

Neocolonialism: America's Biggest Challenge in the World Today

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John F. Kennedy once quoted, "...My Nation was once a colony, and we know what colonialism means; the exploitation and subjugation of the weak by the powerful, of the many by the few..." In this, he brightly brings up the example of the United States and predicts how its early years will parallel the unfortunate cases of colonialism present today. However, this colonialism takes on a different form – neocolonialism, referring to the modern sociopolitical frameworks that resemble one country controlling another through many means, e.g., through its multinational corporations (MNCs). Neocolonialism serves as a gruesome reminder of the world's colonial past – a time when many exploited their own fellow humans simply for their pilfered materialism. This economic materialism that created horrors like slavery would also later lead to such tragedies as ethnic cleansing because of superimposed boundaries in Africa on the part of colonizers. Although Western countries, especially America, have now unequivocally condemned colonialist atrocities, the fact that MNCs are starting to have *de facto* control over large swaths of agricultural land in developing countries presents a truly worrisome trend for everyone involved.



But it, like all the guilty pleasures people have in this world, involves food. Chocolate, the most candied and mouthwatering food of them all, indeed has an unbelievably sour secret. Most of the world's chocolate is produced in two West African countries, Ivory Coast and Ghana, and is significantly influenced by MNCs operating the plantations. Because of the often unreachable expectations that globalization has incurred upon industries, these chocolate plantations sometimes conduct practices that would warrant felony conviction if they happened in our own lands, namely child labor, but do not get much traction. Although these illicitly-practicing farms are not necessarily directly overseen by MNCs themselves, the latter is almost always indirectly involved and thus facilitates the process. The colonial likeness of this phenomenon is merely emphasized by the fact that expansive corporations spanning many nations (similar to empires) are compromising the sovereignty of and sometimes being passive in atrocities against locals. In reality, many more actors than we would like to admit are expediting the extreme poverty and cruelty inflicted upon laborers in these developing regions. Child labor

is just one of the many hard-to-believe effects of this neocolonialist globalization that we must come to terms with if we strive for a truly moral foreign policy.

In a broader sense, the overall impacts of neocolonialism are embodied in the dualisms between actors of MNCs and workers in developing countries. This “dual society” phenomenon results when two interacting groups have severe power imbalances in terms of housing, income, status, etc. First of all, members of the MNCs rarely, if ever, inhabit the shanty housing units they themselves provide for the actual laborers operating the farm or plant. Many, if not most of the decision-makers, do not even live in the country they are operating; therefore, this dualistic society has another important facet—it is transnational. Also, many of the workers continue to live in extreme poverty even after staying on the site for years, as their incomes are embarrassingly insufficient. This is definitely in contrast to the millions of dollars spent on paying high-ranking managers within the company. What sets this apart from other capitalistic instances, however, is the inaction on the part of many MNCs regarding obvious human rights abuses. Realize that a society results in which one party receives almost all of the fruits of labor, while the laboring group itself receives little. The dual society framework thus contributes to a power structure in less developed regions that is heavily tilted towards the corporation, and MNCs exercise some degree of leverage in the politics of these areas as well. In fact, many governments, such as Madagascar, Ghana, and Nicaragua, have even signed agreements with the companies, giving them access to huge sections of resource-rich land at the expense of their own citizens.

These impacts are real and ongoing. The U.S., however, as a key global power, has a responsibility to promote equality and sovereignty to the fullest extent possible through its foreign policy. This is especially true for developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin

America that, although still scarred by colonialism even today, are seeing it creep back into society through multinational corporations. By taking legal action to prevent these corporations from using illegal methods and restricting the amount of land they are able to control in these areas, the U.S. can use its economic policy to further global development throughout the 21st century.

References

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