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What is in the Process? Caribbean and African Trade Policy: Vestiges of the Past, Prospects for the Post-Colonial Development Agenda

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Abstract

Africa and the Caribbean share a common history of European colonization and imperialism which spanned at least 300 years. Colonialism is the single most significant event in the history of the two regions. The very fabric of Caribbean and African trade policy as we know it was built around the legacies of their colonial past. It drove their integration into global trade and the nature of their export patterns and trading relationships. Its impact was wide reaching and its legacy persistent. While there are many angles from which to examine the legacies of colonialism, this paper concentrates on exploring how colonial influence persists in trade policy within and across the Caribbean and African sub-regions through a case study of the integration arrangements of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The paper explores the existing very extensive literature, through a systematic review with a twofold objective. First, to identify to what extent vestiges of colonialism still exists in the trade policies of African and Caribbean territories that were once colonies. Second, discuss what gaps may need to be addressed for the contemporary trade policy agenda to play a more active role in driving the post-independence development agenda of the two regions.

Keywords: CARICOM, colonialism, development, ECOWAS, legacies, trade policy

Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established on May 28, 1975 with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos. The Agreement, which could be described as a Customs Union, has 12 member states and consists of a population of 387 million people.¹ In the Northern hemisphere, the Caribbean Community was established on July 5, 1973 with the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas. The agreement has 15 member states and a population of 15 million people.

What do these two agreements that are continents apart have in common? They capture two regions, Africa and the Caribbean, that share a common history of European colonization and imperialism which spanned at least 300 years, from the 15th to 18th centuries. The age of colonization drove both British industrialization, Caribbean and African economic integration into the global economy and fundamentally, the first wave of economic globalization with sugar, in particular, as “origins of modern global trade” (Stack, Ackrill and Bliss 2018). The production of sugar was fundamental to colonial settlement and often initiated the process of establishing a colonial settlement. Through the transatlantic slave trade and a process of triangular trade, colonies across Africa and the Caribbean were linked with colonial empires where slaves and tropical products would be traded between ports in Africa, the Caribbean and Europe.

Colonialism is the most significant event in the historical development of African and Caribbean countries. It has shaped every facet of Caribbean and African societies and its imprint persists in colonial economies through their politics, economy, institutions and cultures (e.g., Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson 2001; Bruhn and Gallego 2012).

This paper examines the persistence of colonial influence through trade policy *vis-à-vis* policy making and implementation. The very fabric of Caribbean and African trade policy as we know it was built around the legacies of their colonial past (Morgan 2021). The nascence of policymaking and implementation capacity at the time of independence prejudiced the paths taken for national development. Former colonies continued the same export sectors to the same export markets, reinforced by trade agreements.

This paper comparatively explores how colonial influence persists in the trade policy formulation and implementation within and across the Caribbean and African sub-regions. It will do so through a case study of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The article draws on the existing body of literature through a systematic review with a twofold objective. First, survey the literature to identify to what extent vestiges of colonialism still exists in the trade policies of African and Caribbean territories that were once colonies. Second, discuss what gaps may need to be addressed for the contemporary trade policy agenda to play a more active role in driving the post-independence development agenda of the two regions.

The paper proceeds as follows, the next section provides a brief overview of the method used to extract and analyse the literature. This is followed by a discussion of the avenues through which the legacies of colonialism persist in the countries' trade policy and a discussion of what may be required for contemporary trade policy to be more responsive to the wider development interests of countries.

Data Collection and Analysis Method

The literature on the impact and legacy of colonialism is quite extensive. It was therefore necessary to approach the extraction and analysis of data from the literature in a systematic manner, being consistently guided by the underlying goal of examining the legacy of colonialism in specific reference to trade policy within Africa and the Caribbean. Four simple steps were followed in this regard. Firstly, a determination was made of search terms based on the research objectives; secondly, the inclusion/exclusion criteria for papers were determined. Thirdly, screening for inclusion was done; and fourthly, full texts for included papers were evaluated to determine content quality.

To be included, studies needed to make particular reference to key terms that included colonialism, the Caribbean, Africa, mercantilism, trade policy frameworks and development, ethnic division, institutions. The main search platforms were Google scholar and JSTOR. Approximately 120 abstracts/ articles were selected based on the key search terms. These were screened to ascertain the relevance of the content to the research topic resulting in a total of about 80 full-text articles being deemed relevant for assessment. Included here were internet-based materials as well as technical reports of international agencies such as UNCTAD, which although not peer-reviewed were deemed satisfactory on the basis of the reputation of the publishing agency. Additional materials were found relevant through backward/forward search of references in papers at the evaluation stage. Approximately 20 additional studies were identified through this means.

The full texts of the included articles were further assessed for eligibility by skimming through the articles to evaluate the treatment of the core issues. After assessment, a total of approximately 24 studies were excluded and some 56 articles

considered for data extraction which was done in accordance with the key search terms and inclusion criteria and structured along the lines of the two key objectives.

Vestiges of the Past

The colonial experience has had an indelible impact on the post-independence development of the Caribbean and Africa (Khadan 2019; Bernards 2020; Austin 2015; Parashar and Schulz 2021). Khadan (2019) speaks to a “colonizer effect” on present day development. However, there are mixed perspectives in the literature on whether the colonial experience has been positive or negative (Khadan 2019; Austin 2015).

Some have argued that European colonization, which involved racial plunder and economic extraction for over 300 years, has resulted in structural underdevelopment (Austin 2015; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2002; Robinson 2017). In his seminal work ‘How Europe Underdeveloped Africa’ for instance, Walter Rodney (1972) presented a poignant perspective on how European slavery, exploitation and imperialism reversed economic fortunes in Africa. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Falola, and Morgan (2018) reference the “structural, systemic, cultural, discursive and epistemological pattern of domination and exploitation” that emerged with colonialism and that still persists.

Those who point to heterogeneous impacts of colonialism such as Heldring and Robinson (2012) and Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2001, 2002) hold this view on account of the multiple channels through which colonialism has impacted former colonies. They also point to the fact that there are post-colonial successes such as Ghana and Botswana and countries that have not been colonized such as China, Iran, Japan, Nepal and Thailand, amongst others for which there is a great deal of variation in development outcomes (Heldring and Robinson 2012; Acemoglu 2002, 2017).

Those who take the stance that colonialism has had a positive impact reference among other things, investment in infrastructure, trade, education and health, dissemination of technological knowledge, and seeds sown to pave the way for the emergence of democratic institutions and systems of government (Mpembwa 2024).

Overwhelmingly however, the literature points to a legacy that has led to underdevelopment and economic inequality (Acemoglu 2017; Parashar and Schulz 2021; Michalopoulos, and Papaioannou 2020). In the words of McQuade (2017) “It takes a highly selective misreading of the evidence to claim that colonialism was anything other than a humanitarian disaster for most of the colonized.”

This following section attempts to identify how the colonial influence persists in trade policy. The very fabric of Caribbean and African Trade policy as we know it was

built around the legacies of their colonial past (Morgan 2021). This is evident in several defining features of Caribbean/ African trade as discussed in turn below:

- *Production and economic structures*

Both African and Caribbean countries relied substantially on monocrop plantation systems during colonial periods for the production of tropical crops such as sugar, bananas and cocoa for which the regions were naturally endowed. These plantation systems were the primary basis for British extraction from colonies (Kodjo-Granvaux 2024) (Kehoe et al 2016). They had a defining impact on the economic structure of colonies during and post-independence (Khadan 2019). For the most part, economic and production structures remained narrowly defined around these core industries. For instance, sugar provided as much as 20% of Guyana's GDP during the 1970s (Rakotoarisoa and Chang 2017) and bananas provided as much as 20% of the GDP of the Windward Islands during the 1990s (Mlachila, Cashin and Haines 2010). Post colonialism, these sectors continued to be large contributors to GDP but except for the beverages industry, have not created linkages that fostered value addition and broad based diversification. Therefore, production and economic structures continued to be narrow. The geophysical location of economic activities was also a defining and persistent feature of colonialism in some territories (Khadan 2019; Khemraj 2015). For instance, Khemraj (2015) notes that during the 1700s Dutch settlers moved from inland settlements to the low coastal plains in Guyana. Consequently, industries and populations have emerged and remain significantly located along this area. However, this now poses challenges *viz* climate change as the coastal plains lie below sea level.

- *Export patterns*

African and Caribbean countries were integrated into global trade based on existing comparative advantage in tropical products and primarily for those under monocrop production systems. Exports for countries where there existed plantations was therefore heavily dependent on these crops; sugar for the Caribbean and Africa, Banana for the Leeward Islands and cotton and cocoa for Africa. Many countries maintained this pattern of trade for significant periods post colonialism and some still have heavy reliance on such products in their export baskets. For instance, countries such as Burkina Faso, Benin, Mali and Togo continue to export cotton as a major crop; Ghana, Ivory Coast and Togo continue to export coffee and cocoa. Generally, there is still significant exportation of tropical and primary products, even if these did not operate on the basis of plantation type production systems. For instance, Burkina Faso, Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo export significant amounts of agricultural products: fruits and nuts, oil seeds, fish and livestock; Guinea-Bissau

exports fish; and Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo export mineral products and precious metals in relatively large quantities.

Some countries have been able to develop new industries due to new resource discoveries or successful diversification strategies. For instance, countries such as the eastern Caribbean and the non-English Caribbean, Cape Verde and Senegal have diversified into services. Nigeria and Guyana have discovered oil. Nigeria also produces fertilisers, cement, beverages and armoured vehicles.

For the most part, export baskets remain commodity dependent, with products that reflect low technology and economic complexity and poor linkages (Constantine and Khemraj 2019). Several empirical studies point to the constraining impact of such export structures on growth. See for instance Hussain (1999) for African and East Asian countries. Structuralists had pointed to declining terms of trade (Singer 1950), low wages and weak inter-sectoral linkages (Prebisch 1950) associated with primary products.

- *Relative importance of European trading partners in trade with the world*

Related to the pattern of export products, is the nature of the relative importance of the markets that those products were being exported to in total trade. Because African and Caribbean colonies were exporting mainly primary products to former colonial powers, given the significance of those products in their export baskets, those countries became leading trading partners to former colonies. They were the main destination markets for exports and key import markets primarily for value-added products. For instance, Europe has consistently been among the leading trading partners for both regions. In 2020, Europe was CARIFORUM's² second largest export market with US\$2.8 billion worth of goods exported (Braithwaite 2022). For Africa, Europe accounted for as much as 40% of total trade up to 2000 (Graff 2023). In recent times, both regions have been able to expand their own intra-regional trade as well as trade with emerging markets such as China, India and the United Arab Emirates.

- *Role of regional agreements in external market access, in driving integration interests and in managing development aspirations*

Colonialism helped to drive regional integration and as a legacy, colonialism has shaped regional relations between colonies as a block and colonizers, as well as the role of integration in achieving the development aspirations of regions in Africa and the Caribbean.

Firstly, colonialism had both an indirect and informal impact on regional integration, as well as a formal impact (Schields 2021; Funicane 2018). During colonial periods the countries were naturally netted together as a result of trade ports. Integration among countries was further shaped through a network of interaction among merchants, sailors and pirates that emerged under various empires. In the Caribbean, these had a constructive impact on trade in goods (Funicane 2018).

Post colonialism however, the regions' formal interest in regional integration was reactive to regional integration efforts in former colonial powers. All former colonies are now part of some regional arrangement. The drive towards regional integration was on account of their development aspirations to improve standards of living and position export industries to be more competitive in the global market space. However, the external influence of regional integration efforts in former colonial powers was also very influential. Europe moved progressively towards integration and many former colonies that were trading sugar and other tropical products were concerned about the potential for trade diversion and therefore responded with integration efforts of their own (DaSilva-Glasgow and Bynoe 2016).

Secondly, trade and development agreements between former colonies and colonizers helped to sustain their bilateral trade. Trade agreements such as the Yaoundé trade agreements, the Lomé commercial conventions and Cotonou Agreement granted preferential access and protectionism to former colonies from competition in former colonizers' markets (Stack, Ackrill and Bliss 2018; Khadan 2019; Bernards 2020). However, some thinkers have questioned whether these agreements were developed to safeguard the interests of former colonies or for Europe's own self-interest. For instance, Thomas (2005) points to sustaining supply of a strategic tropical product as the basis for the creation of sugar protocols with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Access to sugar did provide the impetus for development of the rum industry in the UK. Mitchell (2004) also links the emergence of the beet industry in Europe during the 19th century to rebellion in the colonies and consequent disruption of sugar supplies. The emergence of London as a leading financial centre is also a corollary of colonialism. Langan (2017) also saw tariff liberalization under the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) as being premature and as reflecting EU ladder-kicking.

The agreements between the EU and former colonies were tenuous to begin with because they encouraged concentration of economic activities on one product with access to protected markets. Subsequent crises such as the WTO challenge against trade policy relating to bananas and the erosion of preferential access following EU sugar sector reforms would confirm the tenuous nature of such agreements (Laurent 2005; Kleiman 2007).

Noteworthy, is that trade agreements have evolved into wider development agreements such as the Cotonou development accord between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions, and more recently, the Samoa Agreement (MFAIC Guyana 2024).

Thirdly, regional integration has become a key trade policy architecture to drive development aspirations. Most of the countries of the Anglophone Caribbean formulate and implement trade policies within the framework of CARICOM through mechanisms such as the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED). Integration is a platform to manage external trade policy, multilaterally through the WTO and bilaterally with leading trading partners such as the US. For instance, through the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), the US provides duty-free access to most products of CARICOM member states into the US market. CARICOM has also created free trade agreements (FTAs) with Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Collectively, the region also negotiated the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between CARIFORUM and the European Union (EU) and the recent Samoa Agreement to replace the Cotonou development accord. At the time of its negotiation the EPA was seen as a monumental feat because it represented the region's first reciprocal trade agreement with developed country partners which was also a comprehensive development agreement covering issues beyond trade in goods. The agreement was meant to reflect Europe's continued interest in upholding its commitment to shoulder the development of its former colonies as reflected by the preceding Lomé Conventions (1975-1990) and the Cotonou Agreement (1990 to 2020), but on the basis of a WTO- compatible arrangement.

- *Ethnic and social fractures and the impact on growth and development*

Colonialism and the persistence of the plantation system created ethnic and social fractures that have impacted economic growth and development outcomes in Africa and the Caribbean. Colonialism shaped the ethnic composition of the regions, in the Caribbean, in particular, through both slavery and indentureship. It further created racial hierarchies and bolstered white elitism that contributed to egalitarian societies that persisted post emancipation in both regions (Parashar and Schulz 2021).

Virulent obstacles to development emerge as a result of ethnic fractures. For instance, Beckford (1972) had argued that institutionalized mechanisms emanating from colonial economy and society have contributed to the impoverishment of the black majority in the Caribbean. In Africa, racial hierarchies led to civil strife and genocides. In the Caribbean, racial hierarchies have influenced social relations, political organization, the business culture; and institutional mechanisms (Khadan 2019;

Bernards 2020; Beckford 1972; Edwards 2021, Ellis 2019). Constantine (2020) also alludes to the pervasive impact on income inequality. Edwards (2021) speaks to the competition for resources among racial groups and the overt and covert power struggles that have been evident in some Caribbean states.

On the matter of the impact on the political process, Banerjee and Pande (2007) and Gerarad (2007) show that ethnic voting leads to lower-quality politicians and that ethnic politics may allow leaders to extract more from the state.

Ethnic fractionalization has also shaped the policy formulation process. Easterly and Levine (1997) documented this in the case of Africa. Some studies emphasize the inefficiencies arising in policy formulation from ethnic divisions, for example because of diverging preferences for the provision of certain public goods (Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999) (Khadan 2019).

- *Institutions and their impact on policymaking*

Colonial institutional legacies have carried over into the post-independence era in African and Caribbean states with influences on institutions, governance and policymaking processes (Acemoglu 2017, Fasakin 2021). Young (1994, 283) had opined that “although we commonly described the independent polities as ‘new states,’ in reality they were successors to the colonial regime, inheriting its structures, its quotidian routines and practices, and its more hidden normative theories of governance.” According to Bernards (2020) most former colonies adopted the Westminster model of government which affects the policymaking process.

Khadan (2019) for instance, had referenced the Caribbean’s poor performance as it relates to *public-regardedness* in policymaking, which essentially captures public interest in the policy making process or policies developed to benefit special interest groups. Poor *public-regardedness* is relevant to trade where private sector participation should be integral in shaping policies and consultative mechanisms should function effectively to ensure consistent flow of information across parties critical to the policy formulation/implementation process. In the case of Guyana for instance, the policymaking process affects trade through reforms of laws that will benefit trade, and slow implementation of laws affecting imports such as anti-dumping laws or laws to regulate the services sector (see for instance DaSilva-Glasgow 2019).

Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2001) in explaining the reason for the persistence of colonial institutional legacies in post-independent states point to the cost to change institutions; as well interest by elites in exploiting extractive systems rather than incurring the cost of introducing better institutions. For instance, Reno (1995) (in Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson 2001) note that Sierra Leone continued to use the strategies of the British to solidify political control and extract resources from society.

Constantine and Khemraj (2019) also spoke to the interest of those with significant ownership of assets and power in preserving the *status quo* as it relates to economic structures and the distribution of resources.

- ***Development aid***

One legacy of colonialism is the impact on the structure, origin and recipient sectors for bilateral aid; and the trade negotiations agenda as well as the stance of negotiators towards aid negotiations. Aid for the most part, follows a linear path, flowing from North to South. Most of the global aid providers are developed countries that make up the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). These are countries that have committed approximately 0.3% of their GDP to providing aid to the developing world (DaSilva-Glasgow and Pile 2023, 2024). Most of the DAC members are also former colonial powers. Therefore, most of the multilateral aid to African and Caribbean countries comes from former colonial powers. Aid is a form of soft power. Several authors (Alesina and Dollar 2000; Berthélemy and Tichit 2004; Fuchs, Dreher and Nunnenkamp 2014; Becker 2020) posit the view that aid from colonial powers “serves for maintaining political influence and economic relationships that developed during colonial times”. Therefore, according to Becker (2020) bilateral aid sustains trade links with former colonizers and in a way sustains their dependence on these markets. Noteworthy, however, is the increasing role of emerging markets such as China and India in providing aid to the global South (DaSilva-Glasgow and Pile 2023, 2024). Some view the provision of aid by these countries as a challenge to the conventional aid architecture and also offering more flexibility to aid recipients.

Aid also drives the trade negotiations agenda and influences policy priorities in recipient countries (Becker 2020). Much of the trade negotiations agenda in Africa and the Caribbean has been dedicated to sustaining development agreements with Europe. The Organisation of the Secretariat of the African, Caribbean and Pacific states is a creature of Aid and was created to sustain dialogue with the EU towards sustaining market access in the EU and sustaining Europe’s interest in development support for the regions.

More recently Aid has formed part of the call for reparatory justice for Europe’s lasting impacts on underdevelopment in Africa and the Caribbean and the Caribbean has emerged as the epicenter of the global reparatory justice movement (Sherman- Peter 2022).

- ***Weaknesses in financial markets***

Generally, there have been concerns about the availability of financial services in the global south. These relate to the state of development of financial systems, uneven

development across countries and concerns regarding financial inclusion. Legacies of colonialism has been identified as an explanatory factor in all aspects of these concerns. Bernards (2020) points to the fact there has been uneven development of financial systems within and among former colonies and that this same level of unevenness carries through in contemporary financial systems. Those territories that housed commercial centres for colonizers (such as South Africa and Kenya) today have much broader and deeper financial sectors compared to other countries. There is also embedded legacies of colonialism *vis-à-vis* practices and infrastructure in financial markets that contribute to financial exclusion. Bernards (2020) for instance, notes that the averseness of the contemporary banking system to lending to small peasants who are viewed as risky, was observable during colonial periods as the configuration of the banking system during colonialism favoured the urban sector and was dominated by expatriate banks. The author notes that these legacies are often not identified and emphasized by international institutions seeking to remove distortions in financial markets in developing countries and such, efforts to reform financial markets in developing countries have not been fully successful.

Prospects for the Post-Colonial Development Agenda

Colonizers were clearly driven by wider development interests related largely to supporting industrialization efforts. Colonialism was therefore an economic (mercantilist) prescription to support industrialization by providing access to goods and labour (first through slavery and then through indentured servitude) (Hippert 2018; Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson 2005).

In like manner, trade policy in CARICOM and Africa must be driven by the wider development aspirations of the two regions. UNCTAD (2018) had posited that “trade policy does not exist solely to achieve some abstract concept such as a positive trade balance, but should instead be aimed at promoting the development of countries and advancing the wellbeing of their people.” This necessitates first ascertaining development interests and priorities and ensuring that trade policy is aligned towards assisting in achieving those priorities.

Both regions have been clear in expressing their development interests which is well articulated in their framework agreements, the Treaty of Chaguaramas (1973, 2001) in the case of CARICOM and the Treaty of Lagos (1975, 1993) in the case of ECOWAS. Both regions have indicated interest in raising standards of living and promoting economic development. Both regions view regional integration as an important economic prescription to achieving wider development interests. ECOWAS makes explicit reference to collective self-sufficiency and economic stability.

CARICOM as a smaller block, has expressed interest in improving competitiveness and facilitating effective insertion into global markets by circumventing the limitations of size through regional cooperation to create economies of scale and propel industrialization.

Both regions find themselves at a place where fundamentally they need to drive productivity and competitiveness, achieve diversification in production and exports and provide higher standards of living. To achieve these and other development goals, trade policy needs to play its part. In particular, trade policy should aim to:

- identify and dismantle the range of barriers that countries face to trade. This must include behind the border impediments to competitiveness, barriers to exporting, physical and policy barriers erected in foreign markets, barriers to intra-regional trade and barriers to importing from the rest of the world (UNCTAD 2018). Much progress has been made on reducing tariff barriers at all levels, multilaterally, regionally and bilaterally but particularly on intra-regional trade. Both CARICOM and ECOWAS as Customs Unions, operate under a fully harmonized tariff schedule. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will create a wider block and will eliminate tariffs on 90% of goods traded among 52 out of 55 African countries (except Benin, Eritrea and Nigeria). Notwithstanding, barriers must not be viewed through a myopic lens. There are a range of other restrictions to trade. Barriers include restrictions imposed by policies, whether deliberate or inadvertent as a result of the capacity constraints that countries face; administrative and institutional bottlenecks that raise export costs, infrastructure weaknesses, hurdles to linkages between goods and services sectors, political instability and civil unrest (in the case of ECOWAS in particular) and other limitations (DaCosta 2007). Even where market access was guaranteed through trade agreements, the existence of barriers prevented full realization of the benefits of such agreements.
- support diversification of exports away from colonial crops and creation of a more dynamic export sector based on production of higher valued products across all sectors but particularly in priority export sectors, competitive insertion in global markets and fuller participation in global and regional value chains through enhanced domestic competitiveness.
- Support diversification of export markets by improving trade and cooperation links with neighbouring countries, intra-regional partners and emerging markets in the south. Caribbean intra-regional trade and trade with

neighbouring markets in South America has been relatively low but there is much scope to increase such trade once infrastructure barriers are addressed. Both African and Caribbean intra-regional trade has been approximately 20% of their total trade with the world (Nicholls 2019) such trade can also be substantially increased with the right policy investments.

Many emerging markets in the south are experiencing growth. According to Nicholls (2019) “Africa is home to some of the world’s fastest growing economies and according to the United Nations (UN), the world’s youngest population, comprising one fifth of the global youth population (aged 15-24)”. There is scope for increased trade with Africa and other markers such as India where there are cultural ties through both trade in services (through tourism) and goods but this would require improved connectivity with respect to air travel and visa waivers (Nicholls 2019). Ghana signed cooperation agreements with some Caribbean countries to encourage Afro-Caribbean descendants to participate in Ghana’s Year of Return. Some CARICOM countries (Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago) also have a diplomatic presence in some African countries, as well as bilateral investment treaties (BITs) and double taxation agreements (DTAs) with individual African States (Nicholls 2019). There is therefore a foundation already in place from which trade could be supported. The creation of AfCFTA further boosts the prospects for increased CARICOM-Africa trade by providing a platform for more efficient negotiations with the entire region.

- More aggressively address trade in service. Reforms in the services sector in individual countries could be growth enhancing, but trade policy has traditionally serviced the goods trade primarily. Trade policy also needs to address neocolonialism in trade in services as it relates to unequal patterns of trade and barriers to trade (Chan and Patten 2023).
- Be philosophically guided. “Just as no smart traveler would go on a journey without a road map, policymakers in [the trade policy] field are well advised to have a reasoned plan that guides their actions” (UNCTAD 2018). All countries within CARICOM and ECOWAS do not currently have national trade policy frameworks,³ as a result trade policy making has lacked proactivity and has been largely reactive. ECOWAS does have ECOWAS Vision 2050. It would be useful for countries to articulate national or regional Trade Policy Frameworks to provide a coherent and strategic framework to guide their trade policy decisions. According to UNCTAD “A trade policy framework (TPF) offers a structure for the many decisions that a country’s

negotiators, legislators, and litigators must make as they devise and implement policy”. Very importantly, such a framework will allow countries to be able to align their development and trade interests and allow them to be treated as the complementary ends they truly are. DaCosta (2007) had alluded to the importance of building consensus on a country’s future direction as being important for sustaining progress. A trade policy framework that employs a consultative process, as many do, would allow countries to align priorities based on stakeholder perspective, which allows for more inclusion and identification of barriers and resource needs for more developmentally-impactful outcomes.

Conclusion

This article took a nose dive into the extant literature to reflect on the impact of colonialism on trade policy in Africa and the Caribbean through CARICOM and ECOWAS as the instructive lens. No doubt colonialism is the most significant historical experience of the two regions with persistent effects on their contemporary development through multiple channels. The literature on the impact of colonialism is by no stretch of the imagination deficient on this matter. This paper was particularly concerned however, about lasting legacies as it relates to trade policy which are reflected through: *production and economic structures; export patterns; relative importance of European trading partners in each region’s trade with the world; role of regional agreements in external market access, in driving integration interests and in managing development aspirations; ethnic and social fractures; institutions and their impact on policymaking; development aid; and weaknesses in financial markets.*

For years following independence, the industries that existed and the patterns of exports in both CARICOM and ECOWAS members were aligned with the colonial era, aided by trade agreements with colonizers. This alignment unfortunately created a transmission mechanism for crises and dislocations when there were disruptions in the markets of colonizers as was evident with the erosion of preferences for sugar trade or reforms to EU banana trade following a WTO litigation. Many of the countries in the two regions have been able to shift their production structures and expand trade with new markets but legacies of colonialism continue to exist through their fine nuances in structures, processes, institutions, governance and epistemological imprints on culture and social structures. The conversation on how to disrupt those legacies in trade policy formulation and implementation therefore remains relevant.

Trade policy in the post-colonial era must be under toned by a very critical lesson that can be extracted from colonizers during the colonial era, that is, that trade and wider

economic development must have a symbiotic relationship. This realization will aid the disruption process. During colonialism trade and empire went hand in hand with trade providing access to goods to support European industrialization. Similarly, trade must provide opportunities to earn foreign exchange but must similarly strategically provide access to goods and services and technical resources that can support the development interests of the regions. In particular, it is important for policymakers in both regions to:

- identify and dismantle the range of barriers that countries face to trade.
- support diversification of exports towards higher valued products.
- Support diversification of export markets by improving trade and cooperation links with neighbouring countries, intra-regional partners and emerging markets in the south.
- More aggressively address trade in service.
- Be philosophically guided so that the trade and development nexus is never lost in policymaking.

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Endnote

¹ ECOWAS’ membership prior to January 2025 was 15 member states and consisted of a population of 434.4 million people. Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali jointly withdrew their membership from ECOWAS, effective January 29, 2025.

² CARICOM plus the Dominican Republic.

³ In fact, only two CARICOM Countries have TPFs, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago and no ECOWAS member state has a TFP but the following African countries do; Botswana, Zambia, Namibia, Angola.