

Feb 8th, 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM

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Neocolonialism and Globalization: The Dual Phenomena of Exploitation and Underdevelopment
in Modern Africa

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Since the 1960s till date, African independence has been a mirage. Real freedom for African countries has been redefined by the impact of neo-colonialism and globalization. While neo-colonialism simply means indirect hegemonic control of former colonies or developing countries by former European colonizers and Western powers, globalization is the integration of global economy marked by free trade, free flow of capital, and the exploitation of cheaper foreign labor and raw material markets. Under neo-colonialism and the globalized world, though presumed independent, African countries have remained dominated and exploited. Kwame Nkrumah, perhaps one of the most influential African leaders of history, aptly captured the spectacle of neo-colonialism thus: “The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and, thus, its political policy is directed from outside.”¹ African development is also stunted through the weakening and replacement of traditional African cultures with Western or European cultures by the former colonizers and emerging powers by the indoctrination of some trusted “educated” local officials whom served as their puppets. Neo-colonialism and globalization are characterized by economic dominance, cultural appropriation, or indirect political control of the developing nations of Africa by outside powers. This paper will address the challenges imposed by neo-colonialism and globalization on nation-building and development in Africa resulting in economic instability, cultural alienation, and political control, sometimes under the guise of democratization.

One, of many, of the crippling effects neocolonialism pushes onto the developing African nations is economic dependence African nations have with their former colonizers. The role of

¹ Kwame Nkrumah, “Introduction”, *Neocolonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, transcribed by Dominic Tweedie, (London, Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1965)
<https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/nkrumah/neo-colonialism/>

Africa as a global economy, only relies on the continent's ability to produce natural resources. Harbeson and Rothchild have described the relationship Africa has with the world as "a lop-sided dependence on the export of raw materials, and the import of manufactured goods"². This goes to show the undeniable evidence of the exploitation of the African natural resources as well as the hegemonic power of the former colonizer, in turn creating a vicious cycle of selling goods low, then buying them high. This is a way to continue to economically alienate developing African nations. At first, the motives of colonization were to 1) make money and 2) bring "civilization" to the "savagery" in Africa by ushering in the European way of life on people who have their own way of life already established. While, the countries of the world continue to progress, Africa has lagged. The more powerful countries of the West have continued to compete for influence in Africa throughout the Cold War and after, to dominate or to spread their cultural, economic, or political ideologies. After the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR, there was no longer any need for the US and her allies to compete for influence in Africa; later the US stopped providing aid. Leaving the African countries yet again impoverished, dependent, and politically unstable, the US and her allies grew richer; as there was no more competition since the dissolution of the USSR. The crippling effects of the economy in African nations hinder them in development. Simply due to the lack of money, no development can occur. This brutal cycle of underdevelopment and political instability gives rise to domestic tyranny, high debts, and due to both of those, less international aid. However, today we are at a critical point in globalization; China has been investing a lot into Africa and has been increasing trade. Chinese activities may be interpreted in either of two ways. Either they are trying to impose a power relationship onto Africa, or they are

² John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild, *Africa in World Politics: Constructing Political and Economic Order*, (Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 2017), pg. 73

truly trying to help Africa. From what I can see, it appears that the Chinese are creating an African dependency on the money and facade of help being offered by China. The Europeans at first did the same thing. China “was desperate for raw materials and energy to power their growing manufacturing capacity. They put Africa on the globalization map.”³ This was how Europeans also did it when they arrived in Africa; they took the “power” (humans) and the natural resources so that they may be processed. However, after the independence of African nations, there was a foreign power vacuum created as well as the dependency for money and even guidance. They receive money from developed nations, such as the US or USSR, however this money came with strings attached, which makes African nations the most indebted in the world. This is how they are kept at bay and not able to prosper.

Another way neocolonialism and globalization impacts African development is due to the cultural hijacking of African nations, prior to their independence. When the Europeans colonizers came to Africa and tried to “civilize” the native people, they had their own indigenous civilization. Since African culture and civilizations were different from those of Europe, they were dismissed as unworthy by the colonizers. This was certainly a justification for colonization. To “civilize” Africans, the colonizers would take the natives and educate them in the ways of Western culture as well as stripping the selected people of their native culture. One way this was done was through religion. European colonizers justified and used Christianity to divide people and strip them of their own culture. Often, the different Christian denominations would compete on where to be and who would be there for their missions. Which led to the further dividing up of land and people. According to Robert Harms, the rise of Christianity missions in Africa increases in the hopes of

³ Panos Mourdoukoutas, “What is China Doing in Africa?”, *Forbes*, August 4, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/panosmourdoukoutas/2018/08/04/china-is-treating-africa-the-same-way-european-colonists-did/#445b7309298b>

creating and divinizing the African kingdoms. But with Christianity the Western customs also came through, such as the “clothing styles, naming patterns, musical instruments, and burial customs...”⁴. He also goes on to support this position that another way Africans were stripped of their native culture “were Christian, educated, and practiced in European and American ways”⁵. So, to take a person, send them to England or France or Portugal, teach them a “western” language and then teach them in the European fashion just to send them back to Africa and influence the rest is just diabolical. But this is exactly what the colonial powers had in mind. To colonize and completely change the indigenous culture to the culture that they want. And these customs are still around today. Things from a new family structure and language to a psychological enslavement of Africans to feel the need to fit into a Western society. A lecturer in the Adekunle Ajasin University in Nigeria, Dare Arowolo, said this about the current family structure in Nigeria, due to the Christianization: “it sought to impose monogamy and the nuclear family as the norm”⁶ We can still see today the evidence of the lasting influence that the colonies have on their former colonies, other than religion and family structure. We see this still today as the judges and lawyers of many African nations, all former British colonies still wear white powdered wigs and the robes. These cultural remnants of Britain are forms of neocolonialism and to me, pose as a way for Britain to keep their former colonies under some form of power. The judges and lawyers are black, however, the power and influence the British left behind in their colonies is such. But some say that this Commonwealth of Nations is still a form of colonization and I agree. Julius Malema, the leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters says, “Pulling out of the Commonwealth is one of the things we

⁴ Robert Harms, *Africa in Global History*, (New York, W.W. Norton Company, 2018), pg. 383

⁵ Harms, *Africa in*, 383

⁶ Dare Arowolo, “The Effect of Western Civilisation and Culture on Africa”, *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 1 (2010):11, accessed November 17, 2018, <http://onlineresearchjournals.com/aaajoss/art/53.pdf>

need to do, to realise complete sovereignty”⁷ Complete sovereignty has been the goal for developing African nations since their formal independence. However, their independence has only been named that; from this I mean, that they are not completely in and of themselves free. It is a front, but in the background the former colonial powers, and the rest of the world maintain a form of hegemonic power. When it comes to the interactions of people in those countries, it is their cultures that have suffered the most as they continue to live in the culture forced upon them by their old colonizers.

Political influence is another way nation building and development in Africa is impacted is by globalization and neocolonialism. Post-Cold War Africa was a tumultuous environment with varying degrees of support. However, one thing remains; the aid that was there for the Cold War, to buy influence one way or another for a developing African nation, was now not there. Money, though, is not the only element that plays a role in political influence toward African nations, but the relationship with their former colonial powers. For example, during the Cold War, France maintained a tight relationship with its former colonies. In that, France was powerful, but non-aligned as well; France also had strong ties with their former colonies, which means strong influence. Guy Martin, in his book “Africa in World Politics: A Pan-African Perspective” wrote:

“And while all the French-speaking African states nominally belonged to the Non-Aligned Movement, they effectively retained close political, military, and economic ties with France throughout the Cold War. In reality, France was acting in Africa not only in defence of its own national interests, but also as a proxy gendarme of the West. Today, Africa remains the only area of the world where France retains enough power and influence to support its claim to medium-power status in the international system”⁸

⁷ Kylie Kiunguyu, “African Judges Wearing Wigs a Symbol of British Colonialism? Julius Malema Thinks So”, *This is Africa*, August 31, 2018, <https://thisisafrica.me/african-judges-wigs-symbol-of-colonialism/>

⁸ Guy Martin, *Africa in World Politics: A Pan-African Perspective*, (Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, Inc., 2002), 63

This supports the claim, that all the aspects of neocolonialism and globalization are intertwined. From an American perspective, we know that France is clearly an ally of the US and we know that they have been for hundreds of years. So for France to play a part of being “non-aligned” in the Cold War, is funny to me. France was not aligned with the USSR, and they were allied with the US, but they still attempted to maintain a position of non-alignment in Africa. However, in doing so, they also influenced the African states to align themselves with France, ultimately breaking that “non-alignment” thought, especially the French speaking nations. Martin also goes on to write, “A nation cannot be considered ‘non-aligned’ if it has any permanent diplomatic identification with a great power”.⁹ Martin goes on to write about the “non-aligned” African Francophone nations, and how they align with the global powers. This is where it gets a little unclear. Though “non-aligned”, however, they align themselves with a power that was aligned to the West, France. But some of the Francophone African nations, were aligned with the East, either moderately or vehemently. From this confusion of who is aligned with whom and when, it is easy to see how the major powers would quickly get their hands in on a poorer, less developed nation; with this as a proverbial land-grab.

Another branch of the political influence in African nations leading to underdevelopment is the lack of political control. The former colonial powers, are to blame for the roles they played in holding their colonies back, whether it be technological, economical, or militarily, but there is also blame to be placed on African nations themselves. There have been many challenges in the developing nations to answer the question of: who is in charge, and what powers do they hold?. This has been an occurrence due to the power vacuum left behind the colonizers, and a learned way of life, that being an all-powerful, all ruling dictator. Which then leads to the political unrest

⁹Martin, *Africa in...*, 109

and often coups/juntas. In a journal article by Cheryl Hendricks and Naffet Keïta, they argue that many of the political issues faced by developing countries in Africa, politically are: “issues of marginalization, lack of development, pervasive poverty and unemployment, lack of democratization, leadership challenges, the inability to broadcast power or rule beyond the state capital...”¹⁰. I disagree however with their statements of the “lack of democratization” to be an issue; I believe a hybrid government is necessary in the birth of a new country. The people being governed want a democracy, maybe, but they are not used to what a democracy means for them. A national democracy should be eased into, and it should start from the localities first and work their way up. This is to stop the growing of the government too fast, ultimately choking themselves out before they even began. Every nation started out with a hybrid government, where there is one leader with limited power, making all of the decisions until the economy and government make an even keel again. This was evident in the emergency dictators in the Roman Empire, and even the President of the United States. We know that President of the United States of America has power that neither the public, nor Congress can touch. However, after the government is sophisticated enough, one must be able to recognize that and step down from power, in order to usher in democracy. In a book called “Democracy as Culture: Deweyan Pragmatism in a Globalizing World” by Sor-hoon Tan and John Whalen-Bridge, they wrote that “democracy will occur naturally as... engages with other nations”¹¹. To follow this philosophy, then a country must cooperate with other countries, and the only way to do that is to strengthen the economy and then bring democracy in, as it would naturally occur.

¹⁰ Cheryl Hendricks, and Naffet Keïta, “Security Regimes in Africa: Prospects and Challenges” *African Journals Online*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2017), pg. 5.

<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ad/article/view/167092/156529>

¹¹ Sor-Hoon Tan, and John Whalen-Bridge, ed., *Democracy as Culture: Deweyan Pragmatism in a Globalizing World* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008) pg. 71.

Globalization is a concept we often hear today referring mainly to trade and economy; bringing not only positive but negative connotations as well. Positive connotations can refer to the connections made between the nations of the world; negative connotations would include the schism between the countries that are prospering, and those that are not. Slightly differing from neocolonialism, globalization takes mainly an economic toll today. It is a modern form of neocolonialism because it also involves indirect dominations, and there are no more colonies under the direct control of a nation. The cultural and political implications of neocolonialism also apply to globalization due to the fine line between these two concepts and is often hard to differentiate between them in a modern perspective. However, the ways globalization effect modern Africa similar to neocolonialism is the way by which African economies function and are left underdeveloped. Reasons why this is include regional economies of Africa, specifically those Sub-Saharan nations, and the overutilization of the products exported in said nations.

Poor inter-regional economic cooperation and infrastructure has been cited by many experts to be a leading cause in the underdevelopment in Africa. According to the New Partnership for Africa's Development and Coordinating Agency (NEPAD), "Bridging the gap in infrastructure is thus vital for economic advancement and sustainable development. However, this can only be achieved through regional and continental cooperation and solution finding"¹². NEPAD is a newly formed agency of the African Union (AU) to focus on the ushering in of the African Union agenda into this globalized world. Mainly fighting toward the goal of having an improved regional economic relationship between the countries within the AU. Not only is the economic

¹² "NEPAD Transforms into the African Union Development Agency." *Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) | NEPAD*
<https://www.nepad.org/nepad-transforms-african-union-development-agency>.

infrastructure needed to gain leverage toward this goal, but so is the governmental infrastructure to rely on the economy to work. Without the AU members' cooperation, the single countries will continue to become indebted and fall further behind. In a journal article from Alhaji Ahmadu Ibrahim, he claims that "It is clear that globalization benefits those who have the capacity to harness it but can be very detrimental to those whom it finds not prepared"¹³. This general statement could not be any more correct than it is now. Certainly, the schism between the most developed and least developed countries evermore increases as long as the developed exploit the underdeveloped. This is what the term globalization is about. The fact of the matter is: there needs to be an African economic unity, perhaps similar to the European Union, where countries of that union trade and export products fairly and equally; in the attempt to succeed equally with each other.

In conclusion, in today's globalized society, it is important for nations to be able to participate fairly. However, when the world holds standards and morals through the lens of only one culture, then it puts the rest of the world in a peculiar situation. Whether to adapt and join, or whether to remain true to their own culture and be looked down upon. This is the hegemonic power and predicament placed on the developing nations of Africa. This is due to the neocolonialism placed on those nations by the rest of the world. In addition to the exploitation economically by other nations, whether it be through natural resource taking, or by large and unpayable debts. Or even by the lasting western culture entwined among the current civilizations; and even the ever-present influence of international politics. The economic effects, the cultural commandeering, and

¹³Alhaji Ahmandu Ibrahim, "The Impact of Globalization on Africa" International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Vol. 3, No. 15 (2013), pg. 91
http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_3_No_15_August_2013/11.pdf.

the political misrepresentation of developing African nations play significant roles as neocolonialism and globalization practices are implemented.

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