

**Forum:** General Assembly Third Committee

**Issue:** Protecting the cultural values of the African continent in the face of neocolonialism

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## Introduction

Neocolonialism, allegedly being the “last stage of imperialism”, still exists in the world today, even though the neo-colonized countries are internationally recognized as sovereign, independent states. As developed countries continue to impose their cultural, political, and economic power to the less stable countries, the latter countries experience increase in economic and political dependence on the former countries, which in turn results in the promotion of the ‘powerful’ culture and the loss of ‘non-powerful’ culture. This phenomenon is especially dire in African countries, as the former Western colonists continue to exploit their capital with the pretext of bringing development to the neo-colonized African states, and their heightened influence shifts cultural values in their societies. (Marxist.org, n.d.) Furthermore, with the world now moving more towards globalization and capitalism, the role and impact of neo-colonialists become more important to the African countries, therefore leading the African nations to adopt their colonizers’ ideologies and cultural values even if that means losing their own. (Afisi, n.d.)

Neocolonialism also involves the direct act of cultural subjugation of one country to another, so with the oppressed government being militarily controlled by the neo-colonists, citizens under the oppressed government are naturally forced to follow the religion, education system, language, and other cultural practices that are foreign to them. On the other hand, their indigenous cultural practices gradually become more undervalued and considered not worth improving or pursuing. This not only creates problems in the identity of such African countries’ citizens, but also results in the replacement of African cultures with Western cultures. Although almost all countries in Africa are influenced by neocolonialism to a varied degree, countries in the Western and Central Africa are currently most seriously affected by such influence. (Afisi, n.d.)

It is also important to note that a country that has never been colonized can also be classified as a neocolonized country today, as these countries are also politically, economically, and socially subjected to the wielding of power by the developed western nations. However, the unstable economy and welfare of the African countries make them harder to break apart from their neocolonists, which further compels them to be dependent on the developed, powerful nations even if that means being culturally subjugated. (Marxist.org, n.d.) Thus, it is imperative for this committee to preserve the cultural sovereignty of these African states before foreign influence completely assimilates into their indigenous culture.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Neocolonialism**

Neocolonialism is a term first coined by a former president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, that is used to refer to a state in which a country exploits its political, economic, and military power to take control over another country. (Langan, 2017) This phenomenon usually occurs with the more powerful country taking advantage over globalization, capitalism, and cultural superiority. The result of neocolonialism is that it excessively promotes the ruling country's culture over that of the neo-colonized country, so the original culture faces the risk of being lost and replaced.

### **Colonialism**

Colonialism is when a country directly imposes its laws and regulations devised by itself to another country and taking authority over economic and political decisions. Unlike neocolonialism, colonialism means that the victim country does not have sovereignty and does not have independent rights separate from its colonial country. The directly enforced colonial laws can easily convert, at least ostensibly, the 'inferior' culture of the colonized into the 'superior' culture of the colonizing.

### **Decolonization**

Decolonialization refers to the process of emancipating African colonies from their previous colonies in terms of economic, political, military, cultural, and psychological means. (Afisi, n.d.) A complete decolonization or liberation of a formerly colonized country is difficult, as the colonized or neocolonized country often has already become culturally and economically dependent. As neocolonialism gradually replaces the indigenous culture, true decolonization often seem unfeasible and even unnecessary.

### **Ethnocentrism**

Ethnocentrism refers to a phenomenon where one judges and evaluates another culture using their own cultural values as standards. Neocolonists negatively judges the cultures of the colonized country due to their mindset of cultural superiority, which is a concept that frames one culture superior and the other inferior. Ethnocentric mindsets of the Western colonists influence the perceptions of the indigenous people towards their own culture, leading them to favour the colonists' cultural values rather than the indigenous ones.

## Background

Neocolonialism in Africa is not an unexpected incident that rose recently, but is rather a somewhat inevitable course of imperialist history. Indeed, there are many reasons why neocolonialism is a difficult matter to overcome,

and its negative impact on African society and culture is equally significant in the consideration of humanitarian development.

## History of African Neocolonialism

In order to consider ways to alleviate the negative impact of neocolonialism, it is essential to first examine the origin of the cause and eliminate the roots that keep the conflict at stake.

### *Last stage of Imperialism*

The history of imperialism has begun from slavery and shifted to colonialism which lasted until mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, or even into the late-20<sup>th</sup> century for some African countries. Although almost all countries now preserve independence and are recognized as sovereign states by the international community, many are only independent in theory and – in reality – are still being controlled politically and economically by their previous colonists. This stage of imperialism is referred to as neocolonialism, and is considered the worst stage by some people because it deceives the colonized subjects into illusions of freedom when in fact there is no real sovereignty to the country. (Marxist.org, n.d.)

The reason why neocolonialism arose can mainly be attributed to the hasty and chaotic decolonization process that occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For over a century, these African states had been relying on their colonists for political, economic, cultural, and societal support, so they were unprepared to be utterly independent in a sudden manner. This meant that the Western countries, who were their colonists, had to continuously aid the African countries even after they became sovereign states, and consequently, these African states became and remained dependent on the Western states. (Marxist.org, n.d.) Appropriating this dependency, the Western states often take control of governmental rights of their colonizing states in order to exploit the African states' capital and promote Western cultures on top of the indigenous cultures. Due to the need of neo-colonized states for their colonizers' aid, they are unable to deny the requests of the Western countries and can only abide by their control.

### *The Role of Neocolonialism in Africa*

Since neocolonialism is based on an economic root where a country with unstable economy relies on another country with stronger economy, even states that have never been colonized before – such as Libya and Ethiopia – are subjected to neocolonialism. These neocolonists bring in capitalist firms to exploit resources and capital of the African countries, and therefore capitalism is also brought into Africa as an ideology to be followed and emphasized. As dependency on the Western nations persisted, cultural aspects of foreign nations began to integrate with the indigenous cultures, and the Africans were exposed to educational, religious, ideological and linguistic culture of the Western states, such as liberalism, democracy, and Christianity, which were very different from their original culture. (Afisi, n.d.) However, with the Western states being the neocolonists who impose authority and influence on the African states, the neocolonists began to practice Eurocentric ethnocentrism, undermining the African culture as inferior and incompetent.

This led to the perception of cultural superiority towards Western cultures, which further wrought the shift towards replacing African indigenous cultures with the more ‘superior’ and ‘advanced’ Western culture.

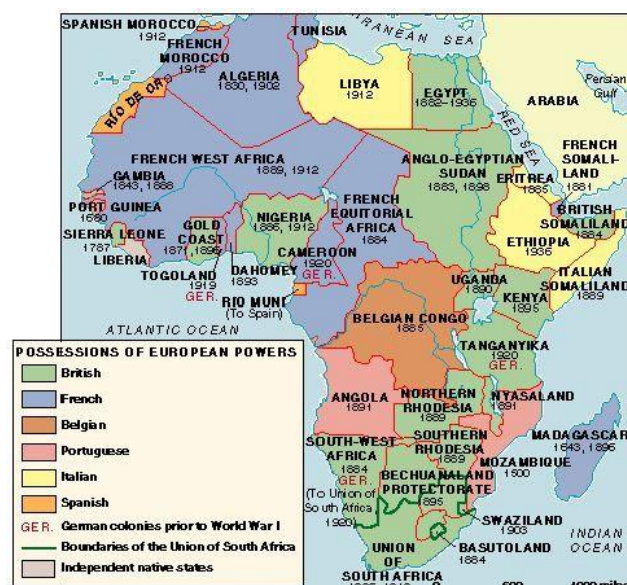


Figure 1. Map of Africa with their neocolonists, which have derived from their previous status as colonists (Reed, 2010)

### Impact of Neocolonialism on African culture

Neocolonialism benefits the colonial states and not those colonized. With the promotion of Western cultural values and emphasis on its superiority, Africans gradually begin to adopt and practice them as their own, even if that means losing their original cultural values. This is why many claim that not only have African states benefit economically from neocolonialism, but they had also lived more ‘enriched lives’ compared to the time before colonialism. These advocates believe that colonialism limited African states’ capacity to develop and grow independently and brought in undervaluation of African cultures that would have otherwise been equally respected and promoted as Western cultures. (Afisi, n.d.) The ultimate outcome of neocolonist impact that Africans worry about is that they might eventually become defeated by the identity of oppression and subjugation to the point where their indigenous culture cannot be found.

### Education

Education in African nations came to promote the use of English language due to neocolonist impact. Westernization of educational system includes using European textbooks for courses, employing European teachers, opening high education courses only in English, and limiting classes that teach African language or history. Such neocolonist educational system puts emphasis on enabling students to learn English and other Western languages, which often results in the loss of African linguistic roots. (Afisi, n.d.) Neocolonialism also advocates the idea that, in order to fully understand, engage, and succeed in the current, one must receive western education that inculcates western values of liberalism and capitalism. This notion is critical in that it renders the indigenous African languages outmoded and displaces the Africans’ linguistic roots, so the educational impact of neocolonialism threatens the language aspect of the African continent’s cultural values.

## Globalization

The increased intensity in globalization in the world today is the main facilitator of neocolonialism in Africa. With globalization, Western nations can more easily and intensely interact with African nations and thereby influence them in a stronger extent. Although many say cultural mergence, due to the ethnocentrism of the neocolonist Western states and the subsequent cultural superiority, the interaction is in reality more of a replacement of indigenous African culture by the culture of the neocolonists. The influence of globalization-facilitated neocolonialism directly results in the decline in traditionalism of the African states; traditionalism includes any original cultural elements such as religious beliefs, rituals, customs, ideologies and etcetera. Missionaries arrive to the African continent for religious conversions, political control promotes capitalist and liberal ideology, and the focus of the society in general experiences a shift towards following Western civilization. This shift, as a result of neocolonialism, causes African culture to embrace modernity, science, technology and other non-original aspects of culture and creates a new cultural identity for Africans. The problem is that this change erodes African cultural heritage and abides by imperialistic pursuits that the neocolonists want – which is following the new culture while failing to persist the original – so Africans face cultural dilemmas and personal identity issues in the midst of social subjugation. (Afisi, n.d.)

## Religion

Another aspect of cultural values that is impacted significantly by neocolonialism is religion. Before western religious culture was introduced, indigenous African religion was mostly based on animism, which is the practice of worshipping animals as gods, and their religions were characteristically both polytheistic and pantheistic. However, during colonialism and neocolonialism, a high number of missionaries arrived to convert Africans into Christianity, which worships an entirely different God and is monotheistic. The religious conversion into Christianity displaces cultural practices that are established on their original religious knowledge systems, such as a community-based ritual to celebrate a certain date. In some cases, religion has also been distorted and misappropriated as a tool to support neocolonialism, which intensifies its negative impact towards African cultural values. (Chiorazzi, 2015)

## Major Parties Involved

### Ghana

Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana as an independent state, Kwame Nkrumah, was the first to recognize the concept of ‘Neocolonialism’ and coin the term. He realized that his country, as well as his neighbours, could not avoid external political interference and economic control, which extended to an unregulated point that went against Ghana’s sovereignty and harmed its culture. Nkrumah made efforts to publicize and advocate the idea of neocolonialism, and even published a book *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. However, this

provoked Western nations who were deemed as neocolonists and led USA to overthrow Nkrumah forcefully. (Langan, 2017)

## **Nigeria**

Nigeria, having high population and large amount of natural resources, has been one of the most desirable target for Western colonists and neocolonists for long. Its underdevelopment and fragile economy became the bases for these countries to take opportunity for neocolonization in the region, which was successfully achieved by Britain and other European states. Since colonialism, Nigeria has never had full independence over their economy and social management, and its mass media and educational system have largely been manipulated to promote its colonists' culture and language. (Oracle, 2016)

## **Cameroon**

Cameroon had been a colony of France and Britain until 1961, when it gained political independence. However, dominance over the country remained even after the independence and France especially attempted to make Cameroon a 'La Francophonie', meaning that it will serve as a platform for promoting French ideology, language, and culture. In order to do this, France has been attempting to implement multiple policies in Cameroon – with military pressure and economic control – that presents linguistic and other cultural aspect of France. (Afisi, n.d.)

## **European Union (EU)**

The EU is an alliance that is formed between 28 European member states, including key neocolonist nations. EU acts as a facilitator to reinforce European influence on African states, as they sway the EU-African trade in a way that makes the negotiations more advantageous to the European states than the African ones. The cooperation aids in maintaining their control and dominance over each of their colonizing state, so the union poses a threat to African nations' efforts to preserve their own culture and sovereignty. (Langan, 2017)

## **Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

There has been efforts not only by the United Nations but also by other independent states to alleviate the issue by raising awareness and attempting to protect cultural values of African states. The list below are some examples of these attempts:

- Protection of Cultural Heritage in Armed Conflicts, Date: 24 March 2017 (**S/RES/2347**)

This Security Council resolution attempts to protect the existing culture in the African continent in the face of increased militarization and threats to security, which can also be attributed to neocolonialism. (Fiankan-Bokonga, 2017) Its operative clauses include actions that prohibit destruction of cultural properties and ask for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural

Organization (UNESCO)'s support in efforts to preserve cultural values against events that aim to damage them. Although the intentions are well-attributed, this resolution caused some divisions between Western states regarding the question of respecting sovereignty and the right to cultural heritage. (Security Council Report, 2017)

- Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) Treaty, Date: 24 July 1993

This was a treaty signed to form a union between 15 West African states, in which the full list of treaty signatories can be found in the real document. This economic community aims to fortify the signatory states' economic strengths as independent nations rather than to be reliant on the Western states, which will ultimately help in eliminating foreign influence that menaces the indigenous African cultural values. This treaty can be considered very successful in that the local economies stabilized and security within local regions strengthened, which contributes to a more ensured approach towards cultural preservation. (Ademola, 2018)

- Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, Date: December 2001 (A/SP1/12/01)

This resolution is directed at peaceful security and management of ECOWAS nations with one of its key objectives being the preservation of existing culture in multifaceted means. Its operative clauses cover actions to not only protect but also to develop further domestic education, religion, cultural events such as festival in the arts, literature, and etc. Although the high number of new policies renders it slightly unfeasible and a partial failure, the overall plans that were implemented were very successful in achieving its objective. (Bado, 2019)

## Possible Solutions

- The most important approach that measures to combat the issue should be eliminating the cause of neocolonialism in the first place, which is economic dependency. It is the neocolonist nations' exploitation of the Africans' reliance, that maintains their dominant influence and leads to cultural subjugation. Therefore, without establishing political and economic sovereignty of the African states, it is difficult to tackle the cultural side in any way. If such dependency is eradicated, then the favoring of Western culture over African culture will naturally fade to some extent.
- Another potential solution that is essential for a secured settlement is an establishment of a regulation or set of laws that protects the African states' right to political governance and prohibits military pressure. The reason why many African nations cannot effectively implement policies and launch culture preservation programs is because the Western states are restricting their rights to do so and are manipulating the government to promote Western education and ideology. Hence, unless there are third party involvement in limiting imposition of authority by neocolonists, any effort for cultural preservation will be hampered by their interference.
- Aside from the fundamental neocolonist causes, local cultural promotion is important to enforce inside Africa as well. Such actions may include hosting cultural events, spreading the use of indigenous languages, educating students about African history as much as – if not more than – European history. It is also necessary



that this promotion is multifaceted, in which it should cover cultural areas including arts, literature, music, customs, and ideology. This effort can also include raising awareness about historical heritage sites in Africa and allowing locals to visit these places and learn about them.

- Cooperation between African states is also an efficient method to a more ensured cultural preservation. As it can be seen from unions like ECOWAS, cooperation among African nations increases their strength and ability to resist against neocolonialist exploitation and subjugative influence. By expanding such union networks out to central, eastern, and south Africa, the line of protection against harmful foreign influence will become stronger. However, it is important to note that even within the African continent, each country has their unique cultural values, so these cooperation should not extend too much to the point where they blur the line between each individual African culture.

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