

Narratives of Justice

Colonization is not a historical concept, it is an active perpetrator that has stunted development and progress for the former colonies. The conquest and direct governance that occurred as a result of the Scramble for Africa are one of these historical events leading up to a century of injustice. Yet, grievances persist even after the modern-day establishment of independence. We argue that this subordination is the effect of neo-colonialism: where ‘influence’ is spread by new forms of indirect control by more-developed control. This does not require coercion or war, but has instead been channeled through the legal, economic, and digital infrastructure required to be visible on the international stage: through courts, capital, and code.

Africa is not alone in this constraint; rather, the entirety of the Global South has been structurally disadvantaged to follow a Western system of ‘administration’ for a standardized path to development, rather than its empowerment. This is why such contemporary systems have instead morphed into stifling African dissent, resource exploitation, and international courts that punish African leadership while disregarding Western atrocities to begin with. We hope that by examining the quantitative aspects of these patterns, more awareness is brought to the claims made against supposedly neutral international organizations and dominant countries that have weaponized their power against a weaker Africa. Unlike other cases of social injustices, reducing these patterns to merely data biases and discrepancies would ignore the ulterior motive underlying the larger issue of the impartial global power structure that has undeniably harmed African sovereignty, for these countries’ own gain.

First, we look at these systemic mechanisms through the imposition of foreign lenses in the legal sphere. The International Criminal Court has long been considered the global arbitrator of justice. Yet, 90% of the charges that it has made since its inception have focused on indicting

African leaders. Africa leads the list of ICC defendants, although it makes up only 20% of ICC member states. This disparity indicated not only the persistence of colonial reasoning but also the unfair portrayal of the African government as fundamentally illegitimate and in need of international supervision, unable to possess political sovereignty. There is an evident lack of neutrality that holds a racially divided global order in which those in positions of power decide who is protected and who faces prosecution. Some may claim that the ICC functions as a tool of Western imperialism, where a nation's power and influence is extended through dominance in other spheres. African leaders themselves have expressed concerns over this bias. For instance, Ethiopian Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn criticized the ICC's operations, stating that they have left a "very bad impression in Africa" and are "totally unacceptable".

Here, membership statistics or the trends in global crime never coincide. Instead, as we compare ICC cases opening with major global events, we see something else entirely different: the atrocities committed by great Western powers—from American invasions in Iraq to abuses of human rights in Afghanistan—always get suppressed. This blind eye turned only goes to show the unbalanced, racial, and hypocritical world legal system that values the superiority of “anti-Black, anti-Muslim” identities.

Contextualizing this requires looking at the Rome Statute, which is a legislative requirement that entrusts jurisdiction to the ICC. It is the root of this recognition that institutionalized contributions to this global imbalance. The Statute captures four categories of crimes—genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression—and conveniently leaves out crimes historically committed by Western (and colonial) great powers who have written up these treaties. These crimes include economic aggression, ecological crimes, and the employment of mercenaries. What is prosecutable hinges on, by definition, who wields the pen

and who is already presumed to be the criminal in mind—an unfortunate result of selective justice sitting on global morals that have only originated from one end.

Even though African states played a pivotal role in creating the Court, their continued participation today is a political necessity rather than a display of trust. Many remain within the ICC's jurisdiction not out of faith in its justice, but because membership boosts their international legitimacy.

Parallel to these legal dynamics, Africa's economic landscape is marred by neocolonial dependencies rooted in the same extractive logic as imperial rule. Although the continent is rich in natural resources—from oil to rare earth minerals—it remains structurally unable to convert these assets into sustained wealth. Instead, this 'wealth' has paradoxically contributed to its economic challenges, being hung out to dry by extractive trade agreements and foreign corporate interests that ensure that the majority of profits are realized *outside* the continent. Foreign firms control contracts, dictate export terms, install or influence leadership, and then repatriate their earnings. This leaves African states with environmental degradation, exploited labor, and weakened governance—all without a substantial increase in economic development.

Current balance accounts illustrate the billions in losses that the continent annually loses. This economic dependency is not simply the result of mismanagement or corruption: it is the product of deliberate systemic design, carried over from colonial trading models that emphasized the export of raw materials and the import of manufactured goods. Under the guise of globalization and free trade, African economies are locked into a cycle of reliance, kept from developing independent technological or industrial capacity—just as they had been under empire. They do not receive adequate compensation or reinvestment into local domestic

economies. Instead, Africa is denied economic self-determination, its growth serving external markets rather than internal needs.

Finally, we examine the most modern form of oppression, one which no longer needs a police force but only the interconnectivity of today's world. If the courts and capital preserve old hierarchies through law and economics, the domain of code introduces an even more insidious form of domination: digital colonialism. In an increasingly internet-mediated age, Africa's dependency on Western-led digital infrastructure makes foreign companies responsible for unparalleled influence over the communications and information dissemination, directly translating to the stability of the continent.

Websites operated by the US technology company META, like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, are leading social media platforms in Africa, and with a combined user base of over 200 million. However, it is a concern that these sites continuously favor sensational news and suppress activism. Such censorship has facilitated violence in war zones, such as Facebook's content-maximizing algorithms in Libya and Ethiopia, engineered to prevent organizing and minimize visibility. Not even internal employee alerts to reduce harm were sufficient at mitigating this issue. Thus, it is not a passive negligence that has isolated the people; it is about money, as seen by the shutdown costs driving algorithmic colonialism, as these platforms profit from chaos while cutting down security at the expense of African borders.

While African activism online is continuously silenced, reformist messages are labeled as violent or fake news, and autocracies utilize ambiguous moderation policies to silence criticism. When the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria erupted, Facebook and Instagram labeled even peaceful images—like bloody flags or pleas to "Pray for Nigeria"—as misinformation, while the government used the social media sites to spread its own disinformation under such operations as

"Operation Crocodile Smile." This pattern, where activism is censored but authoritarianism is broadcast, is another application of the logic of colonial domination: keep things the same, punish dissent, and exert outside control.

Internet shutdowns are yet another blunt instrument in this war of the digital age. While they are ordered by governments, their functioning relies on infrastructure owned and controlled by Western telecommunication monopolies. They can cut off entire populations: from communication and banking, and close off a global consciousness, especially in periods of civil war.

In 2023, Ethiopia's Tigray region had a complete internet blackout for over two years. Sudan also did this in its revolution. As our #KeepItOn campaign at Access Now has revealed, 15 African countries faced 21 shutdowns in 2024 alone. Meanwhile, those in charge of these platforms are thousands of miles away.

The economic consequences of these shutdowns are staggering. According to NetBlocks' Cost of Shutdown Tool, Egypt loses \$125 million per day during a total shutdown. Kenya loses \$13 million, and even smaller nations like Djibouti lose hundreds of thousands. These disruptions do more than silence dissent—they cripple local businesses, halt services, and deepen the continent's reliance on foreign aid, creating a feedback loop of instability and dependency. Disengaged and unaffected, it does not matter to tech companies the 1-2% of annual GDP that African nations lose from repeated blackouts, even when the power to close off an entire country to the continent lies in their hands.

Altogether, the ICC's legal bias, Western economic dominance, and digital censorship form an interlocking system of neocolonial control. They criminalize leadership, exploit resources, and silence resistance—all the while commemorating themselves under the banner of

justice, development, and connectivity. But this is only a reinvention of old mechanisms under a modern guise—replacing the missionary with the moderator and the settler with the server.

The fight for decolonization, therefore, must move beyond national liberation. It must confront the structural scaffolding of this new, ‘hidden’ empire. Africa’s struggle today is not simply to be heard but to regain control over the tools of modern life. To reclaim digital sovereignty, economic agency, and legal dignity will only then allow the continent to move from subjugation to self-determination, and from being governed to governing.