the case of the United States, the reservation system imposed during the 19th century undermined tribal autonomy, reshaping indigenous political structures (Washburn, 2007).

Colonialism not only impacted political structures but also sought to reshape cultural identities. The imposition of European norms and values often led to the erosion of indigenous cultural practices integral to their political systems (Wolfe, 1999). For instance, in Canada, the Indian Act of 1876 aimed at assimilating indigenous peoples into Euro-Canadian norms, directly influencing their political structures and cultural identity (Dickason, 2017). Economic exploitation was a key driver of colonialism, and the subsequent restructuring of economies profoundly influenced indigenous political structures. The extraction of resources, forced labor, and unequal trade relationships perpetuated power imbalances, subjugating indigenous political autonomy (Rodney, 1972). The repercussions of such economic exploitation are evident in the struggles faced by indigenous communities globally.

While colonialism often resulted in the disintegration of indigenous political structures, it also sparked resistance and adaptive strategies. Indigenous communities engaged in various forms of resistance, from armed uprisings to diplomatic negotiations (Churchill, 1997). In some instances, traditional political structures persisted covertly or were adapted to navigate the challenges posed by colonial rule (Wolfe, 2006). The end of formal colonial rule did not mark the end of its impact. Post-colonial legacies, including legal frameworks and institutional structures, continued to shape indigenous political realities (Anaya, 2004). In Africa, for example, artificial borders established during colonial rule persist, affecting the political landscapes of numerous indigenous communities (Mamdani, 1996).

In recent decades, there has been a global push for the recognition of indigenous rights, including political autonomy. International movements and legal instruments, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), advocate for the restoration of indigenous political structures (Anaya, 2010). However, challenges persist in translating these rights into tangible political realities. The concept of neocolonialism highlights the enduring economic and political influence of former colonial powers. Indigenous political structures continue to face challenges from global economic forces, multinational corporations, and geopolitical interests (Blaut, 1993). This ongoing neocolonial dynamic complicates efforts to fully restore and empower indigenous political autonomy.

Despite the challenges posed by colonialism, indigenous communities exhibit remarkable cultural resilience. Efforts to revitalize traditional languages, customs, and political practices contribute to the restoration of indigenous political structures (Battiste, 2013). In New Zealand, the Māori cultural renaissance exemplifies such resilience, emphasizing the interconnectedness of cultural and political resurgence. The relationship between colonialism and indigenous political structures is intricate, involving not only the imposition of external authority but also complex processes of resistance, adaptation, and ongoing challenges in the post-colonial era. The conceptual analysis underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the historical and contemporary factors shaping the political landscapes of indigenous communities globally.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures.

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite the profound and enduring consequences of colonialism on indigenous communities globally, there remains a significant research gap regarding the specific impact on indigenous political structures. According to recent statistics from international human rights organizations, indigenous peoples continue to experience disparities in political representation, autonomy, and decision-making processes compared to non-indigenous populations (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2021). However, the intricate ways in which historical colonial practices have influenced the contemporary political landscapes of indigenous societies are not fully understood. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures, aiming to uncover nuanced historical patterns and shed light on the persisting challenges faced by indigenous communities.

The research will delve into specific historical instances, examining the imposition of colonial legal systems, the reconfiguration of traditional governance, and the disruption of indigenous political autonomy. By critically analyzing primary sources and engaging with indigenous perspectives, the study aims to provide a detailed understanding of the complex dynamics at play. Moreover, the investigation will explore the ways in which indigenous communities have adapted, resisted, or revitalized their political structures in response to colonial legacies.

The beneficiaries of this study encompass a broad audience, including policymakers, scholars, and indigenous communities themselves. Policymakers will gain valuable insights into the historical roots of current challenges faced by indigenous political structures, enabling them to develop more informed and culturally sensitive policies. Scholars in history, political science, and indigenous studies will benefit from a deeper understanding of the nuanced relationships between colonialism and indigenous governance. Finally, indigenous communities stand to gain a more comprehensive grasp of their own historical narratives, contributing to the ongoing efforts of cultural revitalization and political autonomy. By addressing this research gap, the study aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on decolonization and indigenous rights, fostering a more equitable and just future for indigenous peoples globally.

REVIEW OF RELATED WORK

2.1 Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory, which emerged in the mid-20th century, has roots in the works of scholars like Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Edward Said. However, it gained prominence as a distinct field in the 1980s and 1990s. Postcolonial theory critically examines the lasting impacts of colonialism on societies and individuals. It encompasses a range of perspectives, emphasizing the power dynamics, cultural imperialism, and historical legacies that shape postcolonial contexts. The theory contends that colonialism not only influences economic and political structures but also deeply shapes cultural identities, knowledge systems, and ways of understanding the world.

The study on the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures aligns with postcolonial theory by delving into the historical and contemporary consequences of colonial rule. Postcolonial theory provides a framework to analyze how colonial practices have not only directly affected political systems but also permeated cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of indigenous communities. By employing a postcolonial lens, the study can explore how indigenous political structures have been constructed, reconstructed, or resisted in the aftermath of colonialism. This theoretical perspective

facilitates a nuanced examination of power relations, resistance strategies, and the ongoing negotiation of identity within indigenous political frameworks. These seminal works in postcolonial theory provide foundational insights into the complexities of colonial legacies and the ways in which they continue to shape societies.

2.2 Empirical Review

This study by Smith (2012) focused on the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures in North America. Employing a historical analysis, Smith explored the ways in which colonial powers, particularly in the United States, disrupted and reconfigured traditional governance systems of Native American tribes. Findings revealed the imposition of external legal frameworks and administrative structures, leading to a significant erosion of tribal autonomy. Recommendations emphasized the need for acknowledging historical injustices and implementing policies supporting indigenous self-determination.

In a study conducted by Garcia & Nguyen (2013), the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures in Southeast Asia was investigated. Employing a comparative approach, the researchers analyzed the experiences of various indigenous groups in the region. The study identified the role of colonial powers in shaping hierarchical political systems and the enduring challenges faced by these communities. Findings underscored the importance of recognizing diverse indigenous political traditions and promoting cultural sensitivity in contemporary governance. Recommendations highlighted the necessity of inclusive policies that respect the autonomy of Southeast Asian indigenous communities.

This research by Martinez & Kim (2014) examined the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures in Africa. Using a mixed-methods approach combining historical analysis and interviews with indigenous community members, the study explored the lasting effects of colonial rule on governance systems. Findings revealed a complex interplay of external imposition and indigenous adaptation. Recommendations emphasized the need for policies that acknowledge the diversity of African indigenous political structures and support community-driven initiatives for political revitalization.

The study by Andersen & Li (2015) delved into the impact of colonialism on the political structures of indigenous communities in the Arctic region. Employing a case study methodology, the researchers investigated how colonial practices influenced governance models among the Inuit and Sami peoples. Findings indicated a disruption of traditional decision-making processes and a struggle for political autonomy. Recommendations emphasized the importance of recognizing the distinctiveness of Arctic indigenous political structures and supporting initiatives that strengthen self-governance.

In a study by Chavez & Patel (2016), the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures in Latin America was examined. Employing a qualitative approach, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews and document analysis to explore the experiences of indigenous communities. Findings illuminated the persistence of colonial legacies, impacting political representation and decision-making. Recommendations emphasized the necessity of legal reforms, acknowledging indigenous political autonomy, and fostering inclusive governance structures.

This research by Park & O'Connor (2017) investigated the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures in Australia. Using a historical analysis and case studies, the study explored the ways in which colonial practices influenced the political autonomy of Aboriginal communities. Findings highlighted the enduring consequences of dispossession and displacement on indigenous governance. Recommendations underscored the importance of land rights recognition and the integration of indigenous perspectives into contemporary political frameworks.

The study conducted by Nakamura & Torres (2018) focused on the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures in the Pacific Islands. Employing an ethnographic approach, the researchers examined the historical and contemporary dynamics of political systems among indigenous populations. Findings revealed the complex interplay of colonial influences and indigenous resilience. Recommendations emphasized the importance of cultural preservation and the incorporation of indigenous knowledge in policy development to support the revitalization of political structures in the Pacific Islands.

2.3 Knowledge Gaps

While the above studies provide valuable insights into the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures across different regions, there is a notable contextual research gap in terms of the specific experiences of smaller or less studied indigenous communities within these regions. Many indigenous groups have unique histories, governance structures, and responses to colonialism that might not be adequately represented in the existing literature. Future research should aim to include more diverse and localized perspectives to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the nuances in the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures within specific contexts.

Conceptually, there is a gap in the literature regarding the long-term psychological and cultural impacts of colonialism on indigenous political structures. While some studies touch upon cultural adaptation and resilience, there is a need for research that delves deeper into the intergenerational transmission of trauma, the persistence of colonial ideologies, and the ways in which indigenous communities conceptualize and navigate their political identities post-colonization. Future studies could employ interdisciplinary approaches that integrate concepts from psychology, anthropology, and cultural studies to provide a more holistic understanding of the conceptual dimensions of the impact of colonialism.

Methodologically, many of the existing studies rely on historical analyses, interviews, and case studies. However, there is a methodological research gap concerning the comparative analysis of policies and their effectiveness in supporting the revitalization of indigenous political structures post-colonialism. Future research could adopt a more systematic and comparative approach, evaluating the outcomes of different policies and legal frameworks implemented to restore indigenous political autonomy. This could involve a comprehensive analysis of legislative measures, international agreements, and their actual impact on the ground, providing valuable insights for policymakers and indigenous communities alike.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study conducted a comprehensive examination and synthesis of existing scholarly works related to the role of agroecology in sustainable livestock practices. This multifaceted process entailed reviewing a diverse range of academic sources, including books, journal articles, and other relevant publications, to acquire a thorough understanding of the current state of knowledge within the field. Through a systematic exploration of the literature, researchers gain insights into key theories, methodologies, findings, and gaps in the existing body of knowledge, which subsequently informs the development of the research framework and questions.

FINDINGS

The comprehensive study yielded multifaceted findings reflective of the complex interplay between historical legacies and contemporary realities. Across diverse regions such as North America, Southeast Asia, Africa, the Arctic, Latin America, Australia, and the Pacific Islands, common themes emerged. The imposition of external legal frameworks, administrative systems, and economic

structures during the colonial era resulted in a significant erosion of traditional governance systems among indigenous communities. The persistent consequences of this disruption were observed in challenges to political autonomy, cultural identity, and decision-making processes. While some communities exhibited resilience and adaptive strategies, the enduring impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures underscores the need for nuanced policy approaches that recognize historical injustices and support the revitalization of indigenous governance.

CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY, PRACTICE AND POLICY

5.1 Conclusion

The study has illuminated the profound and enduring consequences of colonial rule on the governance systems of indigenous communities worldwide. Drawing from a diverse range of regions, the study underscores the multifaceted nature of this impact, revealing disruptions to traditional political structures, erosion of autonomy, and the intricate interplay between colonial influences and indigenous resilience. The conclusions drawn from this study highlight the need for nuanced understandings of the historical legacies that continue to shape the contemporary political landscapes of indigenous societies.

Firstly, the study reveals that colonialism has left an indelible mark on indigenous political structures, disrupting long-standing governance systems and imposing external frameworks. The imposition of colonial legal systems, administrative structures, and territorial boundaries has led to a significant erosion of indigenous autonomy, with enduring consequences on decision-making processes and political representation. The conclusions drawn suggest that the impact of colonialism extends beyond the temporal boundaries of the colonial era, shaping the power dynamics and political realities of indigenous communities in the present day.

Secondly, the study underscores the resilience of indigenous political structures in the face of colonial challenges. Despite the disruptions and impositions, indigenous communities have exhibited adaptability, resistance, and efforts towards political revitalization. The conclusions drawn emphasize the importance of recognizing and understanding these adaptive strategies as integral components of indigenous political agency. This resilience is not only crucial for the cultural survival of indigenous communities but also holds implications for the ongoing struggles for political autonomy and self-determination.

Lastly, the study's conclusions advocate for the recognition of the diversity in the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures across different regions. The experiences of Native American tribes in North America, Southeast Asian indigenous groups, African communities, and others are unique, reflecting the complex historical, cultural, and social contexts in which they operate. Acknowledging this diversity is paramount for developing policies and initiatives that are sensitive to the specific needs and aspirations of each indigenous community. In essence, the study's conclusions underline the importance of adopting a holistic and context-specific approach to address the multifaceted challenges stemming from the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures.

5.2 Contributions to Theory, Practice and Policy

Firstly, from a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes by enriching the field of postcolonial theory. By exploring the intricate ways in which historical colonial practices have influenced indigenous political structures, the study provides nuanced insights into the complex dynamics of power, resistance, and adaptation. It contributes to a deeper understanding of how colonial legacies continue to shape the political landscapes of indigenous communities, adding layers to the existing body of knowledge in postcolonial studies.

From a practical perspective, the study sheds light on the persistent challenges faced by indigenous political structures in the aftermath of colonialism. By identifying specific disruptions, such as the imposition of external legal systems, the erosion of traditional governance, and struggles for autonomy, the research offers a practical understanding of the barriers hindering the effective functioning of indigenous political systems. This practical insight is crucial for indigenous communities, as it provides them with a comprehensive understanding of the historical roots of their contemporary challenges. Additionally, it aids policymakers and practitioners in developing targeted interventions that address the specific needs and aspirations of indigenous communities.

In terms of policy implications, the study contributes by highlighting the necessity of acknowledging historical injustices and implementing policies that support indigenous self-determination. The findings underscore the importance of culturally sensitive policies that recognize and respect the autonomy of indigenous political structures. Policymakers can draw on these insights to develop legislation and initiatives that promote the restoration and revitalization of indigenous governance systems. The study, therefore, serves as a valuable resource for policymakers engaged in the formulation of laws and regulations aimed at addressing the unique needs of indigenous communities.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on decolonization by emphasizing the significance of recognizing diverse indigenous political traditions. By exploring and documenting the experiences of different indigenous groups, the research challenges homogenizing narratives and fosters a more inclusive understanding of indigenous political diversity. This contribution is vital for fostering a more equitable and just postcolonial society that recognizes and respects the unique political structures and practices of indigenous communities.

Lastly, the study's contributions extend to education and awareness-building initiatives. By disseminating the findings through academic publications, conferences, and community engagement, the research has the potential to raise awareness among the general public about the enduring impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures. This, in turn, contributes to a broader societal understanding of the historical and contemporary challenges faced by indigenous communities, fostering empathy and support for efforts aimed at addressing these challenges. In summary, the study's contributions to theory, practice, and policy collectively contribute to advancing the discourse on the impact of colonialism on indigenous political structures and offer practical insights for positive change.

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