



# Combatting neo-colonialism in Africa

General Assembly 4



From a separated world to global peace: the need  
for a new look on institutions.



**Forum:** General Assembly 4

**Issue:** Combatting neo-colonialism in Africa

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## Introduction

By the end of the Second World War, the colonial powers (France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and the Netherlands, i.a. were exhausted by the effects of Nazi and Imperial Japanese control over much of the world. Due to this, they had no longer the means, nor the desire in the motherland, to persist in maintaining control over their colonies. Besides, these powers met resistance for prolonged occupation by local freedom fighters, who now saw their opportunity to seize power and proclaim independence. Pressure from the ideologically anti-imperialist USSR and USA contributed to decolonization in different parts of the world. Between the late-1940's and mid-1950's, Asian countries gained independence. In Africa, uprisings began in 1947 in Madagascar, followed by Ghana and other African colonies. Later, in the late-1950's and 1960, the French colonies became independent followed by multiple colonies of the United Kingdom in the 1960's.

Although African countries gained political independence from their former colonizers, most of them remained economically bound to them, as a result of bad governance, corruption, and high-income inequality (Aikins and Du Toit McLachlan). Therefore, these nations, despite having attained independence, still find themselves wholly, if not mostly, dependent on their former colonizer, and other developed countries.

This imbalance puts less-developed nations unfavorably against developed nations, allowing one to exercise more (unfair) power over the other, leading to exploitation (Halperin). Neo-colonialism traditionally comes from Western countries, particularly from the USA, France, and the UK. In recent times, however, this has been changing. A modern example of non-Western neo-colonialism includes 'trends of China-Africa's economic relations in trade, foreign aid (...) and [in] economic sectors within the framework of the Chinese economic development model (Lumumba-Kasongo).



## Definition of Key Terms

### **Neo-colonialism**

The control of the economic and political systems of one state by a more powerful state, usually the control of a developing country by a developed one (...) The means of control are usually economic, including trade agreements, investment, and the operations of transnational corporations, which are often seen as the primary instruments of neo-colonialism (Mayhew, "Neo-colonialism").

### **Dependency theory**

A theory influential in the 1970's that the continuing poverty, social deprivation, and political instability in many poor countries was a result of their economic dependence on capitalist countries (Chandler and Munday).

### **Core-periphery**

The core—a central region in an economy, with good communications and high population density, which conduce to its prosperity—is contrasted with the periphery—outlying regions which are less prosperous and border on poverty (Mayhew, "Core-periphery").

### **Benign colonialism**

When the benefits between the colonizer and the colonized parallel one another and the moral case is also in relative equilibrium (Mazrui and Mutunga).

### **International Organisation (IO)**

[An] institution drawing membership from at least three states, having activities in several states, and whose members are held together by a formal agreement (...) [Some are] designed to achieve a single purpose, others have been developed for multiple tasks. Their organizational structures can be simple or highly complex depending on their size and tasks (Mingst).

### **Mercantilism**

The system of political economy that seeks to enrich a country by restraining imports and encouraging exports, to achieve a favorable balance of trade, while also maintaining domestic employment (LaHaye).



## General Overview

### The Scramble for Africa

During the Berlin Conference, which lasted from 1884 until 1885, the leaders of fourteen European countries and the United States came together to discuss control of Africa's resource. European colonization and trade in Africa was regulated via the General Act of the Berlin Conference, establishing rules to divide resources among the Western countries at the expense of the African people. During this conference, the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Portugal, the Kingdom of Italy, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and the Kingdom of Belgium divided the continent for conquest amongst each other. Borders were drawn without respect for cultural, linguistic, religious, and ethnic borders. Notably missing during this conference were any representatives from Africa.

During colonization, "Africa became a source of raw materials for the rapidly industrializing European powers (Settles)." Through forced labour, and production of cash-crops, the native population was being impoverished in such a way, that it had been stripped of its natural resources (including its reserves) and already established wealth, while also being made socio-economically and politically dependent on its colonizer.

### The Dependency Theory of South America and How Europe Underdeveloped Africa

Around the 1970s, when major parts of the world had been decolonized, an economic theory, originating from two papers written by Hans Singer and Raúl Prebisch became important. Singer and Prebisch analyzed the terms of trade between less-developed and developed nations, noting that less-developed nations were in a more unfavorable position, where they received less manufactured goods in return for their raw material exports (Bloch). Their theory suggested that the prices of primary goods, such as raw materials and agricultural products, tend to decline relative to the prices of manufactured goods over time. According to the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis, the relative decline in the prices of primary goods has negative consequences for developing countries, which tend to be major exporters of primary goods and therefore rely on them for a significant portion of their foreign exchange earnings.

Based on this theory, Walter Rodney, a Guyanese Marxist academic, developed an understanding of the effect of European exploitation in his book 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa'. It was important to understand what the pre-European developmental condition of Africa was, as well as for pre-expansionist Europe. Moreover, one should look at mutual contribution to each other's present condition.

### The Nature of Neo-colonialism in Africa

In 'Philosophy and Post-Colonial Africa', Serequeberhan reveals "how Europe propagates its policy of socio-economic and political dominance in post-colonial Africa (Afisi)." According to Serequeberhan, via developmental aid, technological and scientific assistance, political and cultural control is maintained in the form of neo-colonialism (Serequeberhan 13). Since financing mostly comes from the West, and African countries become entirely dependent on this aid without having the means to perform such research, for instance, by themselves, they become entirely at the disposal of the West.

By maintaining control in many sectors of a country, this country now becomes less of an independent country, more so a neo-colony, since it solely acts in the interest, and enrichment of



neo-colonising countries. Furthermore, money made in neo-colonial countries does not remain there or is invested in these countries, but instead mostly goes to the core-country. Important sectors where this takes place are the agribusiness and the energy sector (Langan).

### **IOs and Their Contribution to Neo-colonialism**

Neo-colonialism has mainly been made possible through the enormous wealth of Western countries, and more recently also Asian countries, who provide loans on a certain set of conditions. IOs, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), do so as well, by forcing countries to take “steps favorable to those represented by these institutions but detrimental to their own economies (Halperin).”

Apart from setting conditions for loans, the IMF and WB have also been accused of predatory lending practices, aimed at keeping emerging economies in debt (Weisbrot). Pressure for open markets, privatization, and undue influence over central banks is common (Brett). The European Central Bank also noted that apart from economic conditions, geopolitics also plays a role in deciding who may become a recipient of IMF and WB loans (Reynaud and Vauday).

### **EU Interventions in Africa**

In February 2022, the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) held their 6th joint summit, where the EU pledged an investment of EUR 150 billion, in support of health and education. This, however, has been one of many meetings between EU and African leaders.

Shortly after being installed in 2019, president of the Council of the EU, Ursula von der Leyen, went to visit the headquarters of the AU. According to her, this was an attempt to show that the two continents share a “true partnership of equals.” However, with Europe’s focus on migration and climate change, it is often seen as if the EU is trying to dominate the relationship, especially when investors are lining up (Green). Regularly, decisions are made without regard for African interests.

Deals between the two organizations frequently leads to conditioned help. The EU sets conditions for aid to be sent to Africa, whereby they require education to be given in certain formats, respect for human rights (i.e., LGBT-rights), and limiting (illegal) migration.

Particularly, climate change has been an important topic in EU-AU relations. Some see European pressure for carbon-neutrality as insensitive to Europe’s past. Particularly the past of former colonial powers. The EU would not be “informing about its historical contribution to the current state of our world, considering both climatic and socio-economic impacts, as well as its proposed solutions for tackling global challenges (Njuguna and Ozbayoglu).” Moreover, it would contribute to the continued exploitation of less-developed nations.

### **China and the Belt and Road Initiative**

China is growing more present in Africa, through an increase in investments and diplomatic ties. China’s presence is typically seen as that of ‘development partner’, ‘economic competitor’ or ‘neo-colonizer’. Since president Xi Jinping’s taking office, China has had great ambitions to reclaim its place in the world theatre. The program of the Belt and Road initiative fits perfectly in this ambition.

The historical, political, economic, military, social and cultural connections between mainland China and the African continent are called Sino-African relations. This Sino-African relationship is



hugely asymmetric, seeing as China is an economic heavy-weight, whereas Africa is rather under-developed in comparison. The country effectively exploits trade to let African politicians, the rich elite, and governments to support Chinese mercantilist goals, allowing Chinese companies to enter the African market, without exploitation of higher-educated Africans, or investment in local economies (Langan, Neo-Colonialism and the Poverty of “Development” in Africa (Contemporary African Political Economy) 94–95). Effectively, the resources are exploited, while the people who do most of the work get little in return.

Besides accusations of mercantilism, China also is accused of ‘debt-traps’. China accounts for 12% of Africa’s external debts, and repeatedly denies loans to Africa are given in bad faith (Tadesse and Sguazzin). Critics say that huge loans are given to governments of countries that are strategically located – loans China knows these countries will not be able to repay (Chellaney).

Some projects ‘bleed money’, meaning they do not make revenue, and therefore operate at a loss. As such, governments find their debts increasing, and as a result harder to pay back. Unable to pay these loans back, China then ‘repossesses’ its property, originally meant for the country it lent money to. If countries cannot repay their debts, they may also reschedule them. “In exchange for rescheduling repayment, China is requiring countries to award it contracts for additional projects, thereby making their debt crises interminable (Chellaney).”

It is alleged that loans to Africa are met with bribes (Energy Daily). This would make these loans void under international law. Thereby, technically, there would be no obligation to pay these loans back. However, substantial evidence hereof lacks. Often, countries that take Chinese cite reasons, such as the limited number of requirements set for obtaining such a loan from China, as opposed to one from the IMF (Doodnath).



## Major Parties Involved

### USA

The USA has a long history with Africa, both with respect to slavery, as well as with its intervention in African state formation – Liberia as a nation. Being one of the biggest investors and most influential powers in the continent, the USA has used this to push for democratization and capitalism; both positive and controversial. It exercises its economic authority via the WB and the IMF.

### EU

The European Union (EU) has been accused of engaging in neo-colonial practices in Africa through various means, such as economic exploitation, political interference, and cultural imperialism. Critics argue that the EU's policies and actions in Africa often prioritize the interests of European countries over those of African nations, and that they serve to maintain a relationship of dependency and subordination between the two regions. The EU has also been criticized for its treatment of migrants and refugees from Africa, many of whom are forced to leave their homes due to economic and political instability created or exacerbated by the actions of European nations and institutions. Some also argue that EU's trade policies and its access to markets, resources and investments in Africa, have perpetuated a form of neocolonialism (Naomi Moreno, e.a.).

### France

France has a long history of involvement in Africa, including colonization and neocolonial practices. During the colonial period, France established and maintained control over a large portion of Africa, including many countries in West and Central Africa. Even after decolonization, France has continued to exert significant influence over its former colonies through political, economic, and military means. This can include maintaining control over former colonies' resources, supporting authoritarian leaders, and promoting French culture and language at the expense of indigenous cultures. (Benneyworth)



## Timeline of Events

The Berlin Conference	1884-1885
The majority of African countries gain independence from colonial rule	1960s
The formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)	1961
The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Decolonization of Africa	1975
The adoption of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights	1981
The African Union (AU) is established	2002
The GA4 adopted a resolution reaffirming the right of all peoples to self-determination and independence from colonial rule, and calling for the decolonization of remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories, including Western Sahara	2020





## Previous attempts to solve the issue

The United Nations set up a number of programs and agencies to support economic development in Africa, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was an intergovernmental organization established in 1963 and is later replaced by the African Union (AU). The OAU played an important role in tackling neocolonialism. Established in 1963 with the aim of promoting unity and cooperation among African countries, the OAU took a strong stance against colonialism and imperialism. The OAU also advocated the decolonization of African countries that were still under European rule.

In addition, many African countries also took steps to assert their sovereignty and control over their own resources and economies, such as nationalizing key industries, adopting protectionist trade policies and promoting economic self-sufficiency.



## Possible solutions

The United Nations (UN) can combat neocolonialism in Africa by promoting economic development and self-sufficiency, supporting democratic institutions and good governance, resolving conflicts and promoting stability in the region. The UN can also ensure that international trade and investment benefit the people of Africa, rather than exploiting their resources for the benefit of foreign powers. In addition, the UN can support African countries' efforts to assert their sovereignty and control over their own resources and economies. This can be achieved through various UN agencies such as UNDP, UNCTAD, UNECA and other specialized agencies dealing with development, trade, economics, and other relevant areas.



## Useful documents

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