

Can the North-South problem be explained by Montesquieu's theory of climate?

Inequality is one of the biggest problems of the modern world (Wike 2013). People are bothered not only about inequality within the society (and a growing gap between rich and poor) but also about inequalities between different societies. European and North American countries are way more developed than African or Asian countries. They face waves of migrations while poor countries try to solve numerous problems from internal conflicts to famine. The developed North and underdeveloped South also known as the North-South problem is one of the most popular topics for discussions. There are different explanations of this problem but we were interested *if this problem can be explained with Montesquieu theory of climates*. In this essay we will try to explore this field.

Before we continue, we would like to explain the structure of the essay. We will firstly introduce both the North-South problem and theory of Montesquieu and then we will provide some arguments and counter-arguments answering the question, finally, we will elaborate all stated information and come to the conclusion.

So, let us start with introducing the North-South problem more specifically. According to Thompson by the early 19th century a number of states started to develop faster than others. Technological progress and rapid economic growth as well as military competition that took place in the 19-20th centuries created a base for more economically successful and in some way politically stable systems of the North. The South that mostly consists of countries that at some point of history were colonies (Latin America, Africa, India) lacked both technological and economic growth which ended up in an underdeveloped position in comparison with the North. In the Global South we can see "mixtures of failed states, terrorism, genocide, internal warfare, human rights violations, nuclear proliferation, major power interventions, high population growth, migration pressures, debt crises, respiratory and viral disease incubation, energy source insecurities, humanitarian crises, environmental degradation, and the miseries of poverty and malnutrition" (Reuveny and Thompson 2008, 587–580). Many scholars try to find a solution to this problem. For example, in liberal understanding the North-South problem can be solved by "diffusing economic growth" to The South that will end up in the disappearance of the gap and democratization of The South. However, other scholars like Thompson are not so optimistic in their thoughts. They say that this gap cannot be overcome as the economic growth is uneven, they encourage to think of other decisions not just waiting

(Reuveny and Thompson 2008). It is understandable that most people are interested in how to solve the problem but we were interested in why this problem even emerged. The explanations that most scholars give lay in historical or economical dimensions. But are there other explanations?

The idea that climate influences people has been expressed for a long time. The famous French enlightenment philosopher Charles Louis de Montesquieu (1689-1755) tried to develop a scientific base for his climate theory. He was interested in how climate influences people's bodies, behavior and therefore political development. Montesquieu argued that in the cold climate muscles and fibres of people are more flexible, hearts work better and in general the organism of people is more balanced that is why people who live in the Northern climate are brave and strong and treat others with honor. On the contrary, in hot climates organisms are not able to function well and that is why people from the South have opposite characteristics. Montesquieu described different qualities people had because of climate, how people were feeling differently, even love is different for people from North and South (Demircioğlu 2014, 5). He also distinguishes three kinds of government: despotic (based on fear – people fear despot more than enemies and fight for him), monarchical (based on honor – the desire for true glory, passion to accomplish great acts) and republican (based on virtue – the desire to die for sake of republic in democratic one and modesty in aristocratic), the British type of government he separates from this into special type. These types of government are applicable to different climates according to him. Despotic – to hot climates, Monarchies for cold, Republics for cold and moderate (Montesquieu 1977). We can easily understand how the principles of these forms of government correspond with characteristics of people in different climates. Brave and honest Northerners will be honorable in monarchies and virtuous in republics while weak Southerners can only be guided by despot.

And now let us come for arguments. We should also say that “hot” and “cold” climates in works of Montesquieu are almost equivalent to South and North from North-South problem so we will use these terms as synonymous.

Arguments:

Firstly, from the perspective of Montesquieu people from the South are “naturally” lazy because of the hot climate. It makes the economic growth in these countries problematic. According to him, people do not have motivation for labor in this situation and therefore, the regions of the Global South are underdeveloped. On the contrary, Montesquieu thought that

the climate of the North makes people more energetic and willing to work and their desire for independence contributes to it (Clark 2012; Montesquieu 1977, 231–34). In this case the North-South problem is predetermined by climate and people's behavior. The North is more economically successful because of people who want to work and the South is poor because people there are lazy.

Secondly, Montesquieu argued about slave nature of some people. "One must not be surprised that the cowardice of the peoples of hot climates has almost always made them slaves and that the courage of the peoples of cold climates has kept them free. This is an effect that derives from its natural cause" (Montesquieu 1977, 278). As far as we know from history, slavery after the era of slave trade, in the 19th century brought more bad things for economy than good. Slavery was blocking the technological progress as slavery is strongly connected with an agrarian but not industrial labor. Therefore, the technological gap between slave-owning and free-labor societies started to increase in the 19th century. And if we consider the South as a group of slave-owning societies according to the nature of people who live there, it explains the economic and technological lag of these areas. The industrial development which was the most crucial factor of economic success since the Industrial Revolution was either slow or absent in the South.

Finally, according to Montesquieu the despotic power is most applicable to the hot climate areas because of the nature of the population of these areas. And republics and monarchies tend to exist in moderate or cold climates (Montesquieu 1977). And there are some theories about how the form of government influences the economic success of countries. To be clear, the republics that Montesquieu saw were dominantly small trade republics like Venice or Genoa which were prosperous countries with flourishing economies. However, we can interpret Montesquieu in a different way to adopt them for our time and think of what political structure of the state would be in the country if the people there are independent, courageous and will never let make them slaves. These people will not be ruled neither by authoritarian nor by totalitarian leaders, therefore the Northern people should be governed democratically. Daron Acemoglu with James Robinson argue in "Why nations fail" that only democratic countries which can provide plural political institutions achieve sustainable development (Acemoglu 2015). That basically means that North is more economically successful because of democratic type of governing.

And now let's pay attention to counter-arguments:

Firstly, the point about democracy supremacy in terms of economic development is not so convincing. For example, we can provide a theoretical explanation as a base. Let's take

Mancur Olson, he was the famous theoretic of authoritarian rule and he argued that autocracy could be more effective than democracy. He said that democracy is unstable and therefore is not able to guarantee stable economic growth. To advocate his position Mancur uses a metaphor of stationary and roving bandits. According to him, before the state appeared people were constantly suffering from roving bandits until one bandit decided to stay at the specific place. This bandit became a stationary bandit (dictator with despotic power) and from now on he collects money from people and protects them. It is rational for an autocrat to make people richer so they give you more money. Also, autocrats have the ability to plan long-term unlike constantly changing democratic leaders. So using his plan and guided by rationality autocrat will provide stable economic development for the place where he rules (Olson 1993). The despotic power of stationary bandits is usual for hot climates according to the theory of Montesquieu so in this situation the North-South problem cannot be explained by it.

The other problem of Montesquieu theory is that it predetermines people and countries by the climate they are located in. In modern times we would call it pretty racist. If we come back to democracy, we can argue that this system is applicable not only to moderate and cold climates but anywhere in the world. In the famous work of Francis Fukuyama "The End of History and the Last Man" we can see the idea of global democratization. He witnesses the modernization and will of people for self-expression at any point on the globe that can only be satisfied with liberal democracy. Economic development in this situation will be achieved by the triumph of capitalism, the most efficient economic system (unlike command economy). Fukuyama believes that liberal democracy is a universal solution and that every country will finally come to it (Fukuyama 2006). And there are several examples of democracies that were built in hot climates already (Peru, Chile, Uruguay, Botswana, South Africa, Ghana) and there will be many more.

To sum up, we should say that surely it is possible to explain the North-South problem by the theory of Montesquieu. His ideas of climate influence on people might be applied to North-South problem and our arguments proved it. However, the quality of this explanation is disputable. In post-colonial discourse theory of Montesquieu might be considered incorrect as it is rather similar to fascist ideas that people have some natural characteristics that cannot be overcome or form in different way (Jews tend to do this as they are Jews, women tend to act in a specific way because they are women, and so on). Climate and geography definitely played an important role during the early stages of development of the mankind but we

cannot say that the modern economic development or characteristics of people are predetermined by the climate they are situated in. Surely the main opposition to this idea is the liberal philosophy and, in my opinion, it is more applicable in this case. I do really believe that it is possible to create a prosperous country in any point of the world despite the climate that exists there. It is due to the fact that people are not predetermined by the climate they were born or raised in but rather by social factors, cultural norms and their surroundings and all these factors are constantly changing. So, if there is enough political will it is possible to change the political structure of the country and create a flourishing economy and we can see some examples of countries of the hot climate that are in the North group such as Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong and some others. So, in the modern day of the global economy, getting technology is easier than at any time in our history, when almost all countries are interconnected and in trade relations with each other it is possible to overcome natural factors that might have been crucial centuries ago.

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