Institutional Patterns of Settler Societies: Hybridised Political Economies and Civil Societies on Parallel and Convergent Paths?

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Abstract

Resource abundance and labour scarcity in temperate Neo-European zones led to the settler developmental pattern, reinforced by capital abundance from the latter 19th Century. Institutional evolution in these societies has exhibited certain parallel and convergent features that can be traced to the hybrid political economies that emerged from the peculiar encounter of metropolitan power, culture, and institutions; settler urban versus frontier dynamics; and indigenous/settler conflict. While the significant differences between the Hispanic, Anglo, and Franco settler societies placed them on parallel rather strongly similar paths, there were significant institutional convergences from the late 19th Century, arising mainly from the peculiar resource/labour nexus. The apparent institutional divergence in the half century after 1930 between Anglo and Hispanic settler societies should be seen in a longer context as aberrant and convergence has since resumed. It is argued that these convergences arose from the fundamental connection between resources and labour that characterises the settler zone.

This paper is a first sketch of an argument to be developed and substantiated more thoroughly. Trenchant constructive criticism is welcome.
Developmental routes to the modern world: on institutional and regulatory change in the World Era

The Neo-European settler societies of the modern era form a definite group due to their origins, demographic and environmental history, indigenous dispossession and marginalisation, and a peculiar land/labour/capital nexus, which together produced a distinctive form of capitalist economy and society. Furthermore, it can be argued that these societies constitute together one of the three great broad paths of economic and social development during the long era of world history that began with the emergence of European geo-political and economic dominance from the late 15th Century. Resource abundance and labour scarcity were the key elements underlying the settler economic and institutional trajectory.

World history began with the process of European outward expansion that eventually tied all the continents together into a single economic, political, social, and biological system (Lloyd, 2005). Additionally, we can say that as well as unification of the globe, the fundamental characteristic of this half millennium of the coming of globalisation is economic and social development. In the ancient and medieval worlds there was no conceptualisation, discussion, or debate about socio-economic development. This idea could only rise to collective consciousness as a consequence of the coming into reality of rapid socio-economic change and that reality began with the twin intermeshed forces of European imperialism, which brought to world consciousness the full complexity and variety of social formations in the world, and of capitalism, which was always co-extensive with European geo-politics. The idea of ‘progress’ was born in Europe out of an awareness of the uneven economic and political state of the world, which was long read as being one of European (and Christian) destiny and later made more concrete as ‘stages of development’. The initially implicit and later explicit concept of ‘stages’ has run right through the last several centuries up to the present. Nevertheless, as misleading and even sometimes pernicious as the linear concepts of progress and stages, and the teleology that they usually imply, may be, the fundamental fact of development in the sense of mastery of nature and the consequent vast increase in material production and consumption, standard of living, health and life expectancy, has been a central theme of the later or modern part of the era. The combination of progressive ideology with force, capital, and science, has forged the global system.
Speaking very broadly, the three main alternative causal processes and routes that economic development has taken since 1500 are technological intensification, labour intensification, and resource extraction. (cf recent debates – Sugihara, Pomeranz, Barbier) These do overlap to some extent and are not simply exclusive to parts of the world but, nevertheless, we can see that these routes are closely associated with Europe, Asia, and the Settler regions, respectively. The European route to development and modernisation derived ultimately from technological and geopolitical competition whereas the East Asian route depended more on labour intensification and wage suppression, still evident in China today. The temperate settler zones, by contrast, with their labour scarcity and natural resource abundance, became by the early-to-mid 19th Century areas of comparatively high wages and organised labour strength, underpinned by resource export wealth and later technological innovation. Outside of these three developmental zones, the labour abundant mestizo, slave, and tropical peasant societies were all comparatively stagnant in the modernisation era. The labour factor is key, then, not only to economic development but to the closely intertwined institutional history of these zones. The co-evolution of institutions deriving from labour scarcity and resource-extraction development is the central subject of this paper.

So we can say that the settler societies have followed a resource-extraction and labour importation route to development. This route came about through processes of conquest, obliteration, settlement, and investment, but such processes were not pre-ordained by the geographical and imperial conditions of the Age of Empire and were not themselves the fundamental causes of the resulting socio-economic formations of these societies by the late 18th century. Contingency played an important role and the settler form did not ‘triumph’ in the temperate zones until the 18th century although having laid foundations in earlier centuries in the Americas and Africa. Alternative trajectories were possible at certain key moments. Not all new world sites of conquest became settler colonies as such, not even all those where the indigenous people were essentially destroyed, such as certain Caribbean islands. In particular, we should see that settler societies were the creations of the contingent intersection of imperial policies, specific political, geographic, and demographic conditions in what became the settler regions, and historical processes and events on the ground. The intersections of these forces produced quite different institutional and socio-economic outcomes in each case. However, notwithstanding this contingency, it is argued in this paper that although the institutional background and local history were crucial determinants of the variations that emerged from somewhat similar geo-demographic conditions, the variations
were not unlimited. The settler societies do form a definite group institutionally over time which sets them apart from other colonial and metropolitan regions. We can see that the settler societies evolved institutionally on parallel and even convergent rather than divergent paths. Why was that? The answer is crucial to understanding these countries and regions and to explaining both divergences and convergences in economic development.

Furthermore, institutional history and analysis should not be concerned with the origins of institutions as such but with the history of institutions as a process of gradual and sometimes rapid institutional evolution and transformation. Institutional history is always an evolutionary process in that nothing emerges de novo but always from a prior existing state or structure. This is true even in conquest societies that come about from the violent imposition of one socio-institutional form on the structure and territory of another. There have been no more extreme or violent examples of such a process than that of the settler conquests of the supposedly ‘empty’ or ‘uncivilised’ or ‘unorganised’ lands of the neo-European settler societies. A great contrast existed between European societies and the hunter-gatherer and rudimentary agricultural societies that they conquered in the temperate zones of the Americas, Australasia, Africa, and elsewhere. The economically ‘undeveloped’ nature of these societies was a crucial determinant of the subsequent, post-conquest history. Nevertheless, the emergent forms of these zones were not ‘creations’ in the sense of Europeans imperialists simply sweeping clear the fields of conquest and creating new societies from virgin soil. The agency of indigenous people was always present in these formations and the settlers themselves came with much old world baggage that they employed in their settlements in structurally determined and ad hoc ways. Context and background are always crucial.

Indeed, settler societies should be understood as hybridisations – the new colonial social structures and institutions that emerged were the product of the historical background of both sides, of their encounter, and adaptation by settlers to the new environment. As with all post-conquest societies, they were evolved institutional systems. That is, the elements of their make-up did not come ‘out of the blue’, as it were, but from the background, the encounter, and the subsequent history. It is not surprising, then, that the settler societies of the Angloworld, the Hispanicworld, the Francophone world, and so on, were significantly different from each other (cf Belich, 2009). But the theme of this paper is that the similarities were more significant than the differences.
Hybrid Political Economies and Institutions

‘Hybridity’ is the appropriate concept here for it draws attention to the process of non-linear synthesis and emergence from quite different ancestries of a new form of institutional arrangement that bears the signs and details of its mixed parentage. The key ideas in all the areas of the social sciences that claim to be dealing with hybridity are about ‘adaptation’, ‘viability’, ‘emergence’ and even ‘dialectic’. Hybridity is taken to be a state or outcome of mixing and blending of hitherto distinct and often very different entities and structures that combine elements from the parental contributors in ways that produce sometimes surprising or divergent but certainly viable new entities, processes, and structures. Viability is essential to the concept and description of cases for without it the new entities and structures would obviously not exist. This is not simply a tautology for viability carries the idea of continuous existence and some degree of autonomous power through time. A hybrid outcome becomes a new practice or structure and so takes on a life of its own with a degree of autonomy in the sense of enabling human agency and structural reproduction. Hybrid outcomes are not simply syncretic entities or systems that simply cobble together features of the parents, like famous mythical chimeras such as centaurs, mermaids and minotaurs. Furthermore, hybrids are not simply articulations, which are usually exchange relationships through which more or less independent societies enter relations of greater or lesser co-dependence. Such articulations might lead to hybridisations but not necessarily, at least in the short run.

Thus for a genuine hybrid to come into being there must be emergent properties which arise from but are not reducible to particular characteristics of the parents. Hybrids are indeed real things with properties and powers of their own which have to be described in their own particularities. Sooner or later, we can surmise, most hybrids cease to be such and become simply new, integral, formations or cultures or production regimes. This, we can say, is one of the fundamental logics of socio-economic history in the sense of the evolutionary process of societalisation in the very long run. The essential point about hybridity is its adaptiveness and agency. These are not metaphorical ideas. ‘Hybridity’ and its associated concepts are descriptive-analytical in force and seem to be necessary to social explanation.

Hybrid political economies, accordingly, are characterised by a degree of segmentation into zones of quite different economic activity that have various connections or little at all with local, national, and global markets. *This is the opposite of a linear stages theory.* Traditional
or customary indigenous production, various mestizo forms, and settler commercial zones all co-exist and overlap to influence each other in a hybrid production regime.

**Figure 1: An example of hybridity: the production system of Van Dieman’s Land c 1820**

In the Van Dieman’s Land case the existence of a local market established by the settler society, a quasi-mestizo segment (bushrangers) on the frontier intersecting between indigenous people and the local state, and the world market for agricultural commodities, allowed this kind of segmentation to emerge with hybrid zones in the overlapping areas. A similar structure emerged in many other places where indigenous populations were marginalised but still with a degree of agency. It is essential to see that there is a single overall regime in such cases and each segment is determined by its place in the regime. The urban/rural/frontier connections are all significant here. Strongly influencing the whole is the settler/metropolitan connection within the emerging and maturing world market system. And of course an evolutionary process towards a general globalisation of all local forms has gone on from the 18th Century as trade has grown. The quasi-autarkic frontier zones of the Americas and Southern Africa, in which there was hoped-for autonomy from the national and metropolitan orbits, have been dissolved by the penetration of trade and capital, a process still going on among indigenous peoples in areas of the settler societies of The Americas, Africa, and Australasia.
In the 21st century some of the settler zones of the world – notably North America and Australasia – are among the most economically and socially developed countries with high incomes per capita, high human development, and stable, transparent democracies. On the other hand, they have legacies of dark histories still to contend with, most particularly regarding settler/indigenous relations and the erosion of the remaining hybrid segments. Of course some other settler zones are not so fortunate in economic, social, political, or indigenous affairs. But this paper contends that the history of institutional development of the settler countries, despite the seeming differences, especially between Hispanic and Anglo countries, shows a pattern of important similarities; and that institutional convergences in recent decades are a ‘rediscovery’, in a sense, of convergences that existed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Deep Structural Similarities of the Settler World

Two fundamental and related facts about settler societies are that, first, they were born of land seizures, disposessions, and marginalisations of indigenous people (Weaver  ) and, second, that they were short of labour power. Through all the previous experience of wars and conquests within the European continent and in near eastern lands since medieval times the conquered people were not swept away, exterminated, obliterated by disease, or marginalised. On the contrary, the peasantries, craftsmen, and traders were incorporated into feudal socio-economic systems that exploited them but in a manner little different from their prior situations. The early modern temperate external conquests, on the other hand, beginning with the Atlantic Islands and spreading to the Caribbean and American mainlands, later to Africa, Australasia, and elsewhere, were of a quite new kind. The combination of conquest, subjugation, marginalisation, enslavement, extermination, and settlement, was of a wholly new order of social transformation. European conquests in Asian tropical regions of old civilisations and of African tropical zones was also quite different for the local inhabitants remained firmly in place on their traditional lands and engaged in traditional agricultural activities, albeit within new administrative arrangements at the top but not being significantly displaced below. Wholesale land seizures did not occur in these places. Labour was the chief resource in those cases and it had to be kept on the land and in productive activity that could be taxed and exploited. In the settler zones, on the other hand, the land was seized and ‘cleared’ almost completely for it was the greatest resource available and the one which the conquerors and the settlers who followed were most seeking (cf Weaver 2003). Thus a
divergence soon occurred between two types of seized regions – those tropical zones where coerced labour was needed in large quantities to produce the highly regulated exotic plantation commodities in greatest demand in Europe; and those temperate zones where the land/labour ratio was the opposite – abundant land and scarce labour that could not easily be controlled because of the technological/regulatory system of resource extraction that naturally emerged in the great forest and grasslands of these regions. The latter form – the settler form – emerged under these conditions of initial land abundance and labour shortage and later capital abundance in a world of rapidly increasing demand for the temperate commodities – such as furs, fish, meat, grain, wool, milk, and cotton – that Europe could no longer fully supply (if ever) from its own land. This settler zone, hitherto so unexplored, also became the great supplier of strategic raw materials such as animal oil and precious metals, once European industrialisation began.

Thus the particular intersection of the natural conditions of the temperate zones, immigrant labour supply, international capital, and the geopolitical and cultural background of metropoles, brought forth in the settler domains a particular kind of settlement pattern and institutional organisation that has several key features common to all the main cases of North America, Southern South America, Australasia, and to a lesser extent in other regions in Africa and Asia.

First, there is the settlement pattern that arose from the land grab and dispossession/marginalisation of the indigenous people, in which imperial authorities attempted to control access to new land but largely failed and so effectively created open frontiers in which the indigenes were the losers. The conflict between bureaucratic restrictions on settlement and frontier expansion was a constant theme through all these lands.¹ And sometimes the frontiers produced atavistic socio-political movements that local states sought to control. Second, the issue of labour supply and control was ever present in the minds of colonial authorities and various solutions were tried at various times, all culminating in large-scale immigration. Third, the empowerment of colonists vis-à-vis colonial authorities and metropolitan authorities opened the way for political independence and enfranchisement in formal and informal ways. Here the issue of liberalism and its institutional expressions

¹ An interesting example was the abortive Regulator Revolt in North Carolina in 1771 in which small farmers and squatters on the piedmont frontier rebelled against the colonial authority, based on the coastal plain, which had attempted to impose tighter colonial power.
became a central theme in various forms. The resource abundance and large-scale capital and immigrant inflow in the 19th Century reinforced these patterns. Liberalism and democracy in turn opened the way for labour and small farmer political movements and thus social democracy. (More on this below)

Second, was the fundamental characteristic of labour scarcity in the settler zones, then, compared especially with mestizo, slave, and peasant tropical colonial zones, drove the institutional developments from the 18th Century into the 19th Century and later. A discourse about labour scarcity in the New World began with Adam Smith and was further emphasised by Wakefield, Marx, and others in the 19th Century. Assisting free immigration became a major (perhaps the most important) policy issue from the 1830s in Australia and Canada and New Zealand and Argentina a little later. The general issue of labour supply and its various forms has continued to be a central policy issue in all settler societies ever since. The institutionalisation of labour supply and organisation and the resulting political policies and conflicts is a constant theme in the settler societies from the late 19th Century. These issues played out differently in each case, depending in part on the inheritance of institutions from the founding era. In Argentina, for example, the inheritance of a powerful rural atavistic oligarchy of large landowners, who traced their power to the nexus between the Spanish imperial system and frontier wars that dispossessed the Indigenous people, locked into place a system of sharecropping, small renters, and semi-servile estate workers in rural areas that prevented a family farming development. Immigrants had to stay in the cities and thus became available as an urban workforce that became organised as a social movement with a liberalising ideology. In Australia, on the other hand, the partial defeat of the landed oligarchy (the ‘squatocracy’) by liberal urban forces and the opening of rural areas to family farmers, combined with an immigrant labour inflow to those cities, also led to a liberalisation and a social democratic movement by the late 19th century that combined rural and urban working class interests.

Third, the rise in power and progressiveness of local states under the prompting and even control by collective mass movements became a feature of the settler zones in advance of the European heartland. 2 A particular evolutionary pattern of institutionalisation evolved, then,

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2 The exception within Europe that proves the rule, as it were, of the only zone that experienced a similar trajectory was the Nordic region where a resource abundance/labour scarcity/industrial and institutional
growing out of these key features. A central plank of this institutional structure by the late 19th Century was an early form of social democratic protectionism and welfarism in several places. In other words, an early form of what we would now call ‘a socio-economic developmental state’ emerged in several places in the settler world before World War One, considerably in advance of its development in Europe from the late 1930s. That this occurred ‘on the periphery’, as it were seems significant and is attributable, it seems, to the power of labour movements in their various wage worker and small farmer forms, whose roots lay in earlier developments.

Land, Animals, and Labour Control – Dynamics of Towns and Frontiers

Neo-European colonies as imperial projects began in most places as urban centres of trade and administration that served various interests such as imperial geo-political strategy, state and private plunder, economic adventurism, and religious utopianism. The combination of institutional ‘transplants’ and innovative hybrids were present from the beginning and these ‘foundational’ moments remained powerfully influential ever since. From these urban centres the hinterlands were soon brought under degrees of influence and control. The strength and scale of indigenous cultures and populations and the natural conditions of resource extraction and agricultural production then became crucial. In the temperate areas that became the settler zones the land was ‘grabbed’ by state authorities and the indigenes were quickly or eventually displaced by violence and disease. Ownership of the vast land resource and its native and feral animals soon became, and long remained, a chief question, along with labour supply and control, in the emergent political economies of these zones. The contest over very valuable resources on frontiers, such as beaver furs, deer skins, seals, whales, feral cattle and other species, and alluvial metals, was also in part a labour question for the capacity to operate as privateers conflicted with the desire of large landowners and capitalists to exploit the labour power of semi-coerced or waged workers to undertake these activities.

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3 Hartz’s argument about this has continued to resonate as a principle in the sense of the power of the foundations of Neo-European zones to remain influential over long periods of time.

4 The long and bloody history of settler-indigenous conflict varied a good deal from place to place. In the early years some indigenous societies succeeded for quite some time, such as in the Great Lakes region, the Argentine pampas, the Chilean south, New Zealand, and Fiji, in resisting and/or accommodating to settler incursions.
Thus the twin institutional dynamics of official urbanisation and unofficial dispersal marked the early history of these regions. Land tenure systems reflected the relationships between these conflicting dynamics and the metropolitan-derived importation of formal legal systems. The contingency of the history was evident everywhere for the variations reflected local forces as well as imperial power. Locally, the particular resource-endowment of land, climate, and commercially exploitable species, especially animals, were important factors. Apart from beaver furs in the 16th-17th Centuries and bison for domestic consumption in the later 19th Century North America provided no great animal resource. Feral cattle on the South American pampas, on the other hand, became the foundation for a dynamic hybrid development that in turn strongly influences the urban/frontier/indigenous dynamic. Great wealth accrued to estancias from this exportable resource. Seals and whales in Australia provided a rich resource for capital formation in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and the vast sheep flocks of squatters enriched the pastoral oligarchy through the 19th Century. These frontier activities all raised the issue of labour supply and control and prompted various unsuccessful attempts to chain labour to frontier production processes. As the animal stocks declined and control of soil became the focus attempts to chain labour to the soil also failed as in the notable case of Australian convictism and Chinese indentured labourers in the pastoral industry. Temperate cropping and pastoralism, unlike tropical plantation agriculture, proved more or less unsuitable to coerced labour and so free wage labour and family labour became the norm. Southern South America was a partial exception for there the power of landed elites with their quasi-feudal labour control were not defeated and much of the labour remained semi-servile as gauchos and tenants. Here the inherited land tenure system was crucial.

Thus certain settler zones (along with the Nordic region) epitomise the resource extraction/labour scarcity route to economic development. Far from being a curse, natural resource endowments, under certain key institutional (including geopolitical) and economic conditions, were a blessing that brought lasting prosperity and a diversified modern economy. Not all resource exporting economies have been so successful with many countries in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries experiencing a cursed outcome from resource wealth. Socio-economic and political distortion and stagnation have been common and some settler zones have not had a happy history in this regard. Nevertheless, the differences between the settler zones is far less than sometimes believed. What were the conditions that enabled the transformation from a resource-based export economy into an industrial, diversified and
liberal society (in most cases) in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries? Some of these have already been mentioned – wealth and capital generated from resource abundance plus later capital inflow due to high rates of return, labour scarcity resulting in labour ‘liberation’ which in turn led to mass social movements for higher wages and political rights, the industrial protectionism that grew out of pressure from ‘liberated’ labour.

The Influence of Liberalism, Democracy, Welfarism

The decline of imperial power and rise of local political forces, in the context of the land/labour/urban dynamic identified above, opened in the 19th Century a window of possibility for Liberalism in a manner not possible in the Old World or in other zones of the world system by the same time, except in the Nordic region. Although Liberalism and Constitutionalism did not become completely entrenched everywhere in the Settler zone, as later developments revealed, it did become entrenched before elsewhere in the world in the Anglo settler societies. Associated with Liberalism and Democracy was the early development of demands for state welfare and early systems emerged in several settler societies by the late 19th and early 20th centuries as world’s first developments. From the 1930s the South American region experienced a severe erosion of the Liberalism/Democracy/Welfarism development path, arguably because of the impact of the Great Depression, partial collapse of the world trading system, and emergence of metropolitan-based trading blocs that adversely effected Latin America, such that authoritarianism re-emerged and could not be vanquished for a half a century. Since then, however, southern South America has been able to re-converge institutionally on the ‘standard’ settler (or post-settler) model of a weak form of social democracy that it had become associated with in the early 20th Century. This seems to be a remarkable development in the light of preceding decades and reveals, it could be argued, the deeper political culture inherent within South America as much as in most of the Anglo settler societies. That culture, springing from the ‘liberation’ of labour and the earlier national liberation movements for independence, is egalitarian in essence and founded on the power of labour in a labour-scarce environment.

Egalitarianism and Female Suffrage
Many parts of the Anglo settler regions saw a remarkable development of female suffrage in the late 19th Century, well ahead of other parts of the world. The only comparable country was Finland (1906), and a little later other Nordic countries followed, which supports the contention of Settler-Nordic convergence due to the peculiar land/labour/capital nexus of these zones. It could be argued that the egalitarian impulse of settler societies, particularly strong in the Anglo countries, is fundamentally responsible for this. The achievement of equality and democracy, after all, cannot be said to have occurred without female emancipation.

**Regimes of Hybrid Capitalist Development**

Finally, we return to the issue of hybridity and its role in the socio-economic and politico-economic history of the settler societies. It is essential to reiterate a point made earlier: we should always understand these societies as being complex articulated structures of segments that sprang ultimately from the special conditions of their foundations as both invasion/resistance and metropolitan/frontier societies. And these societies were rich in resources from the perspective of the world market but lacking in labour to exploit them in the ways that were possible elsewhere in the world. These two dynamics of settlement and economic development produced a peculiar institutional pattern as the settler model reached its fullest expression through flows of labour, capital, and commodities in the world market of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The hybrid settler societies were able to articulate to the world market in a highly successful way to produce a third broad route to socio-economic development, one characterised by, among other things, a more or less successful transition to wealthy, egalitarian, and diverse social formations on the foundation of resource-led industrialisation. Now southern South America is showing that it too is converging once more on this institutional and economic model.

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5 New Zealand 1892 and South Australia 1893 are the first female suffrage countries.
Bibliography


