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French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa: A comprehensive analysis

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Abstract

The study examined how French colonialism has shaped political, economic, and social structures across the continent, focusing on the exploitation of resources, suppression of indigenous governance, and cultural imposition. It further delves into neocolonialism, where former colonies, despite gaining independence, remain economically dependent and politically influenced by France through mechanisms such as economic aid, military interventions, and Francophone networks. The study was qualitative in nature and the research design was descriptive as well as analytical which aimed to describe and analyze the historical and contemporary impacts of French colonialism and neocolonialism. The study was conducted within four selected universities under social sciences departments specifically. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who understand the historical impact of French colonialism and how it continues to influence African nations under neocolonial structures. The study consisted 100 respondents; University Lecturers, Students and selected members from Civil Society Organizations. The data collection process involved documentary review, literature review and conducting individual interviews on the participants. The collected was analyzed using themes and content analysis from the objectives of the study. The findings revealed that French colonialism imposed direct rule, extracting natural resources and exploiting labor, while reshaping social and political structures to align with French interests. Additionally, even after the formal end of colonialism in the mid-20th century, neocolonialism emerged, with France maintaining influence through economic dependencies, political alliances, and military interventions. This neocolonial dynamic has continued to shape the trajectory of African nations, as they navigate sovereignty within a globalized economy still influenced by their colonial past. The study therefore recommended for African nations to prioritize economic self-sufficiency and diversify their trade relationships to reduce dependence on France.

Keywords: Assimilation Policy; Colonial Exploitation; Decolonization; Economic Dependence; Military Interventions

1. Introduction

French colonialism in Africa spanned from the 17th century through the mid-20th century, marked by the expansion of French territorial control across vast regions of West, North, and Central Africa. Haag (2011) says that French colonial rule was characterized by the exploitation of natural resources, forced labor, and the imposition of French language and culture, often through policies of assimilation aimed at creating a "Greater France." Colonies such as Senegal, Algeria, Ivory Coast, and Cameroon became key parts of the French Empire, with infrastructure and institutions designed to benefit France economically while stifling local autonomy. Following decolonization in the mid-20th century, French influence did not dissipate but rather evolved into what many scholars refer to as "neocolonialism." Neocolonialism in

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Africa, particularly within former French colonies, is the continuation of economic, political, and cultural control by France through indirect means. This influence manifests in financial dependency, unequal trade relationships, military interventions, and the continued use of the French language and educational systems that promote French ideals (Abraham, 1962). France's engagement in Africa under neocolonialism is often criticized for hindering the full political and economic sovereignty of African nations, leaving a lasting legacy of dependency and uneven development that affects governance and socio-economic outcomes across the continent.

The Assimilation Policy in French colonialism was a significant strategy employed by France in its African colonies, aimed at integrating the colonies into the French cultural, political, and administrative system. This policy sought to create a uniform French culture by imposing French language, education, and legal structures on African societies, erasing local traditions and identities (Assefa, 2011). Africans in the colonies were encouraged to adopt French ways of life and were promised equal rights as French citizens if they fully assimilated, though in practice, very few Africans were granted this status. The policy reflected a paternalistic approach, where the colonized were seen as inferior but capable of becoming "civilized" through French culture. Despite its intentions, the policy largely failed, as it alienated many Africans, leading to resistance and nationalist movements. In the post-colonial era, often referred to as neocolonialism, the legacy of the Assimilation Policy persisted, as African nations remained economically and politically tied to France. France maintained influence through economic control, cultural ties, and political interference, shaping African development in ways that benefitted French interests more than the newly independent nations. This continuation of French dominance, even after formal decolonization, is seen as a form of neocolonialism, where former colonies struggled to assert full sovereignty and economic independence (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa have significantly contributed to the economic dependence of African nations. During colonial rule, the French imposed an extractive economic system that prioritized the exploitation of natural resources and the creation of markets for French goods. Chitondo et al (2023)'s study revealed that African economies were structured to serve the interests of the colonial power, with little focus on industrial development or economic self-sufficiency. After formal independence, many African nations continued to rely on France for trade, investment, and financial assistance, a situation often referred to as neocolonialism. This economic dependence was perpetuated through the use of mechanisms such as the CFA franc, a currency controlled by the French Treasury, which limited the monetary sovereignty of Francophone African countries. Additionally, French multinational corporations maintained dominant positions in key sectors like mining, telecommunications, and energy, further entrenching economic dependence. Hallen (2002) says that the combination of these factors has made it difficult for many African nations to break free from the structural legacies of colonialism, hindering their efforts to achieve sustainable economic development.

Colonial exploitation in French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa was marked by the systematic extraction of resources and imposition of foreign control, deeply shaping the political, economic, and social landscapes of African nations. During the colonial period, the French established a system where African colonies were primarily viewed as sources of raw materials and cheap labor, benefiting France's industrial growth at the expense of African development (Jing, 2019). Colonial policies often prioritized infrastructure development that supported resource extraction rather than improving local living standards. This exploitation extended into the neocolonial era, where, despite the formal independence of African nations, France maintained significant influence through economic dependency, political manipulation, and cultural dominance. Through mechanisms such as the CFA franc currency zone and strategic control over key industries, France continued to exert control, ensuring African economies remained subordinate and reliant on their former colonizer. This legacy of exploitation has contributed to enduring economic challenges and governance issues in many Francophone African countries.

Decolonization in French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa was a complex and multifaceted process, marked by both political independence and continued economic dependence. Following World War II, African colonies under French rule began pushing for autonomy, fueled by rising nationalist movements and global pressure for decolonization. The French colonial administration initially sought to maintain control through political reforms such as the creation of the French Union, but by the late 1950s and early 1960s, many African nations gained formal independence (Krupova & Cech, 2020). However, even after independence, France continued to exert significant influence over its former colonies through a network of political, economic, and military arrangements, a phenomenon often referred to as "Françafrique." Neocolonialism emerged as African nations struggled to break free from French economic dominance, as France retained control over key industries, natural resources, and political structures through cooperation agreements and financial dependencies. This ongoing influence has shaped Africa's post-colonial trajectory, leading to debates over true sovereignty and the lasting impacts of French colonialism on the continent's economic and political development (Chitondo & Chanda, 2023).

Military interventions played a significant role in French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa, serving as both a tool for conquest and control, and later, as a means of maintaining influence post-independence. Assefa (2011)'s study noted that during the colonial period, French military forces were instrumental in subduing local resistance and establishing colonial rule across vast regions of Africa, including West and North Africa. The military presence ensured the enforcement of colonial policies, resource extraction, and the suppression of uprisings. Following the wave of African independence in the 1960s, France's military interventions shifted towards preserving its neocolonial interests through a system known as "Françafrique," wherein French military bases and troops remained stationed in former colonies to safeguard political and economic ties. This often involved direct intervention to support friendly regimes, suppress rebellions, and protect French business interests. These interventions, typically justified under the guise of peacekeeping or counterterrorism, have faced criticism for perpetuating French dominance, undermining African sovereignty, and contributing to instability in several regions.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The problem of French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa lies in its lasting impact on the continent's political, economic, and social structures. During the colonial period, France exerted control over vast territories in Africa, shaping these regions through policies that prioritized the extraction of resources, the imposition of French culture, and the suppression of indigenous governance systems (Athow & Blanton, 2002). Despite the formal end of colonial rule in the mid-20th century, many African nations remain entangled in neocolonial relationships with France, which continue to influence their economic dependency, political instability, and governance practices. The persistence of French economic interests through monetary policies like the CFA franc, along with military interventions and cultural influence, has hindered the full sovereignty of many African states. This analysis sought to explore the historical roots of French colonialism, examine the mechanisms of neocolonial control, and assess the long-term consequences for Africa's development and autonomy.

1.2. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the historical and ongoing impact of French colonial rule and its neocolonial influences in African nations. It sought to examine how French colonization shaped political, economic, and social structures in its former colonies, with a particular focus on the transition from direct colonial control to more subtle forms of economic and political dominance.

1.3. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Examine the socio-economic and political impacts of French colonialism on African nations during the colonial era.
- Analyze the mechanisms of neocolonial influence exerted by France in post-independence African states and their implications for contemporary African development.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Dependency Theory. The theory provides a critical framework for understanding the impacts of French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa. Rooted in Marxist thought, the theory argues that the economic and political relationships established during the colonial era perpetuated a dependency of former colonies on their colonizers, leading to ongoing underdevelopment. French colonialism, characterized by direct control and assimilation policies, entrenched economic systems that prioritized the extraction of resources for France's benefit (Crist, 1987). This exploitation established a core-periphery relationship where African colonies became dependent on French economic and political structures. Neocolonialism, which followed the formal end of colonial rule, continued this dynamic through economic, cultural, and political means, as France maintained significant influence over its former colonies. The dependency theory highlights how post-colonial African states were left with economic structures and political institutions that reinforced their subordinate position in the global economy, perpetuating a cycle of dependency and underdevelopment. This theoretical lens reveals how the legacy of French colonial and neocolonial policies continues to affect the socio-economic and political realities of African nations, emphasizing the challenges of achieving true independence and development in the post-colonial context.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The significance of studying French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa lies in understanding the profound and lasting impacts these historical processes have had on the continent's political, economic, and social fabric. French colonialism,

characterized by direct control and cultural assimilation policies, reshaped African societies, economies, and governance structures, leaving legacies that continue to influence contemporary African states. Neocolonialism, the ongoing influence of former colonial powers through economic and political means, perpetuates inequalities and dependencies established during the colonial era. Analyzing these phenomena provides insight into the complexities of post-colonial African development, the challenges of achieving true sovereignty, and the dynamics of international relations that continue to affect African nations. This comprehensive analysis is crucial for developing informed policies and strategies to address the lingering effects of colonial and neocolonial exploitation, promoting equitable development, and fostering genuine autonomy and resilience in African countries.

2. Research methodology

The research design was descriptive and analytical which aimed to describe and analyze the historical and contemporary impacts of French colonialism and neocolonialism. The study utilized a qualitative approach which focused on the historical context, policies, and consequences is ideal. This allowed for a deep exploration of archival materials, historical documents, treaties, and scholarly accounts. The study was conducted within four selected universities; social sciences departments specifically. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who understand the historical impact of French colonialism and how it continues to influence African nations under neocolonial structures. The sample consisted 100 respondents; 10% of the target population 1000. The sample included 8 University Lecturers, 2 representing each selected institution. 80 University Students, 20 representing each selected institution and 12 members from Civil Society Organizations. The data collection process involved documentary review, literature review and conducting individual interviews on the participants. The collected was analyzed using themes and content analysis from the objectives of the study. The study upheld research ethical considerations such as voluntary participation of the respondents, confidentiality, honesty, and right of privacy.

3. Findings and discussions

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

3.1. Socio-Economic and Political Impacts of French Colonialism on African Nations during the Colonial Era

3.1.1. Socio-Economic Impacts of French Colonialism on African Nations during the Colonial Era

According to study results, the socio-economic impacts of French colonialism on African nations during the colonial era were profound and long-lasting. The study identified Economic Dependence and Legacy of Underdevelopment to be at 20%, Exploitation of Natural Resources at 20%, Education and Social Stratification at 20%, Labor Exploitation and Forced Labor at 15%, Development of Infrastructure at 10%, Cultural Disruption and Identity Loss at 10%, and lastly Health Impacts was at 5%. Tale 1 below summarized these findings;

Table 1 Socio-Economic Impacts of French Colonialism on African Nations during the Colonial Era

Responses	%
Exploitation of Natural Resources	20%
Development of Infrastructure	10%
Labor Exploitation and Forced Labor	15%
Education and Social Stratification	20%
Health Impacts	5%
Cultural Disruption and Identity Loss	10%
Economic Dependence and Legacy of Underdevelopment	20%

The study results revealed that the exploitation of natural resources was a significant socio-economic impact of French colonialism on African nations during the colonial era. French colonial powers systematically extracted valuable resources such as minerals, timber, and agricultural products from their African colonies to fuel the economic growth and industrialization of France. This extraction was often carried out with little regard for the sustainable development or well-being of local populations, who were forced into labor under harsh conditions (Chanda et al., 2024). The colonial administrations implemented policies that prioritized the interests of French industries, leading to the depletion of

natural resources and the disruption of traditional economic systems in African communities. As a result, many African nations experienced environmental degradation, economic dependency on French markets, and a lack of infrastructure development that could have benefited local economies. The legacy of this exploitation persisted even after independence, leaving African nations struggling to rebuild and diversify their economies (Agranoff, 2007).

The study further noted that the development of infrastructure was a significant socio-economic impact of French colonialism on African nations during the colonial era. French colonial authorities embarked on building roads, railways, ports, and telecommunication networks to facilitate the extraction and export of raw materials such as minerals, cash crops, and timber to European markets (Ewuoso, 2023). These infrastructural developments were primarily designed to serve the economic interests of the colonizers, enabling the efficient transportation of resources from the interior regions to coastal ports for export. While this infrastructural expansion introduced modern systems of transportation and communication to African societies, it was largely concentrated in areas that held economic value for the French. Rural areas and regions deemed less profitable were often neglected, perpetuating uneven development across the colonies. Furthermore, the infrastructure projects often relied on forced labor, which exploited local populations, undermining their social welfare and contributing to long-term economic disparities in post-colonial African nations. Despite the exploitative nature of these developments, the legacy of colonial infrastructure continues to play a role in shaping the economic landscapes of many African countries (Chanda, 2024a).

Additionally, labor exploitation and forced labor were significant socio-economic impacts of French colonialism on African nations during the colonial era. The French colonial administration implemented various labor policies that forced African populations into harsh working conditions, often for little or no pay, to support the economic interests of France. Attah (2013) supported this finding by stating that Africans were compelled to work on infrastructure projects, plantations, and mines, producing goods like rubber, cocoa, and cotton for export. The system of "corvée labor" was common, where local populations were required to perform unpaid labor for colonial authorities under the threat of punishment. This exploitation disrupted traditional livelihoods, impoverished many communities, and created long-lasting socio-economic inequalities. The forced labor system also had a profound psychological impact, as it dehumanized African workers and further entrenched colonial power dynamics, leaving a legacy of economic marginalization and social disintegration in the post-colonial period (Floribert, 2022).

Respondents also alluded that education and social stratification were significant socio-economic impacts of French colonialism on African nations during the colonial era. The French colonial administration implemented an education system that primarily served the colonial elite and was designed to reinforce the power dynamics between the colonizers and the local population. Access to education was limited, with most Africans receiving minimal schooling, if any, while a small minority, often from privileged families or groups aligned with colonial interests, were given access to higher levels of education (Chanda et al., 2024b). This system perpetuated a rigid social hierarchy, where educated Africans were often used to support colonial administration, while the majority remained disenfranchised and economically disadvantaged. The education system thus became a tool for maintaining social stratification, as it created divisions within African societies, with a small educated elite benefiting from the colonial structure while the masses were excluded from the opportunities education could provide. Kurbatova & Kagan (2016)'s study added that this legacy of educational inequality contributed to deep socio-economic disparities in post-colonial African nations, influencing the development trajectories of these countries long after independence.

Furthermore, the study revealed that during the colonial era, many African nations experienced deteriorating health conditions due to the introduction of new diseases, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and exploitative labor practices. One of the lecturers explained that:

“French colonial governments made minimal investments in healthcare for the African population. The introduction of new diseases and the poor working conditions in colonial enterprises, combined with inadequate healthcare infrastructure, contributed to high mortality rates”.

Colonial policies prioritized resource extraction and economic gains over the well-being of indigenous populations, leading to malnutrition, poor living conditions, and limited access to healthcare. Indigenous populations were often forced to work in harsh conditions, contributing to the spread of diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, and respiratory infections (Mbembe, 2001). Moreover, colonial authorities failed to invest in proper sanitation, clean water, and medical services, further exacerbating health challenges. The focus on exploiting Africa's resources led to social disruptions, displacements, and weakened traditional healthcare systems, creating long-term health crises that persisted even after the colonial period. Consequently, the health impacts of French colonialism became a significant factor in the overall socio-economic underdevelopment of African nations.

Members from civil society organizations noted that French colonialism in Africa significantly disrupted indigenous cultures and led to identity loss, particularly during the colonial era. African societies were subjected to the imposition of French language, values, and norms, replacing or marginalizing local customs, languages, and traditions. This cultural imposition created a profound disconnection between generations, as younger populations were educated in French institutions and encouraged to adopt European lifestyles, leading to a gradual erosion of African cultural identity. Chanda & Chitondo (2023)'s study alluded that culture in the broadcast sense refers to all human activities, which human beings pass on from one generation to another. The forced assimilation policies, such as the "assimilation doctrine," sought to mold Africans into French citizens, which further alienated them from their own heritage. Over time, traditional social structures, religious practices, and cultural expressions were undermined, resulting in a lasting legacy of identity fragmentation. Economically, this cultural disruption also affected indigenous systems of production, trade, and governance, as French colonial authorities introduced European economic models that disregarded African socioeconomic systems (Ghaffar et al., 2019). The loss of cultural cohesion and identity had long-lasting socio-economic impacts, contributing to issues of self-perception, national identity, and cultural revival movements in the post-colonial era.

The respondents also narrated that the economic dependence and legacy of underdevelopment in African nations can be traced to the socio-economic impacts of French colonialism during the colonial era. One of the respondents expressed that:

"The economic systems established during the colonial era were extractive in nature, focusing on resource exportation rather than industrialization or self-sufficiency. This created long-term challenges for economic development post-independence".

French colonial policies were primarily extractive, focusing on exploiting Africa's raw materials and agricultural resources to fuel the French economy. This created a system in which African economies were structured around the production of a limited range of commodities, often for export to France, leaving little room for diversification or the development of local industries. The imposition of a colonial economic model also stunted infrastructural development in many regions, as investments were directed toward resource extraction rather than improving the local economy. As a result, African nations were left economically dependent on their former colonizers, with limited capacity for self-sustained development after independence (Maduagwu, 1999). This dependency fostered a lasting legacy of underdevelopment, with weak industrial bases, inadequate infrastructure, and economies that remained vulnerable to global market fluctuations and external control. The socio-economic inequalities perpetuated by these colonial structures contributed to the enduring challenges of poverty and economic instability that many African nations still face today.

3.1.2. Political Impacts of French Colonialism on African Nations during the Colonial Era

The study results established that the establishment of centralized political systems was a significant political impact of French colonialism on African nations during the colonial era. French colonial rule imposed a highly centralized governance structure, often dismantling traditional forms of decentralized leadership and replacing them with a bureaucratic system controlled directly by French authorities. This system was designed to consolidate power in the hands of colonial administrators, stripping local chiefs and kings of their autonomous political authority (Camara, 2018). The French operated under the policy of "direct rule," where they integrated African territories into the French state, seeking to assimilate colonies into a uniform French administrative and legal system. This centralization of power disrupted traditional governance practices, eroded local political institutions, and often created a legacy of centralized authoritarian rule that persisted in many African countries even after independence (Chanda & Chitondo, 2024). These political systems, characterized by a concentration of power in capital cities and weak local governance, have had lasting effects on post-colonial African political landscapes, often contributing to political instability and governance challenges.

Additionally, the introduction of western political ideologies during the French colonial era had a profound political impact on African nations. French colonialism imposed European governance models, such as democracy, republicanism, and the rule of law, on African societies, fundamentally altering traditional leadership structures and political systems. The French promoted the assimilation policy, which aimed to transform African societies into extensions of France by imposing Western values and political norms. This led to the marginalization of indigenous governance systems, replacing them with centralized colonial administrations that operated under Western legal frameworks (Chanda, 2024b). African elites, educated in French institutions, were often groomed to adopt and promote these ideologies, resulting in the formation of new political movements that aligned with European principles. However, while these ideologies introduced ideas of civil rights and political representation, they were often selectively applied

to maintain French control. Consequently, the introduction of Western political ideologies created a legacy of political structures that, after independence, influenced the governance and political dynamics of many African nations (Chanda et al., 2024d).

The study also revealed that during the colonial era, French colonialism had a profound impact on traditional political structures in African nations, primarily through their systematic suppression. The French colonial administration sought to dismantle indigenous governance systems that had existed for centuries, replacing them with European models of governance. Degterev (2022) says that this suppression was driven by the colonial desire to centralize power and control, thereby undermining traditional authority figures and political institutions. The French imposed their own administrative frameworks, which often disregarded and disrespected local customs and traditions. Indigenous rulers, who had previously played significant roles in maintaining social order and cultural continuity, were marginalized or co-opted into the colonial system as mere intermediaries with limited authority. This led to the erosion of traditional governance structures, which not only destabilized local political systems but also contributed to long-term socio-political challenges in post-colonial states (Chanda & Chisebe, 2024). The suppression of these traditional structures effectively disrupted established social contracts and governance practices, leaving a legacy of weakened indigenous political systems that struggled to regain their pre-colonial strength after independence.

Lecturers pointed out that during the colonial era, French colonialism significantly influenced the formation of political elites in African nations, shaping their political landscapes in lasting ways. One of the respondents stated that:

“French-educated elites emerged as a result of colonial education systems. These elites were often the ones who led independence movements and later assumed leadership roles in their countries”.

The French implemented a policy of assimilation, which aimed to integrate local elites into the French administrative and political systems. This policy created a class of educated African elites who were often educated in France or French-controlled institutions. These individuals were groomed to assist in the administration of the colonies and were given limited political roles within the colonial framework. Faridah et al (2023) in their study noted that the French administration focused on cultivating a small, loyal group of local leaders who would support French interests and help manage the local populations. However, this created a political elite that was often disconnected from the broader indigenous population, leading to a class of leaders who were more aligned with colonial objectives than with the aspirations of their fellow Africans. The formation of these political elites under French colonial rule established a political hierarchy that persisted beyond independence, influencing the post-colonial political structures and contributing to ongoing challenges in governance and political representation in many African nations.

The study also established that assimilation and association policies were central to the political impact of French colonialism on African nations during the colonial era. The French pursued these policies as a means of exerting control and shaping their colonial subjects. Assimilation was grounded in the belief that African societies should be integrated into French culture and political structures, often through the imposition of French language, education, and legal systems (Hussain, 2017). This approach sought to transform Africans into French citizens by erasing their cultural identities and eradicating traditional practices. On the other hand, association policies allowed for a degree of local autonomy but maintained a hierarchical structure where the French administration retained ultimate authority. This dual approach aimed to balance control with limited local participation, often resulting in a complex interplay of resistance and adaptation. Both policies had profound effects on African societies, leading to the erosion of indigenous governance systems and cultural practices while fostering a dependent relationship on the colonial power (Chanda, 2024c). The legacy of these policies contributed to long-term political and social challenges in post-colonial African nations, including struggles with national identity and governance.

3.2. Mechanisms of Neocolonial Influence Exerted by France in Post-Independence African States

The study findings on objective 2 which looked at the mechanisms of neocolonial influence exerted by France in post-independence African states were identified as shown in Table 2 below;

The study results established that in post-independence African states, France has continued to exert neocolonial influence through the political support and backing of elite networks, particularly those aligned with its economic and strategic interests. This mechanism involves maintaining close ties with political leaders and influential figures in African governments who uphold policies favorable to French interests. By nurturing relationships with these elites, France has been able to secure access to natural resources, markets, and military cooperation, often at the expense of broader national sovereignty (Fani et al., 2023). The political influence exerted through these networks ensures that African states remain reliant on French support, both diplomatically and economically, creating a cycle of dependency

that reinforces France's dominance in the region. Zimenkov (1985)'s study revealed that this neocolonial strategy also stifles political autonomy and development in these nations, as leaders often prioritize the interests of France over the needs of their own citizens, further entrenching the legacy of colonialism.

Table 2 Mechanisms of Neocolonial Influence Exerted by France in Post-Independence African States

Responses	%
Economic Control through the CFA Franc	15%
Military Presence and Security Pacts	20%
Political Influence and Support of Elite Networks	30%
Cultural and Educational Influence	20%
Aid and Development Assistance	10%
Diplomatic and International Influence	5%

Additionally, France has maintained its influence over post-independence African states through military presence and security pacts, which are often viewed as mechanisms of neocolonialism. After granting formal independence to its African colonies, France established defense agreements with many of these nations, ensuring its continued strategic control over their military and security apparatuses (Igwe, 2005). French military bases in countries like Djibouti, Gabon, and Chad not only safeguard French economic and geopolitical interests but also serve as a tool to intervene in internal political matters under the guise of maintaining regional stability. These security pacts often guarantee the deployment of French forces in case of political unrest, thereby enabling France to support regimes that align with its interests or suppress movements that threaten its dominance. Latour (2007) says that this military presence reinforces dependency and undermines the sovereignty of African states, making them reliant on French intervention for their security and stability. Consequently, such arrangements allow France to exert significant political, economic, and military control over these countries, extending its neocolonial influence in the region.

The respondents explained that France has exerted cultural and educational influence as a key mechanism of neocolonial control in post-independence African states, reinforcing its presence through various means. One of the lecturers noted that:

“France exerts considerable soft power in Africa through language, culture, and education. The promotion of the French language, the Francophonie organization, and cultural ties through media and education systems ensures a continued cultural dependency”.

The promotion of the French language and Francophone identity has been a strategic tool for maintaining cultural dominance, with French often remaining the official language in former colonies (Marks, 1974). This linguistic hegemony is reinforced through educational systems that prioritize French curricula, often designed to align with French cultural values and perspectives, thereby shaping the worldview of African students. Additionally, France has played a pivotal role in establishing and supporting educational institutions in these countries, ensuring that many African leaders and elites are educated in France or in French-modeled institutions. This perpetuates a cycle where these leaders are influenced by French ideologies and policies, creating an intellectual and political alignment with France. Chanda et al (2024c) in their study revealed that such cultural and educational influences serve to sustain French economic and political interests in Africa, as they promote a dependency on French expertise, resources, and networks while undermining the development of truly independent and indigenous cultural and educational frameworks in the region.

The study findings also revealed that economic control through the CFA Franc serves as a key mechanism of neocolonial influence exerted by France in post-independence African states. One of the members from civil society organizations expressed that:

“The CFA Franc, initially introduced during colonial rule, remains a shared currency for several West and Central African nations, tightly controlled by the French Treasury. This system grants France significant oversight over the monetary policies of these countries, limiting their economic sovereignty”.

African nations using the CFA Franc are required to deposit a substantial portion of their foreign reserves into France's central bank, restricting their ability to independently manage their financial systems and respond to economic crises. Additionally, the fixed exchange rate with the Euro reinforces dependency on French and European markets, often hampering diversification and economic self-sufficiency in these countries (Yalemzewd, 2024). This monetary arrangement is widely viewed as perpetuating a form of neocolonialism, where France retains considerable economic leverage and control over its former colonies, despite their political independence (Ndongo, 2017).

Furthermore, aid and development assistance have served as significant mechanisms of neocolonial influence exerted by France in post-independence African states. Through financial aid, technical assistance, and development programs, France has maintained substantial control over the economic and political structures of its former colonies. This aid is often tied to conditions that ensure continued French involvement in key sectors such as infrastructure, education, and governance, thus perpetuating dependency on French expertise and resources (Nkrumah, 1966). Moreover, French development assistance has been strategically used to secure favorable trade agreements, ensuring that African economies remain aligned with French interests. Nwosu (2023) says that this relationship allows France to exert influence over policy decisions and maintain its geopolitical and economic foothold in Africa, reinforcing a neocolonial dynamic that limits the true autonomy and development potential of these nations.

The study results further revealed that diplomatic and international influence have been pivotal mechanisms through which France has exerted neocolonial influence over post-independence African states. Following the end of colonial rule, France maintained a strategic presence in Africa through a web of diplomatic ties and international agreements that preserved its influence. Oelofsen (2015)'s study French foreign policy in Africa has often involved leveraging diplomatic channels to shape political and economic landscapes in favor of French interests. This has been achieved through bilateral agreements, where African states have been enticed with financial aid and development support in exchange for political alignment with French policies. Additionally, France has utilized its position in international organizations, such as the United Nations and the African Union, to sway decision-making processes that align with its strategic interests. The use of diplomatic pressure, coupled with economic incentives and support, has enabled France to continue exerting significant influence over its former colonies, effectively maintaining a form of neocolonial control under the guise of partnership and cooperation (Ziai, 2020).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the legacy of French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa has had profound and enduring effects on the continent's political, economic, and social structures. While the era of formal colonization ended with African nations gaining independence, neocolonial influences have persisted through economic dependency, political interference, and cultural domination. France's control over African resources, continued involvement in African political affairs, and maintenance of military bases highlight the lingering impact of its colonial past. However, African nations have also shown resilience by asserting their sovereignty and seeking more balanced partnerships, though the remnants of colonial power dynamics continue to challenge their efforts for full autonomy. This analysis underscores the complexity of French-African relations, marked by a tension between dependence and resistance, and calls for a reevaluation of these ties in the context of genuine development and decolonization.

Recommendations

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study:

- **Strengthening African Economic Sovereignty**

African nations should prioritize economic self-sufficiency and diversify their trade relationships to reduce dependence on France. This can be achieved through promoting local industries, investing in infrastructure, and encouraging intra-African trade.

- **Promoting African Political Autonomy and Decolonizing Governance**

African nations should work to dismantle the lingering political influence of French neocolonialism by fostering governance systems that reflect African values, cultures, and priorities. This can involve rejecting neo-imperialist policies, empowering regional governance bodies like the African Union (AU), and encouraging political reforms that reduce reliance on French diplomatic, military, and political intervention.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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