Neocolonialism and Forms of Resistance in Sub-Saharan Africa:

The Impact of Structural Adjustment Programs on Kenya

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**Introduction**

While the independence of African nations—occurring generally during the 1960s and 1970s—marked a positive shift of political power back into the hands of the indigenous population, post-colonial Africa continues to face exploitation and stunted development through new forms of foreign rule, such as aid under unfavorable contingencies, “investments” that don’t truly benefit the country, and neoliberal policies that were imposed upon the country. In the decades following independence across the continent (the 1980–90s), the challenges of establishing a sovereign, self-sufficient African nation under the stress of a global capitalist system and continued influence from former colonizers are evident. In particular, the emergence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a lender of last resorts for debtor nations resulted in the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)—a condition for receiving loans from the IMF and the World Bank (WB) (Due and Gladwin 1991, 1431). SAPs introduced neoliberal economic policies, such as the privatization of state-owned sectors and the establishment of free trade, effectively integrating these nations into the global economic system.

This study is concerned with the impact of SAPs during the 1980s and 1990s on the development of nations within Sub-Saharan Africa and the responses to such impacts found at the state and public level in Kenya specifically. I argue that while the state recognized the negative impacts of SAPs, they ultimately viewed them as a necessary means for development, trusting that the liberalization of trade and commerce could aid in their development and integration into the global economy. The impacts that SAPs had on laborers, however, manifested in distrust of financial organizations like the IMF among the public and resulted in resistance, particularly through strike actions. Because nations fell into further debt and dependency through the involvement of the IMF and WB, I am interested in examining alternative models and forms of resistance to the global capitalist system. This project ultimately seeks to highlight the dissonance between state and public responses to SAPs to call for alternative approaches to development in Africa.

**Background to the Problem**

Similar to other subjugated regions, Africa’s historic and contemporary exploitation has consistently been characterized by a capitalist process of accumulation and a rising dominance of the capitalist economic system. A land rich with resources and labor, the African continent had historically practiced communal-based forms of subsistence, seeming to prioritize need rather than accumulation. There had been contact with other peoples from Asia and Europe prior to the slave trade and colonization, but it was not until Europe made the transition from a feudalist economic system to a mercantile capitalist system that Africa and its resources were exploited to satisfy the greed of foreign entities. The “Scramble for Africa” began in the 1880s, with Europe splitting African societies into territories for colonization. At this point, Africa entered the global arena in a periphery position, serving the interests of European nations. The slave trade exploited Africa’s human capital in the most extreme fashion, subjecting African people to horrific physical and emotional violence for the sake of free labor and, thus, increasing the wealth of European nations. Through the seizure of land, the imposition of foreign ways of education, the separation of workers from the means of production, and the establishment of a white minority rule (Rodney 1972, 22–6), the Europeans ensured that Africa’s autonomous development would be stunted, therefore giving the Europeans control over the land’s resources.

Independence from colonial forces began with Ghana in 1957 under party leader Kwame Nkrumah. As the first colony to be free—having a leader who spoke to Pan-Africanism, calling for the liberation of all colonized Africans—Ghana’s independence spurred a movement across the continent (Zuberi 2015, 58–74). While this was certainly a momentous feat, the reality is that Africa still maintained economic relations with their colonizers post-independence. Frantz Fanon recognized that the independence of African nations in the mid-twentieth century was obtained through negotiations and compromises, effectively blocking Africa’s chance to achieve economic independence and ensuring that the continent would remain dependent on the whims of global superpowers (Fanon 1967, 120–7). Without achieving economic independence, African nations were doomed to occupy a subordinate position once again.

Political independence did afford African nations the ability to envision a path to development that was removed from the global capitalist system and was instead focused on improving domestic growth. The coalition of anti-imperialist Third World nations during the Cold War era signified an attempt by previously colonized people to remove themselves from the influence of both America’s capitalism and the Soviet Union’s communism, opting instead to form a Third Bloc, which remained unaligned and therefore closer to attaining true freedom from their oppressors (Fanon 1967, 130–6). This was a move by colonized people to reclaim their destiny and take ownership of their nations. The choice to remain unaligned signified the threat that global processes of imperialism posed to the prospect of development within Africa. In separating themselves from the two major imperialist forces, African governments could focus on the development of proper infrastructure, prioritizing the growth of their own nations.

Although these Third World nations attempted to construct economies outside of the capitalist system at times, the globalization of capitalism made integration inevitable. The development of their economies suffered as a consequence of integrating too soon, since many of these nations had not yet achieved true economic freedom. Due to this, African nations began to rely on relations with foreign investors and trading partners (Fanon 1967, 120–7). The dynamic between the “developed” market economies of the Global North and the “developing” market economies of the Global South, particularly Africa, is an intensified consequence of colonized African nations’ inability to acquire true economic freedom. Instead, nations opted to join the capitalist market system and subsequently had their resources exploited in new, covert ways (Rodney 1972, 3–29).

The nature in which Africa was integrated into the global capitalist economy set the conditions for its treatment. Integration relegated the continent to a land of reserves, with resources that the exploiting nations could tap into whenever they pleased. Scholars have understood this dynamic as a direct result of Africa’s colonial history, in which the colonized people had no ownership of their land nor resources, making them subservient to the owners of capital (Rodney 1972, 3–29; Gumede 2023, 440–1). Africa’s underdevelopment is necessary to the global capitalist system, as a developed Africa would no longer be relegated to the periphery and could no longer be exploited by foreign nations aiming to accumulate capital. This realization makes clear the role of capitalism and its need for exponential growth of accumulation in the present condition of the African continent.

**Research Questions**

This project will ask the following questions:

1. Broadly, how did the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s (enforced by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank on debtor Third World nations) impact the development of Sub-Saharan African economies?
2. What responses to the impact of SAPs can be seen during this time period in Kenya, both at the state and public level?
3. Was there resistance among laborers in response to the impact of SAPs, and, if so, how were workers resisting?
4. How do these responses to SAPs at the state and public level inform our understanding of the impact of neocolonialism in Africa and, more generally, the usefulness of alternative models to achieving social and economic development?

**Theoretical Framework**

Capitalism and Black Marxism

An inherent component of capitalism is its creation of uneven relations, both within nations and between them. For this research project, I intend to utilize a Marxist understanding of the capitalist system and approach to development, viewing capitalism as an economic system with distinct class relations—an alienation of the working class from the means of production—and a prioritization of capital accumulation, which requires the exploitation of laborers (Marx 1849). In examining Africa’s position within the global capitalist system, my analysis will consider race as a construct that is intrinsic to capitalism and which further adds to the exploitation of African people within the system. Cedric Robinson (1983), known for his work on racial capitalism, understood this intersection as a product of the racialization already present within the European feudal system, prior to capitalism (45–53). This history of racialization can be seen in modern capitalism and will inform my analysis of Africa’s exploitation under the global capitalist system, which is defined, for the purposes of this paper, as the emergence of a global market economy spearheaded by transnational corporations. These corporations contribute to the strengthening of their country’s economy through expanding the supply chain and relegating countries within the Global South to the role of producing raw material and cheap labor.

Dependency Theory

 This project aims to understand Africa’s position in the global economy through the lens of dependency theory, which delineates the global relationship in which the resources of poor “periphery” nations are exploited by the wealthy “core” nations to enrich the core at the expense of the periphery. In the case of Africa, previous scholars have understood the continent’s history of colonialism through this lens. Samir Amin (1972), a pioneer of dependency theory, understood that the history of European colonialism in Africa resulted in a construction of African societies meant to enrich Europe by producing exports (503–24). The transfer of resource wealth from Africa to Europe illustrates the relationship between the two continents under the capitalist system.

**Key Concepts**

Underdevelopment

The development of Europe came at the direct cost of underdevelopment in Africa. To understand how underdevelopment occurs, it is important to understand what development entails. Walter Rodney (1972), a Guyanese historian who examined capitalism and issues pertaining to the African Diaspora, defined development as “an overall social process which is dependent upon the outcome of man’s efforts to deal with his natural environment,” critiquing the perception of development as a purely economic process (6). Rodney insists that societies have historically developed by responding to their material conditions, which links the development of politics, economy, and social welfare under this same objective (3–29). Underdevelopment, then, can be understood as a society’s inability to progress economically and socially. While each region of the world developed their base in relation to their environment and superstructure of culture, the development and progress of African nations were paused when the Europeans arrived. Here, we see how development and underdevelopment are related: as Europe progressed into new modes of production through exploiting and monopolizing African resources, they inhibited Africa’s ability to transition into new modes of production. Rodney’s framework for understanding Africa’s postcolonial condition as a product of underdevelopment will continue to inform my own analysis on the impact of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) on African nations and peoples.

The construction of singular export industries within African colonies is one such example of the development of European nations resulting from the underdevelopment of African nations. Through an examination of the political economy of French West African colonies, the Marxian economist and political scientist Samir Amin (1971) concludes that the focus on developing one particular market specialization—such as France’s focus on producing groundnuts in Senegal—subsequently underdeveloped all other industries, leaving African nations with severely underdeveloped structures of social and economic development post-independence (3–41). Amin’s work on the political economy of West Africa provides support to Rodney’s observations on underdevelopment, further validating the use of this framework in understanding postcolonial Africa and its interactions with foreign nations, corporations, and organizations.

Neocolonialism and Neoliberalism in Postcolonial Africa

While formal colonization is no longer a plausible reality and nations in Africa have achieved political independence, the cycle of exploitation finds a way of continuing. Nations within the global core, such as the United States and Great Britain, still rely heavily on the wealth of African nations, so new avenues for extracting resources were established. In place of colonialism comes neocolonialism. Kwame Nkrumah (1965)—a political theorist, nationalist leader, and first President of Ghana—observed that while “the State which is subject to it [neocolonialism] is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty, … its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside” (4). Nkrumah understands the consequence of neocolonialism to be the use of foreign capital for the exploitation of underdeveloped nations rather than development within such nations, widening the gap between rich and poor countries and placing underdeveloped nations in a dependent state. This state of dependency is vital in the operations of neocolonialism, because it leaves African countries with no choice but to accept the conditions of trade and commerce laid out by the global core nations.

The influx of neoliberal economic policies within Africa as a result of SAPs points to the deceptive nature of neocolonialism. The neoliberal ideology pushed in the 1980s by the Reagan and Thatcher administrations was positioned as a necessity for any nation’s economic growth. As can be seen in the experiences of African nations, reducing the control governments had over regulating the market and providing social safety-nets resulted in economies lacking protection from the fierce competition of larger, more developed economies, such as the United States and Great Britain. An example of the ineffectiveness of neoliberalism in Africa can be seen in both Nigeria and Kenya. Both countries have the highest annual average increases in manufacturing value-added from 1990 to 1993, despite not implementing import liberalization and engaging in protectionist policies through the use of tariffs (Lall 1995, 2023–4). The call for liberalization in Africa stems not from a belief that it will lead to economic prosperity and unprecedented growth in the continent but instead from a belief that it will open up the African markets to the global capitalist system, allowing global core nations to maintain access to Africa’s riches at a price they have set themselves. Nothing proves these intentions to be true more than the implementation of SAPs.

**Methods**

 This project makes use of secondary literature to assess the impact of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) on African nations and extrapolate themes, as there has been much research on their negative effects already. Peer-reviewed articles on the impacts of SAPs will be critically analyzed and situated in the context of underdevelopment and neocolonialism in Africa. To understand responses to the impacts of SAPs, I will conduct a close examination of Kenya, which implemented a SAP beginning in 1988 and continued the program throughout the 1990s. Kenyan newspaper archives from 1980 to 2000 will be accessed through the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) Nairobi Press Archive. Through a close reading of seven articles from IFRA, I will assess themes in both state and local responses and highlight forms of resistance among laborers in particular. The scope of my analysis on responses to SAPs will be limited to Kenya’s experience.

**Impact of Saps on Sub-Saharan African Economies**

Before examining the impacts of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), it is important to clarify what exactly these programs demanded of debtor nations. The intention of SAPs was to integrate “developing” nations into the global economic system through the implementation of neoliberal policies. As Macleans A. Geo-Jaja and Garth Mangum (2001) state, such “policies encourage the aggressive opening of countries for unbalanced trade, accompanied by excessive deregulation and the removal of subsidies” (32). These conditions were not done in service of African interests but instead served Western ones; they made it easier to exploit African resources. These adjustments completely stripped African nations of any protectionist policies they previously had, making it incredibly difficult for them to devote resources to build strong and diverse industries. As a result, the development of various industries in African economies was severely stunted (Geo-Jaja and Mangum 2001), continuing the cycle of underdevelopment under a neocolonialist landscape. This section will explore themes across Sub-Saharan African nations’ experiences with SAPs.

Intensified Import Competition

 Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) opened premature African economies to the global market, so these African nations had to compete with imports from more developed nations. Neoliberalism called for a laissez-faire economy, which requires minimal government interference for economic growth, trusting that the market will regulate itself. This philosophy leaves no room for protectionist policies, which allow domestic industries to develop by restricting international trade, shielding themselves from fierce foreign competition. African nations had no way of protecting their newly established industries from the competition of imports from more developed industries. In his critical examination of the unfoundedly optimistic 1994 World Bank report on the impacts of structural adjustment on African industries, Sanjaya Lall (1995) found that these programs fell short in diversifying manufactured exports and promoting consistent industry growth (2019–31). Lall recognizes this failure as a result of import competition, which points to a fault in the neoliberal approach embodied by these SAPs.

 The push for import liberalization by the International Money Foundation (IMF) was due to Africa’s post-independence history of import substitution industrialization (ISI) that failed to promote industry growth. The ISI model’s failures should be recognized as a result of underdevelopment, because these newly independent African nations had to overcome a lack of economic resources and established industries. This essay posits, however, that the IMF relied on the failures of African nations during the 1960s and 1970s to justify the liberal approach, failing to recognize the further harm it had caused to the manufacturing sectors of these countries. By failing to diversify manufacturing exports, SAPs left African nations dependent on their primary exports, such as minerals and agricultural products. Samuel M. Wangwe and Haji H. Semboja (2003) found that this reliance on primary exports has made it difficult for African nations to compete in the global market, which is saturated with these products already (161–89). Ignoring the empirical evidence pointing to the ineffectiveness of import liberalization, the IMF continued to impose their policies on African nations during the 1980s and 1990s (Wangwe and Semboja 2003). This illustrates the neocolonial agenda of the SAPs, since the IMF insisted on this method for development in spite of the negative impacts it had on African economies.

Adverse Effect on Agricultural Industry

 Many studies on Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and agricultural growth in Sub-Saharan Africa have concluded that these programs had adverse effects on this sector. It is particularly the lack of subsidies under these SAPs that has decreased agricultural productivity across the continent. Subsidies allow for the government to stimulate particular industries, giving them financial incentive and thus increasing productivity. In the experience of Kenya, researchers found that there has been a decline in per capita agricultural GDP and recommended that the nation introduce subsidies to provide assistance for farmers dealing with high production costs and low market prices (Mbithe, Mwabu, and Awiti 2017, 27–29). A comparative study on Tanzania’s agricultural industry pre- and post-SAP similarly found that the removal of subsidies led to a decline in production of the nation’s principal agricultural product, maize (Meertens 2000, 333). The lack of incentive for productivity highlights a major flaw in the design of SAPs. Sticking to the neoliberal model for economic development clearly had adverse effects on many African industries, and the impact on agricultural productivity has perpetuated food insecurity and poverty across the continent.

 The increase in food insecurity within many Sub-Saharan African nations can be seen as a direct result of this decline in agricultural productivity under SAPs as well as a lack of purchasing power among the people. Jean M. Due and Christina H. Gladwin (1991) argue that the partiality of SAPs towards export crops made it more difficult for women to provide for their families, as women farmers tend to work food crops for home consumption rather than export (1431). They call to attention the gendered discrimination brought by SAPs, as they found female headed households suffered the most under these economic reforms. In prioritizing export crops (which later proved to suffer under SAPs, as stated previously), these programs reinforced a capitalist means of development, which failed to improve food access for the people. In addition to prioritizing export crops, which failed to promote economic growth, SAPs perpetuated food insecurity by reducing the purchasing power of many. A study on Zimbabwe’s struggles cited the lack of economic opportunities for Zimbabweans under SAPs as the main contributor to endemic hunger in the country (Chattopadhyay 2000, 307–16). Many factors led to a decline in employment under SAPs, but the impact on the education and health sectors specifically have been highlighted most often by scholars.

Stunted Development of Education and Health Sectors

In an effort to conserve government spending, SAPs required that governments make budget cuts across various sectors, with education and healthcare suffering the most. Regarding education, Macleans A. Geo-Jaja and Garth Mangum (2001) found that lessening government spending in this sector left the working class with little opportunity to actively participate in the nation’s economy (30–49). SAPs failed to account for the importance of education in promoting economic growth and human development, which Geo-Jaja and Magnum (2001) define as “empowering people and enabling them to participate economically to enhance their opportunities for productive employment and income generation, unleashing their creativity, building human capacities, and expending their entitlements for effective popular participation in the development process” (31–32). Human development is necessary for economic development, because it builds up a working class that has the skills to compete under the global market. In cutting down government spending and subsequently stunting the progress of education in African nations, SAPs inadvertently harmed these countries’ chances at advancing their industries.

The healthcare sector also suffered under SAPs, undermining the objective of economic development as a result. Through privatizing the health sector, SAPs effectively made access to healthcare extremely difficult, particularly for vulnerable communities. A study highlighting the experiences of women in Kenya found that the high rates of maternal and infant mortality in 1992 was a direct result of many healthcare facilities shutting down due to a lack of resources and qualified healthcare professionals (Parsitau 2008, 195). The health of women in particular is of importance when considering the vital role they play in social reproduction. Neglecting the health of this population, therefore, has negative implications for economic development. The inaccessibility and lack of quality which characterize healthcare in many post-adjustment African countries reveals, again, another obstacle to development on the continent produced by SAPs. By negatively impacting both the education and health sectors of many African nations, these programs constructed a population of laborers with limited opportunities to sell their labor power, allowing them to fall into a cycle of poverty and unemployment.

**A Case Study on Kenya’s Experience**

After examining the negative impacts of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) felt across Sub-Saharan Africa, I will now highlight Kenya’s experience and the responses to the aforementioned impacts at both the state and public level. Seven newspaper articles will be referenced in this section, all of which showcase sentiments at the time concerning SAPs in Kenya. The scope of my findings will be limited to Kenya’s experience; however, this case study will provide insight into the larger discussions surrounding SAPs and the prevalence of international financial institutions in African affairs. It should still be understood that the responses found in this newspaper archive are specific to Kenya and cannot be generalized to encompass responses to SAPs across the continent.

State Responses

 During the earlier phases of adjustment, the Kenyan government often acknowledged the struggles faced by their people due to liberalization and looked to solutions. The president of Kenya at the time, Daniel arap Moi, is seen grappling with the increase in poverty and hunger within the nation, turning to various avenues of assistance. An article titled “Moi’s decision on SAPs is welcome” comments on a meeting called by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) to address the inability of Kenyans to purchase basic necessities under the harsh reforms of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), with a specific mention of food insecurity across the country (*The Standard* 1994, 8). The anonymous author expresses hope that KANU will decide, at the very least, to regulate the prices of essential food commodities. This opinion is shared by many critics of SAPs in Kenya, who believed the government would likely return to regulating the economy, which shows that President Moi had been expressing concern that SAPs were ultimately harming the nation.

 Around this same time, President Moi addressed the failures of SAPs and gave hope to Kenyans that liberalization policy would end soon. Published in the same year, the article titled “SAPs ‘will hurt farmers most’” shows President Moi once again pointing to SAPs and their call for liberalization as the cause of inflated food prices in the country (Gichohi and Kamotho, 1994). Despite President Moi’s statements on the issue, this passage written by authors Jerusha Gichohi and Kihumba Kamotho (1994) illustrates the hold that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) still maintained on economic policy making:

Meanwhile, a Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry official said the Government would be negating the purpose for which the liberalisation policy was meant if it fell back on its commitment to decontrol food prices and liberalise the marketing of the commodities. Mr Charles Anyama, the KNCCI chief executive, said before the controls were removed, discussions between the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Paris Club concluded that controls inhibited production.

Regardless of what the Kenyan government thought was necessary to improve the quality of life for Kenyans, the IMF and the WB were clearly capable of dismissing their suggestions.

 Once again illustrating the power held by the IMF and the WB, an article titled “Moi’s plea over SAPs” shows the president turning to the WB for another loan to address the increasing rates of poverty caused by that same institution (Onyatta and Mwangi 1994, 12). President Moi, recognizing that liberalization had disproportionately placed rural Kenyans in absolute poverty, pleads to the IMF and the WB for additional funding in order to continue implementing the SAPs. The desire to continue adjustment shows that the government was hopeful that liberalization would ultimately lead to economic prosperity, a belief that only strengthened over time, even in the face of worsening conditions for both urban and rural Kenyans.

 Later on, in a 1996 Independence Day speech, President Moi fully supports the implementation of SAPs, shaming Kenyans who have disrupted the reforms and critiqued the programs. In “Govt ‘committed to SAPs,’” President Moi acknowledges the hardships induced by SAPs and thanks the Kenyan people for bracing through them (*Sunday Nation* 1996, 10). Further along in the speech, he denounces those Kenyans who have incessantly protested against SAPs, positioning them as selfish and not embodying the national spirit of Kenya (*Sunday Nation* 1996, 10). He continues by insisting that Kenyans are committed to the economic reforms and to the partnership with the IMF and the WB, despite all the negative impacts felt by the Kenyan people (*Sunday Nation* 1996, 10). This speech shows a clear backing of the SAPs by the Kenyan government and a blatant disregard for the immediate negative impacts of the reforms, trusting that it will all be worth it in the long run. As understood through public sentiments regarding these programs, however, the Kenyan people had no trust in these reforms and often actively resisted them.

Public Responses

 Scholars and columnists took to the newspapers at this time to freely criticize SAPs and their impact on the working class. Okech Kendo’s 1994 article titled “SAPs: The poor in Africa have become poorer” provides a pointed critique of SAPs and the negative impact they have had on healthcare and education, which has resulted in growing rates of poverty and unemployment. Kendo recognizes the importance of these two sectors and credits the lack of subsidies for their underdevelopment under SAPs, a popular critique among the public (Kendo 1994, 8). The general sentiment expressed by many Kenyans was that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) cared little for the country’s well-being and that their government was entirely too dependent on the counsel of the IMF and WB. In a passionate denouncement of SAPs, written by an anonymous columnist in the *Kenya Times*, titled “SAPs have failed to be of positive benefit,” the writer suggests that by turning to the IMF and WB (despite their programs harming the common man), Kenyan politicians are disregarding the country’s fight for political independence (*Kenya Times* 1995, 6). International financial institutions were perceived to be tools of neocolonialism, as shown by this author, who clearly views the involvement of such institutions as predatory and exploitative.

 Among the working class, we can see various forms of resistance to the impacts of SAPs. In 1994, an article titled “How are Kenyans coping with SAPs?” detailed the resistance among workers to the harsh impacts of SAPs on working conditions and wages. Writer Gichohi Ngari (1994) notes that strikes were occurring among bank workers, railway workers, doctors, paramedics, and, most notably, university lecturers (12). Ngari (1994) states that “[t]he most outstanding and disruptive of strikes has been the universities lecturers which has been on since November 29, 1993 and has reportedly cost the universities upwards of shillings one billion” (12). In withholding their labor power and disrupting the productivity of these industries, the workers made it clear that they could not continue under the conditions created by SAPs any longer. In the case of university and hospital strikes, we can again see that the education and health sectors were impacted most heavily by SAPs, placing a burden on workers within these industries and lessening access to these resources for the general public. From the tone of President Moi’s Independence Day speech in 1996, we can infer that these strikes and protests continued, causing disruption that the government could not ignore.

**Conclusion**

The negative impact of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) across African nations points to the exploitative nature of international financial organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB). These neoliberal policies were implemented not to enrich and develop African nations but to open their economies to the global market, allowing core nations to continue exploiting the wealth of Africa post-colonization. Samir Amin (1971) postulates that these nations cannot develop until they delink from the capitalist system (155–96), and I argue that Africa’s experience with SAPs further proves this to be true. In prioritizing liberalization, the IMF and WB stunted the development of African industries, the impacts of which are still felt today. The instability of African nations has led to an influx of educated Africans leaving the continent to find employment and wealth in the global core, primarily the United States (Yeboah 2016, 83). This brain drain negatively impacts the development of African economies, and the migration of Sub-Saharan Africans to the global core (especially the United States) is a continuation of global capitalism’s exploitation of human capital within Africa to achieve goals of accumulation. Developmental policy in Africa should look to alternative models of development outside of the global capitalist system to best address the needs of the people. If the continent continues to trust neoliberal economic policies as a tool for development, it will continue to be exploited as the periphery of the global market.

From Kenya’s experience with SAPs, it is clear that the Kenyan people are concerned with the hold of international financial institutions over their livelihoods, and this concern is still felt today. Kenyans continue to resist neocolonialism at the hands of the IMF, as just this year protests erupted following the passing of the Kenya Finance Bill 2024—a bill that would raise the cost of living for the working class. The protests were successful in getting the government to withdraw the bill; however, there were many casualties (Dickerson 2024). While this study focuses on Kenya, future research may explore responses and resistance to SAPs within other African nations, specifically to highlight the reality of SAPs and the dependence of African governments on international agencies as being negatively felt by their citizens and being symptomatic of a larger issue of exploitation within the global capitalist system.

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