



PHILOLOGY

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A Critical Analysis of the French Language's Improperness as an Official Tongue in Contemporary Francophone West Africa: Exploring the Cultural, Social, Economic, and Political Implications for Locals

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Abstract: *In Africa, colonialism has left many cursed legacies in its wake with far-reaching implications for the cultural, social, economic, and political life of locals. The use of colonial language as an official tongue of government business is a factor with enduring negative consequences for locals, but which do not appear obvious on face value. In Francophone West Africa, the French language was impishly presented as performing an innocuous and benign function in local societies. Yet, behind the veil, there were ominous and nefarious motives at play. The French colonial authorities imposed French as an official language, purportedly to operate as a neutral language on account that there were several indigenous languages. The central pivot of any culture is language, so by elevating the French language over indigenous tongues, the colonialists were subtly but methodically*



supplanting local cultural and traditional values with French cultural values. This study argues that the French language was and has never been in congruence with the emancipatory aims of local African traditions, customs, and values, and as such, local people need to rise to the occasion and (re)claim their rightful position as legitimate agenda setters of their polities. Data for this study were gathered through document analysis, digital ethnography, and online information relating to current developments in Francophone West Africa. Findings suggest that far from being a neutral language, French has been a major destabilizing factor in undermining the cultural, social, economic, and political life of the people of West Africa, especially by entrenching their marginalization. Further, the continued imposition of French is inconsistent with relevant United Nations (UN) human rights conventions on the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples in terms of the usage and promotion of their languages as mediums of official communication. Furthermore, the study exposes the spurious democracy mantra of France in Africa, whereby French pronouncements emphasizing the value of democracy have largely been a smokescreen for France's furtherance of its neocolonial agendas of dominance, repression, economic colonization, forcible assimilation, and the divide-and-rule tactics of pitting local ethnicities against each other to create enmity. None of the aforementioned practices resembles democratic values; for there can be no genuine political democracy without relational equality in society. The study concludes that to reverse this foreign dominance trap that has continued to entrench inequalities, West African states should, in the interim, elevate their indigenous languages to the status of official tongues alongside French, with the ultimate objective of eventually dropping French altogether at some future point. Already, Mali has led the way; in 2023, it discarded French as an official language and replaced it with indigenous languages.



Keywords: *West Africa, French language, Indigenous languages, Cultural imperialism, Economic colonization, Emancipation.*

Introduction

The coming of colonization by various European powers in Africa saw foreign languages such as French, English, Portuguese, and Spanish become the official tongues of government administration at the expense of indigenous languages. Thus, in Francophone West Africa, French, by colonization, became the official language. The purported reason for imposing French was that it was intended to fill the gap, given that there were several local languages, each spoken in a specific area, which meant that local tongues had limited geographical utility, hence the need to find a (neutral) means of communicating between the colonial authorities and local people.

This study argues that French was imposed upon the people of West Africa to disrupt local societal cohesion, which the French authorities found to be a significant obstacle to the realization of their colonial project. Thus, French served to reproduce dominant ideologies under the guise of language neutrality.

The research question for this study, argued from a postcolonial lens, is: What are the cultural, social, economic, and political implications of French language use for Francophone West Africans, and how can they realign their situation? This study provides a thought-provoking analysis of how an imperial language becomes an instrument of cultural and economic colonization. The study, therefore, contributes to the literature by expanding the political imagination, raising consciousness among marginalized groups to see language from a reflective perspective as a tool that can either build or destroy a culture. Thus, a postcolonial theoretical frame is necessary in this study because it examines the lived experiences of Africans to bring to light their lives that have been dismissed and obscured. In this way, it puts Africans in



their rightful place in the global body politic to debunk myths and misinterpretations of their culture and confront oppressive systems (Jeffries, 2023).

Language is a critical factor in the equation of emancipation because the politics of language are closely linked to economic gains through international connections in capitalist markets. Due to competition among colonial powers, France devised protectionist policies to defend its markets while accessing African resources. One of the strategic ways for France was to embark upon the compulsory imposition of French as part of a tool of trade. French eventually permeated all traditional and cultural discourses of local systems (Boussougou & Menacere, 2015, pp.7-8). Like land, language can also be an effective device for accessing finances, and given that the primary mission of the French conquest was resource control, it explains why French rule in its colonies was marked by authoritarianism, intolerance, and brute force (Micheli, 2022).

An important aspect of any culture is language, and that is why any polity needs to be aligned to its indigenous languages; for it is through language that people learn cultural and social norms. Language is the library of knowledge systems, and it is through the linguistic morphology and etymological constructs that incorporate the nature and elements of a particular culture. The loss of a local language, therefore, is a critical erosion of the link between the people and their social anatomy (Haramanuba & Maponga, 2024). The decline of the utility of indigenous languages is a major concern for traditional actors, and this worry is expressed by sentiments made by Williams & Chrisman (1994) when they argue that:

...language as communication and a culture are products of each other. Communication creates culture. Culture is a means of communication. Language, therefore, carries culture, and culture carries the entire body of



values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world (Williams & Chrisman, 1994, pp. 441-442).

Given the intertwined utility nature of language and culture, it follows that French as a foreign language does not speak to the values of local African people.

Like English, French is a language of conquest and domination that not only conceals the value of local African languages but, more crucially, masks their gradual walk into oblivion. The subjugation of indigenous languages in preference for the French tongue effectively meant adopting a foreign culture to reign supreme over local norms, traditions, and cultures (Hooks, 1994). Over time, colonial policies, including the imposition of foreign languages, filtered into all walks of local life and invaded the mental universe of Africans, the effects of which are still commonplace today. Through various forms of colonial dominance tactics – notably the imposition of languages - African initiatives have systematically been sidelined and relegated, whether it be in political governance, in commerce, or academia (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

Meighan (2023, pp.146-147) argues that privileging colonial knowledge and languages is coloniallingualism and emphatically asserts that:

...coloniallingualism, covertly or overtly, upholds colonial legacies, imperial mindsets, and inequitable practices. Colonial languages carry colonial legacies and perpetuate an imperialistic and neoliberal worldview. Coloniallingualism resides in the ‘epistemological error’ in dominant Western thought, characterized by linguistic imperialism and cognitive imperialism. Coloniallingualism is subtractive and detrimental to multilingual, multicultural learners’ identities and heritages.



Ravishankar (2020, pp.3-4) asserts that the forcible use of colonial languages, which persist today, is a form of linguistic violence against local people. It is violence because the subtle, yet systematic, erasure of indigenous languages buries not just the language, but also its history as a culture, its struggles, and all the people who lived through it. The manners and habits in which people use, associate, and link words, colours, and symbols contain their underlying viewpoints of the world. Ravishankar (2020, pp. 1-2) aptly explains the perceptions molded by dominant languages by arguing that:

... in colonial prejudices, the colour white implies virtue, life, innocence, and purity, while black symbolizes death, chaos, evil, and impurity. These value judgements are not exclusive to words only or colours, but translate into the colonial perspectives of the world, where whiteness embodies righteousness and peace, while blackness embodies violence and untamed Animality in need of civilization. Foreign languages emphasize the colonial claim of superiority and righteousness. By making colonial languages the primary or only means of speech and expression for the colonized, the colonialists simultaneously made those languages the only means by which the colonized understood themselves.

The systematic sidelining of African initiatives and languages can also be seen today in key international governance institutions that have not reformed (or have refused to reform), such as the UN Security Council, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, where Africa has no voice whatsoever. Because these institutions were formed to serve Western interests, as can be attested by the fact that Africa was not a part of their formation, Africa's repeated calls for their reform have fallen on deaf ears: for *you cannot reform what you did not form*. Under



the circumstances, the blossoming of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), where, apart from South Africa, Ethiopia, and Egypt, have now come on board, comes in handy to provide a voice for disenfranchised Africans in an international system where hegemony prevails over reason. Such hegemonic dispositions have created arm-twisting conditions where political and economic blackmail supersede constitutionalism (The Economic Times, 2024).

John Mearsheimer, an international relations scholar, asserts that international politics (i.e., a hegemonial *appetite* for domination and forcible control of other states) has always been a ruthless and dangerous business and is likely to remain so (Meibauer, 2021, pp. 350-351). Mearsheimer's caution should be construed in a broader context: it suggests that politics has no bond with morals. Against this background, the liberation spirit of indigenous languages must be sustained through revolutionary consciousness so that such a disposition works as a form of hedging that intervenes on the boundaries and confinements of dominant languages.

In elucidating the themes articulated in this paper, this study relied on data collected through document analysis of literature on colonial machinations, digital ethnography, and online information on current developments in Francophone Africa.

The French Mission to *Civilize* Africans

In a bid to underline their nascent authoritarian colonial project, the French had to invent a reason for colonization. The *standard* French (and European) reason for colonization is that they went to Africa to *civilize* the local people. The French only see Africans through a prism of a humanitarian case; as people who cannot continue to survive without Western aid and handouts; as lumpen who need Christian



evangelism to awaken their souls; as animal-like dwellers; as people who are simply a European burden in the international system.

Zambakari (2021, pp. 38-40) explains that the French colonial statecraft held that their mission to civilize was a necessary crusade to uplift the lives of Africans, who, according to France, were backward and inferior in their practices, including their spiritual beliefs, which they aspersed as primitive and uncivilized. Western media has also hyped portrayals of Africa as a place in need of rescue; as a continent plagued by instability, corruption, and underdevelopment, all designed to justify the perpetual involvement of the West in local politics. To emphasize, from the overall French perspective, Africans were/are only seen from a prism of destitution; as people with low intellectual acumen, or otherwise, metaphorically, as people with an intelligence quotient (IQ) of a fence post. Such has been the relic of colonial policies that assume that Africa cannot stand on its own, and these practices of demeaning, belittling, and discounting Africans are subtly infused in European policies (Hoijtink et al., 2023).

For instance, propaganda often shaped by the media perpetually suggests that Western military presence in Africa is necessary to maintain security, yet facts on the ground show that the real reason for Western military intervention is to control African resources. This disguised reason is conveniently used to justify the expansion of Western military bases in Africa. France and its allies have always held a narrative that portrays them as ‘saviours’ of Africa; that without them, Africa cannot be stable. The rationale of imposing the French language was also based on that ‘saviour narrative’ which nefariously invented a perception that linguistic diversity was a source of instability, hence presented French as the ‘stabilizing’ factor (Powell, 2020). Below is a map showing French colonies in Africa.



The French have also supported so-called *democratically elected* governments that assume office through electoral fraud and tinkering with the constitution to extend their stay in office. For France, those actions are all in order, provided they serve French imperial interests. But when African revolutionaries stand up to



overthrow those puppet governments, France is quick to label them with derogatory terms such as putschists (Black Culture Diary, 2024). State implosion in Libya was due to the void left in the aftermath of the fall of the Gaddafi regime, where infighting among competing rebel groups has reduced Libya to a near-failed state. The spill-over effects of state failure in Libya are that jihadists in the Sahel region seem to have received the greatest shot in the arm, whereby they use Libya as a major Sahel hub for smuggling of arms (especially small and light weapons), human trafficking, money laundering, illicit trade in precious minerals and oil, and racketeering. Africa is still counting the cost of the destruction of Libya, a country that was a gleaming example of economic success in Africa. The Libyan case has proved that Western involvement in African affairs is mainly driven by ulterior motives (Chengu, 2018).

Thus, colonial narratives of Europeans having gone to Africa to ‘civilize’ local people are frail arguments to present because civilization in Africa began long before colonization.

For instance, examples of artefacts and historical structures of ancient civilizations in Timbuktu (Mali), in the Kingdom of Aksum (Ethiopia), and Monomotapa (Great Zimbabwe) debunk those colonial myths and excuses. Those African civilizations include ceramic production, which shows the continent’s early active role in shaping world history, and not to mention the fact that the origins of humans were traced in Africa (Ehret, 2024, pp. 532-534). One of the most well-known human ancestors is *Lucy*, a 3-million-year-old skeleton fossil whose remains were discovered by archaeologists in Hadar, Ethiopia. This is another illustration that Africa is the cradle of humankind (Su, 2024).

As such, the real reason for colonization was simply about resource extraction for the nourishment of Western industrialization. Due to the persistence of the ‘civilization narrative’, it is only through a conscientious study of African history,



sociology, and anthropology that Africans can demystify such misinformation and liberate themselves from an inferiority complex, and for Europeans to be liberated from a superiority complex (Asante, 2018, pp.4-5). Paradoxically, despite categorizing Africans as inferior beings, the colonial authorities pilfered some of the African artefacts and put them in European museums. To date, many of those countries that pilfered those artefacts have been reluctant to return them to Africa.

One must wonder why the colonial authorities found it necessary to get artefacts from the very people they considered to be inferior. It beggars belief what the Europeans found to be special about the artefacts which were made by ‘inferior’ people. This is an example of how French language dominance, hypocrisy, and dissemination of information have resulted in Blackness being conceived in tales of inferiority touted through centuries of sustained colonial undertones (Lalude, 2024). Most of those pilfered artefacts have not been returned on the bizarre argument that once returned, those items may not be ‘properly preserved’. This argument is equally perplexing; for how can the owners of those artefacts fail to preserve their property upon return? Those European claims are part of a cultivated racist stereotyping that assumes that Africans are congenitally unreliable and incapable of achieving success. Countries that claim to honor the rule of law and champion human rights, as most Western countries do, should not, therefore, have a problem understanding that stolen goods must be returned to the owners without any conditions attached (Adichie, 2009).

Colonial Symbols as Language Tools of Domination & Oppression

The French colonial influence went beyond mere occupation. It pervaded all key facets of life through various forms of French symbols, nuancedly infused in compulsory French language use. This also included the application of French



judicial systems and educational curricula, all designed to advance French interests. Signs and symbols are important forms of semiotic human activities upon which some norms and indexical identifications are constructed. As Brand (2017) put it, a picture/symbol can tell a *thousand words*. Although seemingly being in an unspoken state, symbols and signs, in their *silence*, are part of the language system and critical integrities in societies as they provide meaning and attach value to items, events, organizations, and societies. In their *silence*, symbols such as national flags, national anthems, uniforms, and other types of clothing send *loud messages* about their authority, prestige, power, influence, and societal status. Uniforms, for instance, not only construct ideological frames of authority, but also of fear and impunity. Symbols include a variety of practices such as dress code, the type of foods that people eat, the rituals they practice, their gestures, ceremonies, religious rites, rites of passage, marriage rites, and funeral rites. The performance of rituals is a sacred avenue through which the ancestors bless the clan (Hasty et al., 2022). Significantly, most symbols denote territorial ownership. As such, French symbols, in their *silence*, symbolized French dominance and authority over West Africa.

The picture below illustrates the conquest and assimilation ploys of French colonial authorities through symbolic gestures such as the mounting of a Flag.



Figure 2. French colonial troops led by Lt. Boiteux raising the French Flag in Timbuktu, Mali.

Source: World History Archive/Alamy Ltd., 2024.

Visual representations, as forms of language communication, shape our understanding of society and how it is governed. Visual symbols operate within a cultural semiotic grammar that constructs meaning both connotatively and denotatively (Brand, 2017). Though non-verbal, symbols are integral elements in the construction of meanings. As such, symbols are not mere reflections of the social world but create that social world. In Christianity, for instance, one of the most enduring symbols that European colonizers left in Africa, and which has corrupted the minds of most African Christians, is the symbol that portrays Jesus as a White person. Despite this symbol not being representative of either the African society or the Middle Eastern society of ancient Palestine (where, according to the Bible, Jesus



hailed from), to date, an average African Christian cannot conceive of a Jesus who is not White. The agenda of a White Jesus was to hoodwink Africans into believing that whiteness was the standard measure of ‘humanity and wisdom’, and any other group consisting of people of colour was second-class. Christian culpability in the colonial project and in aiding the entrenchment of modern-day slavery practices, including pervasive racism, discrimination, and stereotyping of Africans, is well-documented (Jenkins, 2023). Any doubts about Christianity’s role in sustaining colonial attitudes are easily set aside by the disclosure made by Pope John Paul II, who, while on a tour to Senegal in 1992, openly acknowledged Christianity’s culpability in slavery and colonialism (United Press International, 1992).

In churches (especially in urban areas), the only dress code acceptable is a Western-style dress. Additionally, African songs and drumbeats are only accepted in churches if they follow Western tune etiquette. In terms of marriages, white weddings, where the bride wears a long white Western gown and the bridesmaid wears a Western suit and tie, have come to symbolize what is considered the ‘standard marriage format’. This is accompanied by the wearing of marriage rings, worn on prescribed fingers. The African traditional wedding attire is perceived to be something of ‘lower quality’. Furthermore, to be baptized in church, Africans must have a so-called ‘Christian name’, otherwise a colonial Western name. Over time, these actions and symbols, as foreign cultural tools, have oriented most Africans to believe that only Western practices and values are worth pursuing and that anything African is primitive and uncivilized (Ogun, 2021; Jenkins, 2023; Mambai, 2024).

Below are comparative pictures of wedding attire for men and women (Western vs. African).



Figure 3. White wedding dress code vs. traditional African wedding dress code for women.

Source: Afroculture.net 2019.

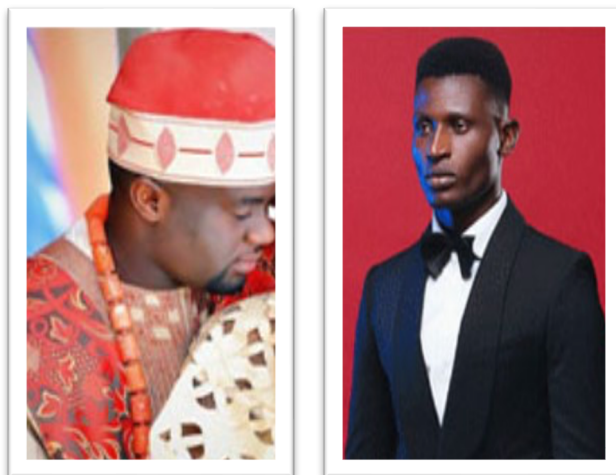


Figure 4. African traditional wedding dress code vs. the white wedding dress code for men.



Source: Afroculture.net 2019.

Regarding judicial etiquette, in the European court system, judges often wear black robes and wigs, supposedly as a reminder to the public of the legal system's dignity, gravity, and impartiality. It is also believed that such attire disguises judges outside the courtrooms. In the UK, for instance, judges adopted the attire of a black robe around 1694 to symbolize the mourning dress for Queen Mary II. In addition to that formal dress code, some judges prefer to add some fashion, such as having a judicial robe decorated with gold stripes (O'Neill, 2001). However, in a typical African setting, the symbolism of judicial authority and impartiality does not necessarily lie in the attire but in the calibre of the community leaders adjudicating in a dispute.

The setting in which European judicial attire was adopted reflected their cultural norms and social circumstances, which are not in conformity with the African context. An average African perceives judges' robes and wigs as symbols of colonial intimidation, hence at variance with the African cultural spirit of social and natural justice. Burkina Faso has now banned the colonial-era French judicial robes and replaced them with locally designed robes that reflect local values of justice. Julius Malema, an outspoken South African opposition leader and a prominent voice for the oppressed masses, has long criticized the wearing of judicial wigs by African judges, arguing that those attires symbolize colonial practices and hence should be discarded (Rubaya, 2024).

Theoretical & Conceptual Arguments on Language Utility & Influence

In the kinetics of sociolinguistic and historico-political analysis, it is imperative to appreciate how various indigenous languages and cultures have



contributed to the development of global knowledge systems. Thorough analytical paradigms of sociolinguistic discourses help us to see the value and the reciprocal benefits of different languages and cultures, including those that are referenced as *primitive cultures*. The term ‘global knowledge systems’ should be understood in its broader context: it should denote the collection and optimal utilization of various indigenous knowledges, and those knowledges reside in languages. Language and culture are intertwined, whereby language reveals culture while culture helps us to understand language better.

In cognitive linguistics, people manifest their world views through their thought processes, which are influenced by language. Cognitive linguistics searches through language as a thought or mental phenomenon, where cognition is both a conscious and unconscious process by which the human mind conceives knowledge (Kreiner, 2019). In this way, language works to maintain and convey a culture and its heritage. Values, norms, and beliefs are key elements of culture that are themselves embedded in language. Therefore, language shapes our perception of reality and behaviour. Due to different upbringings and distinct language use, societal values are conveyed and conceived differently (Swoyer, 2010).

For instance, the Western world has an individualistic culture that places a high value on individuals’ rights in societal organization. In contrast, African cultures are collectivist in disposition, whereby the welfare of society and its values take precedence over individuals’ interests. Significantly, the terminology used in language communication conveys different meanings to different people. For example, the ‘American dream’ in the US is a value that asserts that any person who is in America and is innovative enough will be successful. The implied notion is that wealth is an important element in their lives (Conerly et al., 2021).



But a typical African traditional setup has different dynamics. It can be inferred from Idang (2015, pp. 105-106) that in an African setting, wealth is not considered as something of a priority in people's lives or something that must be achieved at any cost. Instead, people find their lives more fulfilling, more satisfying, and meaningful through virtues such as nurturing communal relations and having equitably distributed peasant farmlands. Traditionally, economic values are marked by cooperation and a pool of resources where every community member comes to the aid of those in need. For instance, help is rendered in farm work and the construction of homesteads. In traditional Africa, the measure of life is not seen through material possessions, but in the impact of an individual through their noble ideas and knowledge contributions to their society. Well-being, rather than wealth per se, is the most important element in African cultural life; in other words, traditional society sees well-being itself as 'prosperity' that can offer infinite opportunities. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (1948) defines well-being as a critical resource that encompasses the ability of people, through their quality of life, to contribute to society with a sense of meaning and purpose.

For traditional Africans, good health is true wealth. Thus, from the African cultural perspective, the aspect of values and well-being, as a public good, is not necessarily a settled matter, but as something contingent upon the forces of environmental adaptation, societal transformations, community prestige, and overall polity functionality (Hasty et al., 2022, pp.86-90).

In language communication, words and deeds have meanings attached to them beyond their face-value definitions; meanings that influence thought and behavior. Also, apart from using spoken language, people communicate without necessarily using words, and this non-verbal communication is symbolic and learned through culture. Through one's language (i.e., culture), one can read a given situation by



simply observing the body language and facial expressions - acts which people outside of that culture may not fully grasp. The use of semiotics (signs and symbols), gestures, winks, and objects also conveys a variety of societal meanings. Messages are also communicated through other avenues such as music, dance, poetry, and artworks (Passero, 2002, pp. 70-73). In Christian theology, for instance, the Bible was not originally written in English, which may explain why religious scripts are often preached out of context today, as there appears to be a lack of deeper understanding of the original Biblical language setting.

Languages may change over time, not only due to vowel shifts, but also due to the volume of words that enter a particular language because of movements/emigrations of populations with different dialects. For example, some words/letters, such as the letter *f* and the letter *v*, may be derived from the same linguistic root, and as such, they may - in certain instances - be used interchangeably (Steinbach, 2013). Hence, the reading of a language should consider varied elements and nuanced meanings embedded in symbolic interpretation, figures of speech, literary genres, metaphors, hyperbolic expressions, parables, proverbs, symbols, and elements of allegory and idioms. Geeraerts (2017) asserts that lexical semantics, i.e., the analysis of how words construct their meaning, helps us to dissect semantic phenomena not just within individual words, but also helps the construction of relevant structure within vocabulary as a body. Further, in linguistics, syntax, i.e., the (proper) arrangement of word usage, operates as a principle that governs the construction of sentences, with a core focus on the appropriate arrangement of words. In this way, syntax intuition enhances clarity on the overall meaning of sentences. Consider the two sentences below:



...the puppy hit the door,

...the door hit the puppy.

Even if the above sentences contain the same words, the linguistic syntax gives different interpretations. This demonstrates the importance of structure, context, and appropriate framing in different word/language constructions and comprehension.

Furthermore, language communication is also conveyed through various metaphysical beliefs, such as ritual performances at sacred shrines, during ceremonies, and festivals, as a means of conveying messages, particularly to ancestral spirits, given their revered role in everyday life. Here, mythological consciousness plays a pivotal role. In most traditional societies, messages and language communication are also communicated through dreams. The dreams, especially those that are intriguing, are considered sacred communication channels, providing greater awareness, wisdom, healing, and warnings, and are usually interpreted by elders using their prophetic insights and visions through meditation (Glaskin, 2005, pp. 297-298). Thus, mythology and fables remain influential traditional practices where the supernatural and spiritual phenomena operate as a mechanism of affective and identity construction. Myths provide insights into the collective desires and fears of a society, and thus, foster empathy and social cohesion. In mythology, death is not the end, as the dead still live in spiritual form, hence remain in contact with the living clan (Bremmer, 2012; Smith, 2018).

Damina (2024) elaborates that to fully comprehend the historical events or ancient written texts, such as the Bible, one must contextualize the times, culture, and historical setting in which people of that age lived. For instance, in this context of the Bible, the interpretation should involve looking for contemporary vocabulary, objects, and symbols that best interpret what was spoken in those days and the intent of the authors of those Bible texts, because often, word meanings are lost in



translation. In judicial cases, for instance, a matter that is not fully clarified in the legislature or a case that does not provide a clear-cut answer within the law is instead interpreted by the judge using reasoning based on the *intent of the framers of that law*.

Aside from the Bible and the law, even in comedy, jokes cannot simply be translated literally from one language to the other without considering the cultural specificities, environment, and linguistic eccentricities of the local audience. For example, in English, the joke/phrase: *'he is barking up the wrong tree'*, might be extracted and spoken differently in the Czech language, where it might even take a darker sense of humour when expressed as, *'he is crying on a wrong grave'* (Eisenchteter, 2025). Conveying cultural nuances through translation from a different language often results in misinterpretations or oversimplification of the contextual meaning. This is especially the case in non-verbal cues, where interpreters unwittingly overlook cultural semiotic subtleties and the kinetic essence of the original language meaning, hence end up with unintended nuances and meanings. Also, sentence and word construction is not always referential, i.e., the notion that the meaning of the word/sentence (or objects mentioned in the word/sentence) directly relates to the actual object in the real world. For instance, the word 'tree' does not always mean tree in every context because words carry a variety of meanings, weights, and utility based on the given situation (Tennis, 2012). Consider the two sentences below:

... a family tree,

...climbing the tree of success.



The two sentence examples above show how the usage of words is not always referential. Often, metaphors, figures of speech, and idioms are commonly used to convey messages.

Also, speeches about an event are retold or have their meanings inferred using logical reasoning, even if some aspects of those events were not witnessed. In other words, stories are captured and summarized through bridging inferencing. A bridging inference retroactively constructs unseen events or sentences to build a coherent discourse. Klomberg & Cohn (2022, pp. 596-597) describe this situation as ‘gap filling’ in sentence/event construction. Apart from the capacity to ‘fill up’ the gaps arising from the unspoken words or the unseen events, bridging inferences also reduce redundancy in sentence construction. This is especially common in theatres when giving an account of a film, a play, or a drama genre. Linguistic morphology, i.e., the inner structure of words and how they connect, is a crucial aspect of consideration. The structure and meaning of words are always dependent on the (cultural) context and application of their usage, not on the dictionary definition, because the same word can carry a variety of connotations. It is, therefore, crucial to understand the etymological framing of words from the language they derive. In essence, words in themselves do not carry meanings; their meanings come from the full understanding of the platform, circumstances, culture, and historical foundations upon which they have been used.

Damina (2024) adds that what also needs to be factored into the equation is the grammatical analysis of language, which helps us to answer questions such as: (1) Who spoke in a statement? (2) Who was the performer of an action? (3) Who was the action being performed on? (4) Who were those active on the scene? The message (words) being conveyed and the messenger conveying that message are critical in assessing the real intentions of the message being relayed.



Interpretations of words, signs, and symbols differ considerably due to varied perceptions informed by the language we use. For instance, in some cultures, due to superstition associated with the number 13, some building owners who have floors higher than 12 may instead prefer to omit or rename floor number 13, as floor number 14 A. This is common in the US, especially in some hotels, where hoteliers fear that superstitious clients may shun their lodgings. In Korea, Japan, and China, the number 4 is considered to carry unlucky connotations because it sounds like the word ‘death’ (Conerly et al., 2021).

In most African traditions, when an elder or a person of higher authority is talking to you, it is impolite to look straight in their eyes as they are discussing with you, while in Western cultures, it is the opposite.

A study by Jalilbayli (2024), which compared the morphological structures of the Japanese and Korean languages, found that despite their historical connection, loanwords in both languages experience shifts in meaning. In the Korean language, some otherwise positive Japanese words take on a negative nuance, and while both languages have an agglutinative formation, the ways of expressing grammatical categories are different. The Japanese language contracts more synthetic forms, while Korean seems to have a more diverse proposition for forming noun and verb forms through morpheme addition and root reconstruction. Furthermore, differences are also seen in the articulation of numerals, tense, and modality, whereby the Korean language appears to use specific ways of constructing case (i.e., the grammatical function of a noun) and tense classifications. A study by Stevens & Washmuth (2022), which investigated people’s psychological wellness in physiotherapy, suggests that the power of words through a specific construction can change how people (patients) think, act, and feel. The words used by clinicians can potentially improve or worsen how patients feel, because language phrasing and its contextual



tone can be as important as physical interventions. In certain instances, the use of expletive words may be positive for patients' outcomes. In other cases (especially in African settings), a surgeon may, out of their spiritual devotion, sing a hymn or conduct a prayer for their patient before the patient undergoes surgery.

Thus, for new language learners, appreciating cultural nuances, which include the syntax of a language (i.e., arrangement of words) and language phonology (i.e., patterns of language sounds), and the appropriate cultural language etiquette and tone, is crucial in understanding the logic of lexical semantics. Also, appreciating the utility of root words, morphemes, affixes, suffixes, prefixes, and how they integrate into word construction helps learners to fully grasp the overarching meanings of sentences. The examples provided above on language comprehension underscore the importance of each language's cultural context and linguistic peculiarities of its interpretive elements.

In social science research, a core principle of information assessment rests on the understanding that correlation should not necessarily be confused with causation because data often underdetermines theory. Researchers can look at the same data but evaluate the happenings differently; an indication that there are varied ways of seeing and interpreting information, some of which are based on one's orientation, cultural disposition, academic acumen, epistemological ideology, or religious affiliation (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012).

Laininen (2019) argues that dominant Western languages are presented as the only centres of science and knowledge production at the expense of other knowledge systems from marginalized languages of the Global South. In this way, global science (as we know it today) is neither inclusive nor remarkably innovative, as it leaves out or purposely ignores potential knowledge systems from other regions. Language hegemony is also reflected in international relations (IR) theories, which often lean



towards a Global North strand. If those IR theories and dominant languages do not acknowledge indigenous knowledge reservoirs, their hypotheses will continue to be insufficient to offer genuine explanations about events outside of the Global North. If, as claimed, the West believes in promoting global justice and progress, it must first acknowledge the agencies and unheard voices from subaltern regions that have long been ignored (Cerioli, 2024).

Since the slavery days, dominant colonial languages have fostered misrepresentations and misrecognition of Africans as people with low IQ. Despite evidence being available in the public domain indicating that human beings across the globe share a DNA of 99.9%, a white superiority narrative has continued to endure. The persistence of this ignorant and racist notion is rooted in Western science, which, to date, continues to present itself as *world science*, at the expense of other science knowledge systems of the Global South (Saini, 2019).

Bigotry has cut across all scientific fields, including plant science. For instance, natural history specimens from Africa have been taken without consent and acknowledgement, which has led to most Africans being sceptical about the real intentions of Western science and academia. Like other scientific areas, research in agricultural seed science is also steeped in racist and colonial attitudes, where seed and soil programs focus mainly on higher yields (but which destroys the soils) rather than acknowledging that perennial crops (despite having lower yields) improve soil health. These agricultural programs - supported by Western financial and technical institutions – are imposed on locals and branded as *global initiatives* through Machiavellian ploys such as veiled threats of reduced technical support and funding to local farmers who do not toe the line (Snapp, 2022). It is due to these challenges that postcolonial and critical theory aim to confront the delusion of Western



benevolence and to cast aside the imperial superiority complex that equates whiteness with legitimacy (Hooks, 1994).

As Auguste Comte argued, all political communities are capable of reflective self-deliberation. The cosmological gist of Comte's argument is premised on the idea that no single system, or single polity, or single language or ideology is self-validating because the utility and possibilities of any system are dependent on a variety of ontological and epistemological underpinnings (Moses & Knutsen, 2007). Similarly, the lesson from Karl Popper on the diversity and depth of knowledge lies in his *theory of falsification* as an approach to gaining empirical knowledge. The logic of this theory is that a sound scientific proposition can never definitively be confirmed. Popper argued that any regimen that claims scientific validity is not objective science because of the ever-present possibility of *falsification*. Scientific theories only get incremental corroboration simply because evidence to disconfirm them has not yet been presented. Thus, for Popper, no number of positive outcomes can ever confirm a theory because a single refutation is logically decisive (Burke, 1983).

Knowledge is diverse, situational, multilinear, contextual, and can also meander. Plato put this proposition even more succinctly when he argued that wisdom (knowledge) is a junction of truth and belief, where comprehension of a phenomenon cannot be claimed if something is true but not believed, or believed but not true (Plato, 1883). For instance, in Africa, ideas about human rights have cultural foundations that non-Africans may not easily see because the function, meanings, context, interpretation, and application of those rights differ from the Western understanding and application of those same rights. Therefore, to answer the human rights question appropriately, one needs to consider various aspects, such as the quality of data gathered in the study of a particular polity, because the available



information might be unreliable. Another prime factor that may affect the cogency of data assessments is timeliness and (the unspoken) motivations of key informants (Schaffer, 1998).

Crucially, empirical analyses and validity assessments of theories of realworld phenomena can also be influenced by political ideologies, which may lead to bias in policy interpretation and formulation. Put differently, the conceptual categories through which we seek to comprehend world phenomenon draws our focus to the data that lends them substance, yet the actual test of the equation may rest in analytically engaging with the categories themselves (Schaffer, 1998).

Often, most Western scholars reduce the complexity of African cultures to a single point of view as if all people in those local polities interpret their traditional values the same way, or as if all of them have uniform cultural rules which, according to the West, seem to be rigid and static. The diversity of knowledge also reminds us, for instance, that if ‘everybody’ believes a particular story, it does not necessarily mean the story is correct, just like if only a few people believe something, it does not necessarily make that story false. For this reason, Hasty et al. (2022) doubt the possibility of accurately representing the perceptions of people whose lives are so different from our own.

Thus, the actual question that arises from this perspective is: how can human rights be universal if they do not bridge the divide between the centre and the periphery? This observation makes a case for interdisciplinarity because the dialogue between the West and Africa has generally been marked by eristic and hierarchical notions instead of being transformative. This disjuncture has arisen because often, the West and its scholars look at Africa for empirical information, but not for knowledge per se, and hence cannot see the broader perspective of the African knowledge dimensions (Aris, 2020).



Scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiongo, Obi Wali, and Ernest Emenyonu argue that language is the primary tool of accessing culture, and as such, much of African literature today has been *midwifed* through colonial languages, hence rendering such literature not authentic. In this context, colonial languages have subverted the literariness of local societies. These scholars associate foreign languages with imperialism, which sets the ground for neocolonialism. This claim is based on the argument that language plays a dual role, whereby apart from simply being a means of communication, it is also a bearer of culture (Irele, 2000, pp.7-8). These scholars assert that foreign languages were used as a means of enslavement and spiritual subjugation. For Ngugi, African writers are bound by their calling to do for their local languages what William Shakespeare and John Milton did for English (Arab, 2019). On the erosion of local languages, Ngugi elucidates that both the African political ruling class and academics have failed the litmus test in protecting and fully advancing African causes, when he argued that:

...as African writers have always complained about the neocolonial economic and political relationship to Euro America, but by our continuing to write in foreign languages, paying homage to them, are we not on the cultural level of continuing the neocolonial slavish and cringing spirit? What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages? (Arab, 2019, pp.537-538).

However, other scholarly voices provide a contrary assessment by arguing that, despite French and other colonial languages being dominant, they can also carry the weight of traditional African language experiences through various forms of resistance, such as critical writing and poetry. As such, a foreign language seen from



this angle (i.e., of critiquing colonial and postcolonial events) is capable of being utilized by locals to champion their cause. It can be inferred from Tennis (2012, pp.19-20) that (African) researchers/writers can use their acumen to influence and shape the knowledge and language organization that disseminates cultural memory. This can especially be done through a critique of the status quo situations, combined with the judicious use of language communication grounded in etymological constructions.

Scholars such as Chinua Achebe, Ezekiel Mphahlele, and Kateb Yacine also argue that African literature need not necessarily be written in indigenous languages to fulfil its goals, which are to successfully transmit its messages. The onus, therefore, is on African writers to use their ingenuity, reflect, and contour the image of their societies as effectively as possible using any language. It is their skill and the imagination contained in their critical writings (written in any language) that captures the essence of linguistic nationalism, rather than relying on local language per se. For Mphahlele, French, English, or Spanish are avenues through which African writers can present a nationalistic front against European oppressors (Arab, 2019, p.539). For these scholars, colonial languages, notwithstanding their corrosive characteristics, can also be a means of both communication as well as being opportunities for inquiring into past subjugated knowledge.

Bassetti & Cook (2010) also propagate that knowing more languages that embody different ways of perceiving world phenomena can mean that, unlike monolinguals, bilinguals have the advantage of conceiving world views beyond what their first tongue can capture. Further, research carried out by Slavin et al. (2008) suggests that students who were taught both in their indigenous languages and English made better progress in school than those who were taught purely in English. This indicates that there might be a silver lining in learning dominant languages, if



they are not ‘prescribed’ or privileged as the only or prime sources of knowledge production. Thus, where a dominant language is offered as an alternative language, it plays a complementary role in the overall student development. The key point here is that learning that emphasizes the use of only a certain (favoured) language reduces the capacity for learners to expand their knowledge beyond that expressed in that particular (favoured) language. However, policies of privileging European tongues in official domestic institutions and literary creation remain intensely despised among local and marginalized groups.

The Use of Indigenous Languages as a Fundamental Human Right

Local people argue that the idea of French as the only official language in Francophone West Africa violates their rights that are enshrined in domestic constitutions, which state that all citizens are equal before the law and have protection of due process. For there can be no meaningful social equality in public discourse in the absence of genuine linguistic inclusion.

Micheli (2022, p.325) laments the paradox of the French language utility, whereby, despite being an official language since colonial days, less than 50% of the population of Francophone West Africa today is fluent in French. In addition, Francophone countries rank among the poorest and lowest literacy levels in the world. For instance, literacy levels in Chad stand at a paltry percentage of 27% of the total country population, Mali at 31%, Niger at 38%, Guinea at 45%, Burkina Faso at 46%, Benin at 47% and the Central African Republic at 37% (World Population Review, 2024). Illiteracy and poverty work side by side, and in most poverty-stricken countries, the common denominator is the absence of quality education. Also, there is a gender gap, whereby nearly two-thirds of the total number of illiterate people are women.



By this token, it can be inferred that in terms of active participation in political governance, more than half of the local population is already disenfranchised. With these staggering statistics, one must wonder how this reality can be reconciled with French propagations of the democracy mantra in Africa; for a disenfranchised and poverty-stricken population does not have any democratic rights, let alone any human rights worth talking about. At any rate, it seems implausible that a colonial master who believes in white superiority can, at the same time, champion human rights. Through the practice of subtle or covert racism, colonizers and their collaborators craftily disguise their real imperial and malevolent agendas to unsuspecting ordinary Africans.

In the legal system, given that laws are written in French and the court deliberations are also mainly conducted in French, this disadvantages locals who are not fluent in French, and even in circumstances where court translation services may be available, such translations need to be paid for as a special service. This situation renders court services as arenas for the elite, effectively denying ordinary citizens the very justice that the constitution promises them.

Further, in legal documents, linguistic ambiguity is a real challenge, especially for rural dwellers who are often less educated and less fluent in French to fully comprehend the legal scripts and their implied meanings, their broad interpretations, and the situational application of those French laws. The irony is that, although from the independence days, customary law operated alongside the French laws, customary law could be set aside if its resolutions appeared to disagree with French notions of public order. The net effect was that French law remained supreme and was purposely designed this way to disrupt the development and effectiveness of local judicial systems (Opoku, 1974, pp.146-148).



The idea of imposing French as an official tongue in Francophone West Africa has several pitfalls that render those colonial policies morally flawed, logically unsound, and constitutionally encumbered. The right to use local languages is a matter that has found expression in various international human rights discourses. From a moral perspective, it is ethically indefensible to impose your values on others. As Julius Nyerere asserted, ‘no nation has the right to make decisions for another nation’ (Muhando et al., 2018).

Thus, from both a legal and philosophical perspective, imposing French upon Africans is not a tenable step, especially for a country like France, which preaches democratic principles to African states, yet does not practice those same values. For instance, the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen is one of the basic charters that outline human liberties. The contextual interpretation of those liberties is that they are not limited to French people only - they envision human liberties to all people, generally, but more so to those associated with France, who include the Francophone West Africans. Articles 1,2, and 3 of the 1789 French Declaration of 30th September 1789 read that:

...people are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on considerations of the common good. The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of a person. These rights are liberty, property, safety, and resistance to oppression. The principle of any sovereignty lies primarily in the nation. No corporate body, no individual may exercise any authority that does not expressly emanate from it (Elysee News, 2024).



As such, the French oppression, suppression, and lack of recognition of Africans' rights and sovereignty stand in stark contrast to what the French constitution aspires to for all people.

Furthermore, the imposition of the French language in Africa is an action that is not supported by several relevant UN human rights conventions and protocols, such as the tenets contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948). Articles 1, 2, and 30 of the UDHR protect the right to equality and freedom from discrimination, and the right and responsibility of individuals, groups, and organs of society to promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms (UDHR, 1948). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1945), Article 1 (1) prohibits any discrimination in education whatsoever. The spirit contained in that UNESCO clause implies *de jure* and *de facto* equality.

Denying children the opportunity to learn school curriculum in their indigenous language is a violation of Article 29 (a) and Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) which states that, education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; and that a child belonging to a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right to enjoy his/her own culture or to use his/her language. Thus, the contention from African indigenous language groups arguing that the French language violates the rights of non-French speakers is a matter of utmost concern as it impacts their daily lives unfavourably.

By implication, Articles 29 (a) and 30 of the CRC (1989), read together with Articles 1, 2, and 30 of the UDHR (1948), infer that the decision by authorities to impose French upon the locals of West Africa was arrived at *per incuriam*. Several



other UN human rights protocols support this proposition. For instance, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007), Article 14 (3) states that states shall take effective measures, when possible, to provide indigenous peoples with access to education in their own culture and provided in their language. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UNDM) (1992), Article 4(3) recommends that states, when possible, should undertake appropriate measures to ensure adequate opportunities for people belonging to minorities to learn or to be taught in their languages.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM -Council of Europe) (1995), Article 14 (1-2) recognizes the right of minorities to learn their languages. It posits that states must make efforts to ensure that minorities have adequate opportunities to be taught in their languages or to receive instruction in their languages.

Zmyvalova (2024) asserts that local languages are endangered because prioritizing foreign dominant languages over local tongues results in their marginalization; hence, their development and future use are at risk. The most worrying phenomenon in schools is that the learning and teaching of indigenous languages decreases considerably as pupils progress to higher educational levels (e.g., from primary to secondary schools). It is this growing challenge of systematically undermining local languages that prompted the government of Mali in 2023 to scrap French as an official tongue and replace it with local languages. Other African states may also contemplate taking the same route (Africa News, 2023).



Real-Life French Language Implications for the Cultural, Social, Economic, & Political Emancipation of Francophone West Africans

When the French arrived in West Africa (initially as travellers), they were received with open friendliness by locals. Mambai (2024) asserts that the European travellers and missionaries in their documentation of African lifeforms were not writing impartial descriptions of local events but instead embarked upon a fishing expedition. In their writings, the European authorities depicted the travellers and missionaries as wise men and patrons so that those descriptions corroborated the supposed superiority of Europeans while portraying locals as silent, wild, and barbaric. Such mendacious reporting nourished the fond stereotypes they cherish about Africans. Mambai (2024) laments the abuses of the writing power contained in missionary travelogues when he argues that:

... the European travellers documented extensive negative imaging of local polity affairs and abused the trust and friendliness of Africans as they were in the service of a racist and colonial ideology and self-representation. Africans knew little, if at all, about those disparaging narratives about them, especially given that they had welcomed the Europeans warmly and ceded land to them to set up mission stations; after all, the African tradition dictates that you receive a stranger in a friendly manner. In Western films, there are deliberate, yet sustained efforts to present images of starving, naked, and sick Black people and present them as the standard picture of all Africans. Instead of being condemned for ethical reasons, the movies receive multiple awards.

By the time colonization was in full swing, the capture of local languages had already been engineered, mainly for economic reasons, and African institutions were reduced to rubber stamps. Thus, the imposition of the French language was, in effect,



an act of economic colonization that alienated locals in economic power relations. The French language was used to aid French international trade links as France increasingly extracted African resources. Language can be disembodied from a setting and commodified as a vessel for economic benefits, rather than necessarily using it for cultural importance in the modern transnational free-market empire (Meighan, 2023). Amid all these events is rising inequalities and lingering poverty and despite proclamations of national sovereignty by African states, economic independence in Francophone Africa remains a distant dream. Over time, promises of mutual partnerships by French authorities proved to be a sheer ruse (African Diaspora News, 2022).

Recent military coup d'état in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Gabon, accompanied by protest movements, have awakened the world to a simple reality: that neocolonialism through French language domination has long been exclusionary and left most of the local population marginalized. Locals who pursue the mastery of the French language are incentivized, while those who stick to local languages are stigmatized and isolated. The incentives for being associated with the French language include having access to privileges such as higher educational scholarships, business contracts, and other forms of political benefits connected to clientele patronage. This manipulative way of privileging foreign languages at the expense of local tongues is a form of violence against local cultures because it robs locals of their natural rights to use their indigenous languages freely in any situation, whether formally or informally (Ravishankar, 2020).

Often, white collar jobs attract those who are fluent in French; this situation leaves most indigenous speakers with little or no chance of sharing the national cake. Simply put, the mastery of French is associated with being intelligent, wise, and hence attracts more favour from the powers that be. For this reason, local people are



compelled to chase after those incentives which only come with the mastery of French, a language that has long been associated with elitism, repression, force, and assimilation arm-twisting tactics (Chumbow & Bobda, 2009, pp.39-40). To live and talk like a colonialist is a sure way of gaining validation, praise, and access to a variety of imperial incentives. Some Africans have even gone to extremes of discarding their language authenticity by feigning foreign accents so that they sound like people from the West (Ravishankar, 2020).

For instance, many Africans today seem to have a desperate desire to speak American or English accents – the accents that seem to sound even more fiddly than the actual English accent itself. It is like frantically trying to be more Catholic than the Pope; this is the tragedy of Africa, the bummer of mental colonial capture and surrender of one's originality and sense of self, just to fit the mould. These unauthentic or *borrowed* behaviors are done simply because the mastery of French or English is a route to entering the privileged neocolonial world. The irony of such French or English mastery is that while individuals gain from those imperial incentives, the foreign language mastery moves them away from their local identity into ever more colonial identities (Daga & Gallagher, 2024). Despite the eagerness of some Africans to speak 'polished French' or 'polished English', the African remains misrecognized by an imperial system that judges the calibre of people by the colour of their skin rather than by individual acumen or effort. In the mind of an imperialist, skin colour (white colour) is the main criterion for one to be considered worthy of recognition. This notion comes from the logic of coloniality, which asserts that non-whites are not *human enough*, as they are epistemologically inferior. Thus, for an African, speaking 'proper French' or 'proper English' is not a sufficient threshold to fix his/her misrecognition (Fanon, 2008, p.14).



While previously, France may have masked its trade practices of undercutting African markets using African puppet leaders, today, that narrative has changed, as can easily be seen through widespread anti-French sentiments across the Sahel region. Weak financial and investment policies were purposely put in place to siphon foreign currency reserves that ordinarily should be helping to stabilize local economies.

For instance, in the financial sector, the continued use of the currency, CFA Franc, a colonial French currency which at least eight West African countries still use, undermines their ability to expand local innovative investments as their financial reserves are controlled in Paris (Sylla, 2020). This unbalanced nature of relations between France and West Africa, where France is the dominant beneficiary of African revenues, has led some West African polities to now assert that continuing this trajectory is akin to entrusting a witch with a baby. It has taken a little longer than it should have, but most ordinary West African people have finally come to see the French language hegemony for what it is: a parasitic empire, if not a vampire, that preys on unsuspecting African societies to control, not only their resources, but also their minds and their destiny. These claims about France's exploitation and appetite for perpetual control of African resources are also supported by the Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, who argued that:

...due to poverty, some children in Burkina Faso work in gold mines. Burkina Faso is one of the poorest nations in the world. France prints colonial money for Burkina Faso - ironically, printing money for a country that has gold. In return, they demand 50% of everything that Burkina Faso exports, which ends up in the coffers of the French treasury. The gold that the Burkina Faso children go down a tunnel to extract mostly ends up in the coffers of the French state. So, the solution to end poverty for Africans is not to bring them



to Europe (through the current migration influx), but to free Africans from certain Europeans who exploit them. In this way, Africans can be allowed to live off what they have (African Diaspora News, 2022).

Policies of manipulation such as these, themselves, amount to an economic coup d'état; actions that are contrary to the democratic and human rights values that France and its Western allies often preach to African states. While France denies these claims, the fact is that, for decades, France has engaged in an economic matrix trap that has put Francophone African states into a cycle of perpetual dependency. In Africa, France had employed all key concepts of historical materialism, i.e., capitalist accumulation, hegemony, and imperialism.

Such self-serving agendas were practiced under the guise of cooperation, yet those actions are not necessarily about fostering bilateral ties but more about furthering Western interests, such as asserting geopolitical influences and curbing competitor influence, especially curbing the growing Chinese influence in Africa (African Diaspora News, 2022). Consequently, inequalities in Francophone Africa have been entrenched, and the social tapestry of locals leaves much to be desired, as the overall economic status in the region is that the economy is on its last legs. Despite all these enduring economic injustices against locals, the topic of colonial restitution is something that France is not willing to engage in. Political analysts assert that France fears that without access to African resources, it could easily be relegated to the category of a Third World country (ibid).

The picture below illustrates this challenge of domineering by hegemonic powers.



Figure 5. A satirical picture showing a one-sided relationship between France and Africa, in favor of France.

Source: United World International, 2021.

Haramanuba & Maponga (2024) argue that years of colonial indoctrination have resulted in the Black person's burden manifesting in an identity crisis. Whereas White people do things their way, Black people have abandoned their systems and replaced them with Western systems: a White person eats white, dresses white, worships white, marries white, walks white and does business as white, yet a Black person has essentially become a copycat, a *coconut* who is brown outside but white in the inside – all because they suffer from an internal virus of colonial education. The foreign colonial curriculum that most African governments have embraced does not address fundamental issues obtaining in local constellations, but instead, such education only produces Western capitalist class materialism. Joshua Maponga, a philosophical and spiritual leader, asserts that before colonialism, Africa had an admirable pedigree that has now been lost. He argues that:

...before colonization, Africans were self-sufficient and strong because they were grounded; they were powerful because they ruled themselves; they were



powerful because they owned land, and they owned their pharmaceuticals through traditional medicines. Africans were powerful because they had their midwives, they had their calendar, their economy, their celebrations, and they had their own God (Haramanuba & Maponga, 2024).

France has been procuring uranium to prop up its electricity needs from Niger by fleecing Niger through a variety of rent-seeking tactics such as price fixing, yet Niger itself was hardly getting much from its uranium as evidenced, for instance, by the fact that as of 2020, only around 20% of the local population had access to an electricity supply (Ritchie & Roser, 2020).

This situation has undermined the true application of the principles of economic theory and hence reduced local people to serfs in their land. In local African schools, French as a dominant language reflects a Western headstrong worldview, which today may be the reason we have a sustainability crisis. Put differently, the main goal of education should be to provide learners with tools that can enable them to construct the world in different ways. If this is the goal of education, subjecting students to education that only emphasizes teaching through dominant languages becomes a self-limiting space that only sees the world from a Western prism, hence undermining the very essence of education and scientific novelty (Laininen, 2019, pp. 186-187).

Postmodernist scholar, Hooks (1994), asserted that education is the practice of freedom that raises critical consciousness, and this should not just be contemplative but should occur in collaboration with social and political resistance. Hence, the role of pedagogy is to prepare students who can critique and work against interlocking systems of domination, imperialism, and supremacist capitalist patriarchy. The idea of exposing hegemonic languages is not necessarily to discourage the learning of



dominant languages, as those languages in themselves are not the problem. Hooks clarified this point by arguing that:

... it is not the dominant language (such as French or English) that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it; how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines; how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate and colonize (Hooks, 1994, p. 168).

Marxist theory argues that people can only become genuinely free when the majority among the oppressed and dispossessed become conscious of their predicament through social power. The irony, however, is that today, despite increases in interdependence, technological advancements, and humanity's social power, the feeling of powerlessness, isolation, and alienation by ordinary citizens persists in contemporary capitalist polities (Oversveen, 2021).

Fractures From within Africa that Have Aided the Perpetuation of Linguistic Colonialism & French Imperial & Ulterior Agendas

Africa seems to have been swamped by the run-of-the-mill political leaders who can hardly articulate the elementary mechanics of micro and macroeconomic systems and how they impact national growth. Many are spent forces who have long lost face among local populations and whose regime legitimacy has hence been rendered *functus officio*. Most African states today are pursuing empty democratic slogans – the democracy of hunger and empty stomachs. Despite the democratic sloganeering, most local people still feel marginalized. As Herberg-Rothe (2021, pp. 9-10) aptly asserted, there can be no political democracy without relational equality in society. For instance, African states have now become accustomed to holding phony elections, but purportedly disguised under the illusionary banner of



democracy, yet vote buying and other forms of electoral fraud are covertly carried out, leading to *democratic coup d'états* (Schaffer, 2007).

African puppet leaders who still worship at the altar of Western imperialism have been dressing up the reality to make it more palatable, offering comforting lies or diluted versions of the truth about the real intentions of imperialists, for they are beneficiaries. Continental and regional bodies that are expected to champion African agendas have lamentably failed the local people. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), like the African Union (AU), has been reduced to a gentlemen's club. ECOWAS is an entity that has long been perceived by locals as a stooge performing clandestine activities for foreign interests in West Africa. The youth of today are demanding tangible economic results, not empty political or democratic slogans. On how a polity is destroyed, Abraham Lincoln said:

... a country will never be destroyed from the outside, and if its people falter and lose their freedoms, it will be because they destroyed themselves. Nations do not die from invasion; they die from internal rottenness. Any group of people, anywhere, being inclined and having power, has the right to rise and shake off the existing government and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable – a most sacred right which we hope and believe is to liberate the world (Lincoln, p.65, p.89, p.388, 2023).

Africa has been let down by groups that are most influential in bringing societal emancipation; these groups are the politicians and academics. So, aside from politicians, inertia is also seen through the *laissez-faire* attitude of most African scholars who falsely and naively equate the attainment of their higher education with being liberated, yet with all their education and credentials, they are nothing more than *educated slaves* because they lack political consciousness.



Jeffries (2023) insinuates that the initial formation of postcolonial intellectuals brought hope to the voiceless African masses, but over time, that spirit seems to have been fading. By attaining higher education, African scholars have a duty beyond classroom teaching to perform proactive and remedial acts of resistance against injustices; for they are more empowered than an average African to fight against neocolonial machinations that manifest in a variety of subtle forms (Nyerere, 1974, pp.1-10; Said, 1994). Many African scholars are mute on critical matters where their voice is most needed, as they seem to operate on the principle of weaponized incompetence, whereby, despite the attainment of their academic credentials, they only do the bare minimum, so that, in turn, local people can only expect the least from them. Unlike the gallant African independence freedom fighters and intellectuals like Ben Bella, Patrice Lumumba, Sekou Toure, Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere, the current generation of African leaders and scholars rarely exhibit a genuine commitment to the struggle against neocolonial injustices and inequalities, for they are traitors who live in ivory towers created by imperial disparities, hence themselves complicit in institutional oppression. Jeffries (2023) exposes these careerists, opportunists, chancers, and gutless Black scholars by arguing that:

...most Black scholars are focused on earning tenure, becoming a sought-after talking head, and eventually being promoted to full professor. This careerist generation is self-absorbed; hence, there is little chance that this sector will confront injustices that occur either in academia or on the streets. Rocking the boat may further the cause for freedom, justice, and equality, yet undermine the trajectory of the career-minded academic. For the careerist, it's a zero-sum game. It seldom occurs to people that it is possible to have a prolific career as a scholar as well as to be the principled



freedom-fighting academic that the stewards of Black liberation consciousness envisioned. To be sure, writing and teaching about matters of concern to Black people have their place, but it is equally, if not more important, that Black scholars put their hands to the plow, determined to bring about the kind of change that impacts Black people's life chances for the better. If Black scholars do that, it is possible that a revolution of sorts could be launched without ever firing a single shot (Jeffries, 2023, pp. 121-122).

The muteness, spinelessness and lack of assertiveness by some academics might be explained by the fact that today, some people obtain qualifications through dubious means such as buying their degrees (through pecuniary gratification), or getting them through sexual favours, or obtaining them through cronyism, cutting corners, favouritism and political patronage (News Diggers, 2024).

For instance, a study carried out in Nigeria by Saheed et al. (2024, p. 227) revealed that, from a sample of 255 female university students, at least 50% confirmed having been approached by male lecturers offering to give them higher exam grades in exchange for sex. The same study also indicates that in Zambia, a random sample at one university showed that at least 54% of female students had been approached in similar circumstances (Saheed et al., 2024, p. 219).

However, sex for grades and sex for promotion in workplaces is not restricted to Africa; it is a general vice globally, which is also not limited to male teachers or male perpetrators. For instance, in the US and the UK, several female teachers have been found wanting. In 2023, at least six female teachers were arrested in a span of two days across the US for sexual misconduct with their boy students; and if within such a short period you have six cases, one must wonder how many of such cases



are committed annually, and how many teachers have gotten away with those cases (The Week, 2023). In 2024, a female teacher in the UK went even further in her misconduct by sending naked photos of herself to her boy student with a caption saying, 'I bet all the boys fancy me... I don't blame them ... I really have big boobs' (The Telegraph, 2024). The deterioration of ethical principles in academia could not be worse.

As Nhemachena & Mawere (2022, pp. 142-143) have observed, there are also instances where learning institutions have professors with clay feet, i.e., professors with considerable character flaws, but which are usually unknown to the public. They obtain their professorship through opaque and unmeritorious means, such as rank inflation and/or grade inflation. This leads to those academics being overconfident in their abilities, yet they do not demonstrate rigorousness of critical and independent thinking. In this way, their inadequacies and deficiencies are conveniently masked under the title of *professor*. It follows that because those candidates may not possess the expected calibre of such a rank, they will have no real voice on critical matters of principle; after all, they are already compromised through favouritism, cronyism, and blind loyalty. These corrupt practices, akin to match-fixing in football, have far-reaching implications beyond a single institution and can potentially harm the quality of the educational ecosystems.

The bottom line is that a person who obtained their qualification/degree or who got a workplace promotion/rank through illicit methods, including stepping on others just to get to the top, cannot be expected to be a societal torchbearer on moral or ethical issues and thus, cannot be a true agent for societal transformation. Further, Nhemachena & Mawere (2022) lament the hypocrisy of such academicians who shrug off their academic corruption yet speak vehemently against the corruption of politicians.



Arikana Chihombori-Quao, a former AU envoy to the US, also bemoans the seeming lack of assertiveness and mediocrity by Africans in reclaiming their identity and languages from foreign powers, when she argued that:

...the stupidity that is going on in Africa must come to an end. You can't be (so naïve) to expect those (colonizers) who put us in the position of servitude to get us out of this. The question is, when is the African going to wake up? How can it be that the African is stupid in Africa; the African is stupid in America, the African is stupid in the Caribbean...wherever you see us as Black people, we do some of the most stupid things...we tolerate all manner of baloney, abuse and mistreatment that no other groups of people elsewhere would ever entertain. Look at the Mexicans in the US, they stick together when it comes to issues about their existence (as a marginalized group); it's the same with the Irish, the Jews, the Chinese, and the Indians. These groups have voices that can be heard because they understand the importance of unity of purpose. But when you ask for African voices, we scatter like mice...we do not believe in each other (let alone, in ourselves). Once, I spoke to my fellow Zimbabwean woman...she spoke with so much pride that her son can't speak Shona (the local language), except for English, which he speaks fluently like a Brit. This is how language colonialism and mind indoctrination have doomed most Africans (Chihombori-Quao, 2024).

Oppression seems to be ennobling; it is ironic, for instance, that in many African states today, one can see characteristics of the previously oppressed becoming the new oppressors but only manifesting in different versions.



Emancipatory Lessons from Burkina Faso, Mali & Niger: Political Consciousness as a Vehicle to Reclaim Cultural, Social & Economic Sovereignty

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, having been suspended from ECOWAS due to military coups in their countries, announced in January 2024 that they were leaving the bloc entirely. They accused ECOWAS of being a surrogate organization that champions French imperial and neocolonial interests, which local populations have endured for far too long. The new leaders of these three countries argued that the need for those coups arose due to the wanton and perpetual exploitation of African resources by France. Africans across the continent are fed up with being ruled by puppet leaders who are easily controlled by imperialists for personal gain. These widespread claims of leadership deficiency in Africa are corroborated by observations made at the recent Africa-China summit by the former Prime Minister of Burkina Faso, Dr. A. J. Kyelem de Tambela, when he argued that:

... most African leaders are not free (i.e., they are captured), hence they lack political will and cannot, therefore, determine the destiny of their people. In Africa today, particularly in Francophone Africa, many heads of state still take instructions from Paris, London, and Washington before making any decisions. We have leaders who prefer to ally with Paris or Washington to fight against their African brothers. In this context, building an integrated development and industrialization framework is difficult. As for Burkina Faso, we have observed that in West Africa, cooperation between states has been difficult, as some heads of state receive instructions from outside to act against other West African states. This realization led us, together with Mali and Niger, to leave the ECOWAS (Uplifting Africa, 2024).



In July 2024, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger established a confederation, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). Under the AES pact, any aggression against one member is an attack on all of them (Klomegah, 2024). All foreign troops (i.e., the French and the US) that were previously stationed within the AES territories were swiftly expelled on allegations that they were complicit in the fight against jihadist terrorists. Complicity was purposely designed to create an impression that the governments of the Sahel region were ineffective in fighting terrorism to justify the continued (over) stay of Western troops, but their real motive was to control African resources (Black Culture Diary, 2024).

Critics argue that the alliance is bound to have insurmountable challenges, given that the alliance does not have the necessary military and economic capabilities to fight extremism. But given the context in which the military coups occurred, the defeatist mindset and reasoning of critics are both politically and morally flawed. Those suggestions are akin to asserting that slaves should not fight for their freedom simply because they do not have sufficient economic means to stand on their own once freed.

By demonstrating fearlessness and assertiveness, the AES alliance is poised to succeed, especially because the key element that they have galvanized is the political support of their masses. The new regimes have proactively embarked upon local developmental agendas that are in tune with local needs, such as promoting agriculture, education, health services, and mining ventures. Furthermore, the extremist security challenges are being gradually tackled with new strategic partners such as Russia, China, and Turkey - all of whom are providing substantial technical and military support (Klomegah, 2024).

The AES states have brought a major shakeup in the body politic and changed the entire colonial narrative of dependence on the West by shifting towards the



South-South cooperation synergies. Chinua Achebe once said, ‘until the lions have their historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter’ (King, 2014, p.2). Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali seem to have heeded Achebe’s call by writing their history through the removal of doormat regimes so that their countries reclaim genuine sovereignty. The revolutionary spirit in which these coups occurred should be construed from a broader perspective: rather than treat the coups as an assault on constitutional order, they should instead be seen as part of the remedial acts of resistance against imperialism. The coups are not about soldiers being power hungry; they are anti-neocolonial rebellions aimed at restoring Africa’s sovereignty. The pragmatic approach that the AES countries have taken towards promoting economic resilience to revitalize their economies has set the stage for a brighter African future. Their new policies provide crucial leverage for the attainment of long-term economic goals. Significantly, creating a stable political, social, and economic developmental environment offers potential dividends for sustainable peace in the troubled Sahel region (Chihombori-Quao, 2024).

Unlike France, the new AES allies, who now include Cuba and Venezuela, are not preoccupied with dictating and controlling local policies and resources of the AES; instead, their support emphasizes development in key economic sectors such as education, mining, health care, and in the fight against terrorism. Importantly, these Global South allies have a historic bond centred on solidarity and comradeship. For instance, Cuba is sending medical personnel to Burkina Faso to improve the health care systems, while Venezuela brings its expertise in energy security. Aside from this, allies are also sending troops to assist in the maintenance of political stability. For instance, Turkey supplies predator drones to fight jihadist terrorists who have been a menace in the Sahel for a long time. Cutting ties with France will ensure that the AES countries rebuild relations with states that value mutual partnership and



send a clear message that the days of bowing to foreign entities and their African marionettes are over (Black Culture Diary, 2024).

If democracy is hijacked by corporate interests, capitalists, and local traitors, many of whom are engaged in fly-by-night business ventures, it will not deliver the change that local people envision. This situation will continuously leave room for coup d'états, some of which will be opportunistic and simply exploit the disaffection of the population. This means that rather than wait for the military to step in, ordinary citizens need to step up by organizing themselves to deliver change; for it should be clear by now that capitalist collaborators and political stooges will not serve local people's interests (ibid).

From an analytical perspective, the divorce between ECOWAS and the AES states may provide an opportunity for ECOWAS to critically re-examine its flawed policies to see if it can devise new strategies that connect with a generation. For a long time, ECOWAS had stayed comfortable with its otherwise obsolete policies that had long lost their footing in contemporary West African politics.

Discussion

Years of French language dominance and neocolonial rule of Francophone West Africa have been marked by egregious abuse of the rights of locals and have resulted in their alienation in economic relations. Local institutions have long been captured and hence are marred and crippled by corruption and maladministration. In essence, most of the affected Francophone African states have been reduced to mere racketeering schemes run by French cronies and surrogates but masquerading as Black leaders interested in improving the welfare of locals. Through French language hegemony, laws were craftily designed to control all aspects of polity governance, which, over time, also created a climate of unwritten rules at every level of local

interaction to keep local people in a perpetual state of inferiority. Fear, force, violence, assimilation tactics, and social exclusion were tools used to achieve those objectives.

African leaders who dare to liberate their people from the invisible chains of neocolonialism are labelled by the West with derogatory terms such as agents of communism (in the case of Patrice Lumumba of Congo), and putschists (in the case of Captain Ibrahim Traore, Colonel Assimi Goita, and General A. Tchiani of the AES). A typical example of such labelling was in the 1980s, where the UK government labelled Mandela and his fellow ANC leaders as terrorists, and within the British establishment, T-shirts and posters were printed with slogans saying, 'hang Nelson Mandela and all ANC terrorists; they are butchers'. Even in the US, Mandela remained on their list of terrorists until 2008 (Descrider News, December 5, 2013).

The picture below illustrates the UK poster messages on Mandela.

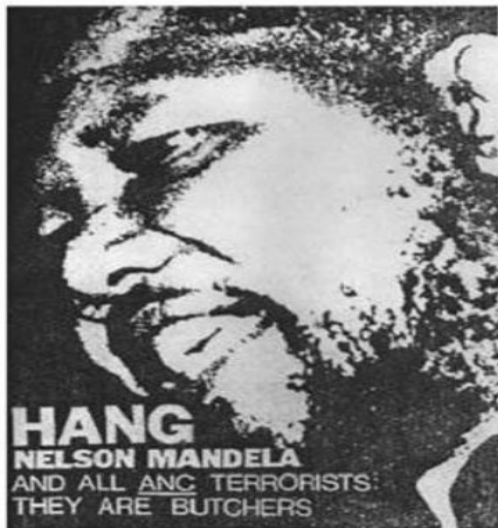


Figure 6. A Poster of Mandela was put up by the student organization of the UK Conservative Party in the 1980s.

Source: Kevin Maxwell, 2023.



However, such mischievous labelling of African heroes has often backfired as local people can see through those machinations; for Africans have come to know who they are as a people and who they are not (Chihombori-Quao, 2024).

The French language politics of divide-and-rule; the rule by conscription, the Machiavellian arm-twisting politics of settling one's debt by 'robbing Paul, to pay Peter', seem to have hit the buffers nowadays. Broadly, French policies in Africa on local development have largely been superficial and marked by self-serving interests. As Abraham Lincoln argued:

...you cannot build character and courage by taking away people's initiative and independence. You cannot help people permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves' (Lincoln, p. 65, 2023).

Today, French influence in Africa is dying on its feet, and the relevance and utility of the French language hangs by a thread mainly because France, through its monotonous neocolonial practices, has forfeited the trust and confidence of Africans and may never regain that ruined trust. The status of French as an official tongue stands firmly challenged, especially in the AES countries.

It is not far-fetched to assert that today, most Africans would rather invest in learning Mandarin or Arabic than French. It is also becoming increasingly clear that Europeans, such as the French, who still desire to dominate Africa, have no real future in Africa. Due to a sense of shame, France has not been forthright in denouncing its past racist, discriminatory, and colonial atrocities. Restitution is not even a topic that colonialists want to hear about. In general terms, when people who practice racism are confronted or called to account, they tend to become defensive due to the stigma associated with being labelled a 'racist'. Instead, they prefer to be



in denial and engage in the blame-gaming tactics to avoid the topic altogether (DiAngelo, 2018).

The new political wind of change brought by recent military regimes (the AES) now seems set on restoring fiscal discipline, as evidenced by their emphasis on local developmental programs such as agriculture, manufacturing, and mining. The new leaders of the AES have thus far demonstrated that, contrary to previous unfavourable portrayals of military governments, they are politically astute, informed, and invested in the future of their countries. The AES leaders have cultivated a persona of Pan-Africanism not seen in Africa for a long time. The tangible progress made so far through their economic policies that focus on local needs has exposed Western fallacies that assume that democracy per se is a necessary condition for growth. The AES has also demonstrated that there are no grand theories of economics required to turn around a country's economic fortunes. All that is required is for the government to be proactive in answering the national question; that is, devising inclusive social and economic policies using a bottom-up approach that ensures that the population at the grassroots proactively owns their economic programs (Institute for Security Studies, 2025).

For the French, the desire for continued repression and forcible control of Africans has pushed them to concoct negative narratives that suggest that Africans are in dire need of aid and French support. The French language has fostered stereotypes, sustained racism, and myths that depict African people as genetically, biologically, and culturally inferior. All these false concoctions are designed to justify French intervention in African affairs (Klomegah, 2024).

In West Africa, France plays a simultaneous role of saviour and tormentor, whereby France creates economic upheavals in Africa through resource plunder, which, over time, creates human insecurity, and then turns round purporting to be



solving those same problems they created. Such a disposition is akin to an arsonist posing as a firefighter to unsuspecting people. In this way, gullible African leaders, otherwise traitors of their homeland, bandwagon with French authorities to justify French perpetual involvement in internal local African politics.

For instance, what France and its Western-allied researchers present to the world as empirical analyses of the Sahel security situation (where France previously had deployed their troops) are instead tales fuelled by selective interpretations bereft of authentic substance and driven more by desire than objective insight. In this manipulative way, France has continued to push a sustained, yet dubious security narrative that Africa lacks a compelling alternative to French military support. West Africans argue that despite its assumed preponderance, France neither has the scope nor the legitimacy to be the bulwark of Africa's security; for if it had such capacity, the jihadist militant cells in the Sahel would have long been crushed (Black Culture Diary, 2024). Furthermore, media misinformation peddled through dominant languages such as French and English shapes a variety of effects across multiple public policy matters, hence posing a challenge that can impact prosperity and security.

More incriminatingly is the realization that the French language imposition is inconsistent with democratic principles, which France claims to champion. Also, imposition of any kind is at variance with human rights norms as enshrined in relevant international protocols and the UN conventions such as the UNDRIP (2007), the CRC (1989), UNESCO (1945), and the UDHR (1948).

Such marginalization and exclusion have also been extended to educational and scientific fields, which mainly reflect global power asymmetries of the Global North while muting and blatantly shunning Global South initiatives. While the key objective is to systematically undermine and exclude subaltern initiatives, the



ultimate consequence for the scientific field as a body is that scientific knowledge is rendered less innovative as ‘science’ remains largely confined to the West, a self-anointed *superior* region of the world (Cerioli, 2024).

For this reason, the rise of new global powers through BRICS might offer a political and economic lifeline for Global South states that have endured decades of Western manipulation, exploitation, racism, discrimination, and misrecognition. The BRICS, together with the AES, demonstrate a rejection of old colonial ties that once confined African states. France, along with its allies, has long positioned itself as the moral and political authority on global governance, but now that power has been called into question. French intervention in Africa has mainly been about manipulation rather than about cooperation and development, but now, the African people are waking up to this reality (Chihombori-Quao, 2024).

The AES countries represent a new Africa that is bold enough to challenge colonial power structures, and by aligning itself with the East, the AES is signalling that the continent will no longer be a pawn in Europe’s geopolitical parlour games. By removing the syndrome of Western dependency, the continent stands a better chance of charting its emancipatory route. For instance, revitalizing industries that previously were on life support, such as the revival of the Burkina Faso airline, is not only about job creation but also about restoring national pride and glory (Black Culture Diary, 2024). Significantly, the expulsion of French forces in the AES, and Mali’s scrapping of French as an official language, combined with Burkina Faso’s ban on the use of colonial judicial attire in the courts of law in preference for locally designed judicial robes, sends an unequivocal message: that Africa is no longer going to be a loaf of bread to be shared by Western powers (Rubaya, 2024). Furthermore, other Francophone countries such as Chad and Senegal have also declared that



French troops should leave their soil. This marks a pivotal shift in the Sahel's relations with imperial powers.

Losing military bases almost en masse seems to have left France grasping at straws on how to maintain a grip on its remaining *skeleton* of military bases on the continent. In what looks like a desperate roll of the dice, France seems to be banking on bolstering its relations with Djibouti as a face-saving mechanism. Recently, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, visited Djibouti, apparently to boost France's plummeting image in Africa, where he made a speech, inter alia, asserting that the Djibouti base will be used as a 'key power point' for Africa and that Djibouti and France share cultural and linguistic values (Firstpost Vantage, 2024). Macron's speech was swiftly rebuked by Palki Sharma, a veteran journalist who instead put the 'shared cultural and linguistic values' statement into its right perspective by arguing that:

... here is a message for all former colonizers: The reason we (Global South populations) have a shared language with you is because you colonized us; it is because you forced us to learn your language; we share culture because you forced it down our throats (Firstpost Vantage, 2024).

Analysts argue that due to France's excessive and undue control that it exerted in West Africa, democracy itself has suffered, i.e., instead of fostering the principles of democracy, the widespread anti-French and anti-imperial rhetoric has contributed to the decline of democracy as an ideological framework (Middle East Eye, 2024).

Locally, however, snitches of all hues, mainly encompassing political leaders, corporate businesspeople, and academics, or otherwise *Europeanized* Africans, have also been a significant destabilizing factor in the equation of the French language and economic domination of Africa. Through treacherous behaviors, local traitors



have significantly aided the destruction of Africa by foreign entities. For some scholars and politicians, rather than provide constructive critique on how Africa can steer away from dominant colonial language use and attain social and economic independence, they succumb to defeatist suppositions that suggest that Africa cannot rise and may well be considered a lost cause. This feeble and defeatist disposition has lowered the value of African citizenship.

Africans deserve better than the seemingly perpetual cycle of manipulation from local politicians, coupled with complicity from local academicians. Despite these setbacks, the new leaders of the AES have demonstrated their unwavering resolve to neutralize colonial attitudes in Africa. For instance, the swift expulsion of French forces, including the French ambassadors, from the AES has dealt a monumental blow to Western influence in the Sahel and beyond, as those actions have the potential to influence other African states to take similar bold steps. From a cultural and political perspective, these actions are real steps towards restoring genuine sovereignty and economic independence (Africa News, 2023).

African bodies such as the AU and ECOWAS have little or no palpable influence on the political and economic direction of contemporary African politics. Save for their official titles, these bodies are mainly seen by local people as empty vessels trying to find their long-lost relevance – this time around, attempting to court unsuspecting or otherwise gullible states to support their puppet agendas. To be sure, an ordinary African sees ECOWAS as an organization run by imperialists but masquerading as an African entity. Crucially, the blatant incompetence of the AU in protecting Africa's sovereignty from foreign interferences makes one wonder why the AU still has support from its members – have the member states not seen that the emperor has no clothes? Patrick Lumumba, a law professor in Kenya, argues that Africans are in this political malaise because they seem to elect the worst among



them to be their political leaders. Thus, the problem is not necessarily with leaders alone, but also with the electorate, who, despite having credible information about the character of candidates vying for office, still elect the least qualified or most unscrupulous candidates to ascend to power (GH Educate, 2025).

This study, as a tool for political, economic, and philosophical reflection, helps to pique the collective interest of locals in the need for Africans to focus on efforts towards economic independence. The underlying call here is that rather than mull over the colonial atrocities that have previously hindered local growth, Africans might now see the current *wind of change* as an opportunity to reassert themselves towards investing in local ingenuity to attain sustainable growth. Blaming colonialists and the local collaborators will not help Africa get out of its current doldrums; instead, Africa must reinvent itself and chart a new trajectory towards reclaiming its political and economic destiny, like the AES countries have done. Importantly, unity of purpose among Africans is going to be key in achieving the envisioned growth. As Julius Nyerere asserted, ‘unity will not make Africans rich, but will make it more difficult for outsiders to disregard and humiliate them’ (Muhando et al., 2018).

Conclusion

This study synthesizes the subaltern historiography of anti-colonial resistance to France’s domination of West Africa through French language arm-twisting policies and politics. Language is a symbolic system through which populations from different societies communicate and through which they convey their culture. Although language is ever evolving, it continues to shape our reality. Language is inseparable from culture as both are intertwined in constituting the heritage of a



society. Thus, language is a means by which societies mobilize themselves, assert their authority, and reveal how they perceive the world.

As such, French, as an official tongue, by default, continues to erode African cultures and heritages because locals are implicitly compelled to perceive their world through a lens of French culture. For instance, an African cannot communicate with ancestors or perform traditional sacred oaths or rituals using French or English; otherwise, that would be a taboo and a show of disrespect for ancestral codes. Thus, the forcible assimilation plays through linguistic hierarchies of privileging colonial languages have considerably dislocated and distorted African traditional norm systems. This scenario of cultural misconfiguration is akin to asking the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Toyota to start using a Mercedes-Benz as their official car. Through a postcolonial analysis and the logic of cultural theory, this study finds a causal link between linguistic colonialism and cultural erosion. The causal inference (cause and effect outcomes) of foreign tongues also extends to poor educational and economic outcomes in West Africa.

Therefore, the idea of (re) introducing indigenous languages as official tongues, like Mali has done, is a step forward in overcoming the French propensity for marginalizing African initiatives. That step opens the space to question both the immaterial and material factors that influence, coerce, and motivate actors in different languages and economic contexts. The educational system of teaching and learning (pedagogy) must reflect the interests, talents, and cultural aspects of learners. In other words, education that ignores learners' backgrounds, cultural and traditional orientations, natural aptitude, beliefs, and local value systems is not only deficient but potentially destructive to those learners.

On face value, colonialism may have ended, but in practical life, the structures that sustain it, such as racism, intolerance, discrimination, economic power relations



that nurture inequalities, and covert schemes of pitting Global South ethnicities against each other to cause enmity, are still alive and becoming ever more sinister. Any oppressor, exploiter, colonizer, or otherwise a marauding superpower, survives on divide-and-rule policies, and thus, will stop at nothing to keep local people divided. Under the circumstances, unity of purpose among locals is going to be a critical tool to fend off such imperial schemes, if nothing else.

Today, the French language and its associated influences in Africa are facing considerable headwinds; for deceptive tactics have consequences. As Abraham Lincoln put it, ‘you can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all of the time’ (Time Magazine, 2016). By engaging in excessive acts of political brinkmanship, such as economic manipulative policies that made local economies go into a tailspin, France was laying the path for its political demise in Africa.

Over time, French neocolonial policies began to wear thin, and locals now saw France and the French language itself as an *enemy* standing in their way towards the attainment of local economic growth and hence sought alternative leaders whom they believed could objectively respond to their welfare. While previously France believed that it would get away with the maltreatment of West Africans, today, those mischievous tactics have been widely exposed, notably through recent military coup d’états in AES states. French manoeuvres, especially their military presence in Africa, are facing unprecedented scrutiny, and the wave of French troop expulsions from Africa shows massive rejection of neocolonialism.

Significantly, the ease with which the populations of the AES rallied behind their junta regimes demonstrates that political consciousness among locals has increased their capacity to resist France’s neocolonial rule. For many in Africa, especially the youth, the AES leaders are heroes and symbols of Africa’s resilience



to dismantle toxic foreign relations and invisible chains of imperialism. But for France and its African political stooges and traitors, the AES leaders are seen as *rogue* elements whose ascendancy to power represents a major threat to their imperial dominance and neocolonial arm-twisting agendas.

Indeed, French power is fast waning, not just in Francophone West Africa, but across the continent generally. This marks a major decline in French historical and imperial influence on the continent. No longer will France exploit African resources and enjoy the loot without being called out. As the adage goes, stealing a village drum is easy, but finding a place where you can play it with a conscious mind is a challenge. Across Africa today, France is generally viewed with misgivings; as a modern-day slave master state, an exploiter state, and a cultural imperialist bent on eroding, if not mutilating, African traditional values through assimilation ploys. Francophone West Africans are perturbed by relentless French meddling in local affairs and are now calling for respect and dignity for their sovereign rights as well as recognition of Africa's contribution to world civilization. The French language and its associated economic politics and policies in Africa have been largely marked by French intolerance, grotesque abuse of fundamental rights of locals, and economic colonization. Ironically, France and its Western allies preach good governance to African states while ignoring their blind spots.

The discernment capacity among disenfranchised locals has increased, and now ordinary Africans have finally seen the conman behind the curtain. This political (re)awakening of Africans, as demonstrated by the AES populations, could indicate that doomsday for the French language and political dominance in West Africa is fast approaching. Chinua Achebe's legendary book, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), on polity disintegration due to relentless changes in the social and political realities, is



probably the best descriptor, metaphorically, of how the once-upon-a-time *mighty* colonial France has today fallen apart in Africa.

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