AFRICA-FRANCE RELATIONS SINCE 1945: "PLUS ÇA CHANGE, PLUS C'EST LA MÊME CHOSE"[1]

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Abstract

The French colonial empire did not survive the Second Great War of the twentieth century. However, unlike the British, the French suffered a crushing military defeat at the hands of the Nazis. The greater tragedy done to France, however, was not in the military defeat but, in fact, in the loss of its economy and its support systems. About 400,000 buildings were destroyed, and five times that number was damaged. The country's infrastructure was rendered comatose, and industrial and agricultural production was running at just 40% of what it had been pre-war. As the French citizens looked up to De Gaulle's government for help, the postwar French state looked up to its African colonies for resources to rebuild the economy. This profoundly impacted the relations between France and Africa. Scholars of Africa's international relations have examined this discourse but often reason that the independence of French African colonies reclaimed African agency in the relations between Africa and France. In this study, evidence is provided that the basics of Africa-French relations have fundamentally remained the same since 1945. The thrust of the paper is captured in the statement: "the more things change, the more they remain the same."

Keywords: France-Africa relations, neoliberalism, Pre carre, post-war Africa and Decolonization

Introduction

In 2018, France won the World Cup in Russia; in his jocular manner, the South African-born global comedian Trevor Noah, on 17 July 2018, on his weekly comedy program, *The Daily Show*, joked that it was Africa that won the World Cup. This was obviously based on the number of African/children of African immigrants who won the coveted trophy for the French. Out of the twenty-three players that comprised the French contingent, fifteen were of African ancestry. However, in a seriously toned letter, the French ambassador to the United States, where Trevor has naturalized, wrote him to carp about the insensitivity of the former's joke about Africans winning the trophy. The ambassador posited that the parents of the footballers might have come from another country, but the great majority of them, all but two of the twenty-three, were born in France, learned to play soccer in France, and are, therefore, French citizens. The honorable ambassador went on to submit that the rich and varied background of the French players is a reflection of France's diversity (or, as Noah later put it, a reflection of France's colonialism). To drive home his point and also gibe at the United States, the ambassador quipped that "unlike in the United States of America, France does not refer to its citizens based on their race, religion, or origin. To us, there is no hyphenated identity; roots are an individual reality. By calling them African team [football players], it seems you are denying their Frenchness. This, even in jest, legitimizes the ideology, which claims whiteness as the only definition of being French" (Noah, 2018).

In his jocular manner, Noah used this communication from the French ambassador to poke at the legacies of French colonial meddlesomeness in Africa. The seriousness the French authorities attached to the musings of a comedian – as exemplified in the letter from the ambassador – about their colonial legacies demonstrates that the matter is not concluded. Although formal colonialism ended decades ago, the basis of the French relationship with Africa has remained unchanged. In fact, the more they change, the more

[1] This was a phrase the French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr used to explain that historical change is never really a departure from the state of affairs. The phrase means the more things change, the more they remain the same.

they remain the same. Africa-France relations has a deep historical import, and the year 1945 is crucial in explicating this relationship.

Profound changes were brought to bear on the relations between Africa and France beginning in 1945, to the extent that a significant part of the scholarship on Africa-France relations has been embroiled in an interesting debate on the nuances of these changes (Chafer, 2002a; Thomas, 2009; Profant, 2010). Since 1945, there have been peculiar sprains and strains that have tested the tenets as well as the foundations of Africa's relations with France. Between 1945 and 1965, there was an unabashed resolve of French efforts at protecting her pré carré (sphere of influence) in Africa. France was known to have been involved in several coups and military interventions in Francophone Africa in this period. As was the case in the heydays of colonial rule, the guiding principle of French involvement in the coups and other military outings, whether in the Congo, Gabon, Togo, Benin Cote d'Ivoire, and Mali, was her political and economic interests. The brutal assassination of Togo's Silvanus Olympius in circumstances in which the French were complicit showed the extent of French determination to still call the shots on the continent. Mckesson (1990) notes that all but two of the military interventions that France made in Africa were at the request of the governments concerned. "No other major power (East or West) has engaged in such operations and, indeed, only one other country (Cuba) has sent any significant number of combat troops" Mckesson (1990:38). To save face, French President Jacques Foccart engaged what was called *réseaux* (informal networks) with Francophone African heads of state; this, nonetheless, witnessed greater criticisms from African intellectuals, who read neocolonialism into France's relations with its former colonies. With decreasing development aids, the 1980s and '90s proved particularly striking in the relations between Africa and France.

By the mid-1990s, the framers of the cascading neoliberal world order, the so-called Washington Consensus, had imposed on France the idea of devaluing the CFA as well as reducing its expenditure on Africa. Despite the destabilizing effects of neoliberalism, at least, on microeconomic stability and livelihoods, many, both in France and Africa, continued to view the relationship between Francophone Africa and France as a special one. For the rest of Africa, France, when the opportunity was provided, worked hard to reduce the influence of her archrival, Britain – as was the case in Nigeria during the Nigeria-Biafra War.

Africa-France relations have received significant scholarly attention. While opinions differ on some themes, they are agreed on others. For instance, on the vexed issue of French involvement in Africa's economic integration efforts, scholarly opinions seem to somewhat agree. Those who have considered the matter appear to have a consensus that French-Africa relations have continuously and continually impinged on the integration efforts of, at least, Sub-Saharan Africa. Some scholars have argued that the entire theme of Africa-France relations since 1960 can be framed with the poser: "Why and how has France passionately disrupted Africa's economic integration whilst championing the same in Europe?" This is scarcely a novel or original question as many scholars have asked similar questions, perhaps not so explicitly, they equally attempted to provide answers within the material evidence at their disposal. Profant (2010) believes that French-Africa relations have been nuanced by a tripod strategic posture and that this understanding is crucial to the overall explication of French-Africa relations. The first of these interests is the strategic advantage of relations with African states. The second is to have economic leverage in these relations. The third is the identity interest of France. Tomas Profant, therefore, argues that France's declining influence in material terms (traditional geopolitics) has not had much influence on its colonial identity constructs (post-colonial identity constructs) (Profant, 2010: 41-44).

Other scholars have examined the subjectmatter from themes ranging from problems of decolonization, citizenship of an empire lost, post-colonial cultures, migration, racism, bilateral clientelism, and exploitation. (Chafer, 2002a; Chafer, 2002b; Thomas, 2013; Cooper, 2014; Warson, 2017, and Amuwo, 1999). In a short documentary on France's new role in Africa, the Royal Institute of International Affairs

(1964) submits that France's interest in Africa since the loss of her empire is for economic and political recovery and that Africa is important to France only in so far as it fits into this plan. Thomas (2009) thinks that culturally, France and her former colonies have become so entwined that both are contesting spaces. He goes ahead to give the historical background to the cultural affinities between Africa and France but does not appear to have underscored the impact of this entanglement on Africa's economy and politics. Warson (2010) focuses on how France tried to control and manage her former subjects' migrations from francophone Africa to Anglophone Africa. Interestingly, this dimension of protecting the empire from without has not received adequate scholarly attention. What can be surmised from the copious literature on Africa-France relations is that it is crosscutting, profound, and vexing. However, a synthesis of the various scholarly opinions seems to be the desiderata. This chapter, therefore, aims at adumbrating the major issues in Africa-France relations since 1960. Our working observation is that the more things changed, the more they remained the same.

The study is divided into six sections. Following this introduction, a background to France's postcolonial relations with Africa is presented. Here, attention is paid to the issue of the French loss of empire and its quest for recovery, which gave a fillip for more intensive exploitation of Africa. The third section considers the processes of decolonization, neo-colonial spheres of influence, and what could be called elite bonding as determinants of the changes and continuities in Africa-France relations. In the fourth section, the study examines how neoliberalism reconfigured Africa-France relations at the end of the Cold War and the implications of this phenomenon. The conclusion is used to frame the trajectories of Africa-France relations since the 21st century. It should be added that our excursus of Africa-France relations in this study, to a large extent, draw from France's former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa - French Equatorial Africa and French West Africa. This is because the deadly war of independence in Algeria made that country an entity *sui generis* and precluded the development of the kind of arrangement found elsewhere in Africa.

Africa-French Relations in the Post-Colony: Loss of Empire and Quest for Recovery
French post-war policy in Africa, and anywhere else for that matter, was conditioned by the events of 1939-1945. Thomas Jefferson's categorization of France as 'everyone's second home' certainly had lost its salience by the beginning of the Second Great War of the twentieth century. Historians have investigated the possible range of factors that conduced to the great humiliation of France in June 1940. Although the war history of France is outside the scope of this chapter, it is nonetheless ironic that the French Army, which the British reposed a lot of hope on, for even their defense, came down somewhat flatter than the walls of Jericho. In January, three months into the war, Sir Edmund Ironside, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had advised his countrymen to have the utmost confidence in the French army because "our own army is just a little one and we are dependent upon the French. We have not even the same fine army we had in 1914. All depends on the French army and we can do nothing about it" (Jackson 2003:13). By June 14, 1940, France had been defeated by Nazi Germany, and by June 22, the Vichy Government had signed an armistice with the Germans. What happened to the French has been seen by one observer as the greatest military humiliation in the history of that country. French contribution to the war was to, therefore, pale considerably, despite the Gaulle's government in exile and nimble efforts in assisting the allies.

At the end of the war in 1945, though victorious, in the sense that the ultimate designs of Nazi Germany were thwarted, the French sense of victory could be dubbed pyrrhic. Jackson (2003:14) posits that even though "the country was liberated by the British and Americans in 1944 and a democratic Republic was set up again. But the trauma of the defeat of 1940 continued to mark the French people." The greater tragedy done to France was not in the military defeat but, in fact, in the loss of its economy and its support systems. It is estimated that about 400,000 buildings were destroyed, and five times that number was damaged (Davis, 2015). The country's infrastructure was rendered comatose, and industrial and agricultural production was running at just 40% of what it had been pre-war. It has been commented that,

> The pitiful state of ports, train tracks, roads, and bridges meant that those supplies that were available could not be easily distributed in a country where half a million hectares of land still needed to be de-mined. The French population was sick and very, very hungry: rationing would continue until 1949, and two-thirds of children were suffering from rickets. One child in 10 did not survive childbirth. Summer drought and a bitterly cold winter also conspired against the French in 1945 (Davis, 2015: 2).

As was to be expected, French citizens looked up to the state for assistance in plowing through the turbulent times. The Gaulle’s government was to rise to the occasion, not only in negotiating ‘favorable' reconstruction programs from the United States' Marshall Plan but also in putting in place a massive nationalization program, funneling investment into heavy industry, as well as the finance, energy, and transport sectors. De Gaulle also used the opportunity to modernize and reform crucial areas of French society: women were granted the right to vote in 1944, and social security followed a year later. The post-war years provided a blueprint for the modern French state. Both the Lend-Lease and the Marshall Plan, as helpful as they appeared, could not help to defray the huge macro and microeconomic problems of post-war France. The fiscal and economic challenges were indeed gargantuan. Economic historians have provided interesting insights into these problems. Lynch (1997), for example, has provided an in-depth analysis of this problem. He notes that imports needed alone were projected at 2,910 million, whereas French total foreign reserve at the end of the war was 2 151.8 million. The implication of the foreign exchange deficit does not need amplification. What was more:

> These imports were first screened extensively and then divided by the Ministry of Finance and National Economy into the monetary areas of supply to calculate their foreign exchange implications. Trade with the Dollar Area had to be settled entirely in gold. Under the terms of the Anglo-French financial agreement of March 1945, one-third of the French trade deficit with the Sterling Area had to be paid for in gold, although it was recognized that when the agreement was renewed, the terms might not be so generous (Lynch, 1997:22).

One obvious fallout of this situation is that postwar France re-focused attention on her colonies, and as some Marxian historians have observed, France tightened her economic grips on her African colonies, at least, to cushion some of the strangleholds of the pressing balance of payments deficits. How exactly did this happen? Scholars who have investigated the matter inform us that the Vichy government had made arrangements for the postwar war empire. Although the Vichy planners were sent packing after the war, through a concatenation of events driven by the French quest for survival, the Vichy economic model more or less was adopted for French colonies. 'A guiding principle of the Vichy planners’ writes (Lynch, 2002:165-166) ‘was that commercial policy in the future would have to be integrated with domestic economic policy to implement the national plan.’ They intended the French colonies, which had been cut off from trade with metropolitan France during the war and given complete autonomy in tariff-making, to resume trade with metropolitan France but on a different basis – first, to substitute French products for those previously imported from the rest of the world. This, according to Lynch (2002:165-166), was to enable the French to expand their production of steel, mechanical engineering goods, and motor vehicles in particular. And ‘where France was unable to meet the demand for imports, as in the case of tea in Morocco, it was suggested that indigenous habits and customs should be changed.’ (Lynch, 2002:165-166).

The second reason was the need of the empire to increase its exports of industrial raw materials such as rubber, tungsten, wolfram, iron, natural phosphates, and nickel as well as of food and agricultural products to the rest of the world provided that French needs had been met first. The Vichy planners wanted the country to become a net earner of foreign exchange for all the benefits. The maintenance of France's system of imperial preferences become a sine qua non (Dougherty, 1978). However, at the Brazzaville conference, held between January and February 1944, De Gaulle’s government made

pretentious commitments to better living standards and accelerating socio-economic and political development in her colonies. These were to become mere platitudes. Buttressing this development, Lynch (2002: 166) writes that an American mission, led by Ambassador Culbertson and including representatives from the Department of Commerce, the Foreign Economic Administration, and private businessmen, visited North Africa to explore ways of restoring private trade and to consider how the area's resources could be exploited for the American market were frustrated by French officials whom they saw as determined to enforce France's closed-door policy towards its colonies. Trade, they were told, would remain in the hands of the French state, as would any discussions of economic development in the French empire. It was in this precarious economic situation, where the French needed to squeeze their colonies more, that the forces of nationalism and self-determination, starting with the Indian archetype, began to pressure the French to decolonize their subject peoples. In such a situation, France endeavored that her decolonization efforts did not substantially impinge on her postwar recovery economic policy. The next section examines issues of African nationalism as well as the attendant decolonization and how this helped to shape Africa-France relations.

The Age of Decolonization, Neo-colonial Spheres of Influence and Elite-Bonding

Our use of decolonization is framed by Michael Collins' argument that decolonization should not be seen as an end to colonial rule but rather as "a point at which certain aspects of a world shaped by empire fell away, while others continued and some morphed into new forms of power, exchange, integration, and fragmentation." (Collins, 2017: 42). Historians of empire and decolonization in Africa have looked at the phenomenon from varying points of view. Collins (2017: 22) writes that: '…this, in turn, has a strong bearing on the forms of agency that historians of decolonization have placed at the forefront of their analyses.' The scholarly interventions and contestations on the historiography of decolonization in Africa, akin to other topics in history, have coalesced into two major historiographical schools – the Metropolitan and Nationalist traditions. Both sides are not lacking in apostles and critics (Curtis, 1916; Mansergh, 1969; Cooper, 2002; Mamdani, 1996; Chafer, 2013). However, a major problem with the Metropolitan or Eurocentric view lies in its downplaying of African agency in its narrations and 'by viewing decolonization as a relatively orderly transition, choreographed by metropolitan political elites' Collins (2017: 23).

There is no need to state the obvious fact that the tenor of African postcolonial relations with France was, to a large extent, set by the nature of colonial rule and, importantly, the phenomenon of decolonization in French Africa. First, the French colonial policy of assimilation, which, contrary to what some observers have noted, ran concurrently with the principles of association, was key in conditioning Africa-France relations between 1945 and 1950. The outcomes of post-1950 events also had a strong impact on the overall postcolonial relations between Africa and France. Assimilation was the beachhead of the philosophy that produced Africans who looked up to France as the epicenter of goodness and democracy – the France of the *Liberte*, *Egalite*, and *Fraternite*. Through the subtle manipulation of these idealized notions of incomparable French goodness, colonized Africans could not fathom a world outside the guidance of Mother France. This explains the reason why the so-called nationalists of French Africa from Mauritania to Dahomey – Houpouphet Boigny, Sedar Senghor, and Modibo Keita, among others, could not contemplate breaking away from France despite the egregious failures of France to live up to the promises made to them in the war years. Africa's ruling class bought the bandied ideals of assimilation of French culture that what was to emerge in black Africa as nationalism was what an observer 'assimilationist nationalism.'

Although the short-lived Popular Front tried to ameliorate some of the harsher systems of colonial rules, such as the indigenat and forced labor, Chafer (2003:33) has shown that there was to be no major change in economic policy and "the industrial road to development was to remain closed to Africans." Despite that, successive French governments, irrespective of ideology and party affiliations, had disappointed all hopes for reliance on the Metropole for development. For example, by 1945, there were less than seventy

secondary schools in the whole of French West Africa, including Togoland. The less than 1000 thousand secondary schools in the AOF were mostly local, and what was worse, "the diplomas granted by all of the African schools were local ones, without standing in France, and therefore could not secure entrance to metropolitan institutions" (Gardinier, 1980: 74). The assimilated African leaders continued to hope and believe in the model of development enunciated by Paris, contrary to the realities unfolding in their eyes.

Things were not also better, educationally, in France Equatorial Africa as the social and economic development there lagged behind those of the AOF (West Africa). The idea of establishing a university in their African colonies was considered a pipe dream by French colonial authorities. What makes the matter more suspect (as we shall see in the next section) is that French social and economic strivings for advancing the social and economic development in their African colonies were moderated by the international political and economic order of the period. One may recall that both the United States and the Soviet Union – the real victors of the Second World War, for reasons peculiar to their domestic interests, eschewed colonialism and all that it represented. President Roosevelt had cringed at the distasteful credentials of colonialism in his tours of French North Africa in 1944. Several American commissions were full of indignation at the indignities of colonial rule. France, nevertheless, resolved to hold onto her prized colonial *heredita,* and if this, in the future, proved unrealistic, she intended to mark off the territories as a special sphere of influence. In the interim, France was careful to appear as a reformer as well as a partner in progress with her African colonies. A critical or close reading of the politics of decolonization in French Africa would show that France was just interested in buying time to stabilize her destabilized domestic economy.

The foregoing should not be read to suggest that there were no improvements in economic and social provisioning in French Africa. The point is that compared to the significant growth in population and the colonial rhetoric of development within the empire, what was provided was inconsequential. Gardinier, whose studies have extolled the virtues of France's decolonization efforts, writes that by 1946, the French government began to grant scholarships for French universities and also for secondary school programs not available in Africa necessary for entrance into certain university programs. He further notes that "by the end of the Fourth Republic, several hundred Africans were holding scholarships in French institutions, and possibly an equal number were enrolled without such assistance." Showing his bias, Gardinier (1981:75) avers that "the consequences of sending Africans to France for long periods of study were not entirely foreseen. The Africans were able to enjoy the advantages of life as a student in the metropole." Furthermore, David Gardinier contends:

> They [African students in France] could obtain an education identical to that which a European received. Grouped together in one or two residences, such as the Maison de la France d'Outre-Mer at the Cité Universitaire in Paris, they established contact with students from their own countries and other lands within the French Union. They acquired a new awareness of themselves as Senegalese, Cameroonians, or Congolese and as Africans, blacks, and inhabitants of the Third World. They became part of an international Francophone elite… (Gardinier 1981:75).

Corollary and complementary to the ground that had been watered by the nuances of the principles of assimilation was the equally significant phenomenon of elite bonding between Africa's emerging leaders and the French elites. Colonial education, morphing with assimilationist philosophy, produced a crop of would-be African leaders who saw Paris as the Eldorado of human evolution. This alone does not explain how Africa's leaders got entwined with Parisian elites and politicians. Better explanations are to be found in the nature of the concessions made to Africans in the immediate postwar era. Gaullist politicians seemed to be appreciative of Africa's contribution to the redemption of France. However, De Gaulle himself had tactically demobilized African soldiers in the eventual triumphant entry into the Motherland in 1944. However, the fact that De Gaulle started his mobilization against the Vichy government, as well as his support for the Allied course from black Africa, endeared black Africans to the French. The reward,

if that term could find employment in the circumstances, was the opportunity to send representatives to the Constituent Assembly in 1946 and deputés to the French Parliament beginning from 1946 (Chafer, 2003). There was also a portion of French funds - *Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social des Territoires d'Outre-Mer* (FIDES), which committed some funds to overseas development. In postwar French politics, the assimilated students (most of whom were to become leaders later) and established African leaders increasingly maintained contact with their French counterparts in the metropole. These contacts and lobby groups helped Africans such as Houphouet Boigny, Sedar Senghor, Modibo Keita, Hubert Maga, Sourou-Migan Apithy, and Maurice Yameogo, among several others, to pressure French Governments towards their territory's often opposing interests and most importantly, such elite-bonding provided the economic and political muscles to consolidate their hold on political power in Africa.

From the 1950s, when internal autonomy was granted to French territories in Africa, the future of Francophone Africa appeared uncertain. Moreover, with the re-emergence of De Gaulle to the saddle of government in France, Africa's bourgeoning political leaders found it difficult to reconcile their differences and chart a political future for their motherland. This situation France found convenient and exploited to the fullest. While HouphouetBoigny did not countenance a federation for French West Africa, Senghor organized those he could tinker with the prospects of a federation. By the 1960s, the so-called age of African independence, Africa-French relations had effectively transformed from a colony to a neo-colony with its attendant maladies.

The transition from colony to post-colony was cemented with the dissolution of the French Union and the creation of the Franco-African Community, the Communaute. This arrangement was marked by an ingenious system of bilateral relations between France and former African colonies, installed through a series of cooperation accords covering trade, currency, finance, security, education, natural resources, and culture, among others. This new system and what it entailed was revealed by its monetary policy implications. The creation of a common currency, the CFA franc, for the former French colonies, we are told, was intended to protect these African countries from the effects of the depreciation of the French currency vis-à-vis the dollar under the Bretton Woods arrangements. The CFA franc was pegged to the French franc until 1999 and thereafter to the euro. In the more than 60 years of the arrangement, the parity has changed only twice: in 1948, the CFA franc was revalued by more than 17 percent against the French franc, and in 1994, it was devalued with the effect that the parity increased by 100 percent. The economic deterioration that occurred before the latter devaluation led to the formation of two sub-groupings in 1994, each with its common central bank: the Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC) and the Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA). As a result, two currencies are circulating in the CFA franc zone: the franc of the Communauté Financière d'Afrique in West Africa and the franc of the Coopération Financière en Afrique Centrale in Central Africa (Mertger, 2008). Supporters of the franc zone have showcased it as a model for the promotion of macroeconomic stability in Africa. Nonetheless, critics are inclined to ask: how economically stable have African states of the zone been? Indeed, 11 out of the fifteen states of the zone are classified as least-developed countries. Apart from the sovereignty loss that this arrangement portends, given that France holds a de facto veto on the boards of the two central banks within the CFA franc zone. This situation appeared to have served the interests of France and Africa's Frenchified elites.

With the possible exception of Guinea's Ahmed Sekou Toure – who rejected French neocolonialist independence by insisting on full independence from France – there is no gainsaying the fact that the triple variables of assimilation, the nature of decolonization in French Africa, and the willingness of the budding African elites to dance to the tunes of the champions of a declining empire helped to produce the crop of African leaders who kowtow to foreign interests. This bonding and fusion of interests between African leaders and French business and political elites had other implications. First, it helped France to effectively ward off Soviet interests in French Africa and, to a lesser extent, Anglo-American

competitions in the wake of the enthronement of the neoliberal world order. Thereby effectively securing French spheres of influence. Second is that this neocolonial situation has subsisted, seriously affecting the ability of Africa to make any meaningful sense of either regional or sub-regional integration. However, the end of the Cold War and American rise to the position of the global hegemon seriously impacted Africa-France relations. To this, we now turn our attention.

The Neoliberal World Order and Africa-France Relations

Throughout the Cold War era, the soon-to-be champion of the neoliberal world, the United States, treated Africa as the traditional sphere of influence of its two traditional allies – Britain and France. Thus, Africa-France relations between the decade of independence and the end of the Cold War were shaped by four factors. First, the geopolitics of the Cold War; second, its national interests; third, its traditional rivalries with Britain; and fourth, African resistance to neocolonialism. The first and second factors explain French military interventions in Africa during the Cold War era. About 53 military operations were known to have been launched by France in its former African colonies. The third factor accounts for France's meddlesomeness in the Nigeria-Biafra war – a purely British area of interest. Fawole (2003:60) submits that it was during the Nigerian civil war that "the role of France as Nigeria's greatest enemy came out in bolder relief than hitherto suspected or imagined."

> The outbreak of the civil war provided perhaps the greatest opportunity for France to act out its morbid hatred of Nigeria, a country which Paris had always perceived as the only obstacle to French hegemony in Africa…once the war erupted, France saw a golden opportunity to work for the dismemberment of the only Anglophone behemoth that served as a major obstacle to the achievement of complete and unfettered hegemony in Africa. Thus France went ahead to provide military and material assistance to the rebels. It even attempted to use Nigeria's contiguous neighbors, especially Benin for gunrunning to Biafra…. (Fawole, 2003:61)

The above objectives also help to explain the French opposition to the question of economic integration in Africa. The fear was palpable that any real economic integration between Africa would be at the expense of the special relationship between France and francophone Africa. In this way, France had often cultivated a sense of tension between its former colonies and the rest of Africa with the main objective of frustrating integration efforts on the continent. Ironically, France has been an ardent promoter of integration in Europe. The Economic Community of West African States has been the most affected by French-African politics. It should, however, be noted that contrary to some accounts that seem to heap the entire blame of ECOWAS' poor integration on French meddlesomeness, the reality on the ground would tend to suggest otherwise. African economies, by the nature of their integration into the global economy, were not made to be complementary in trade. In theory and praxis, integrating unions that are not built on trade creation and complementarity but rather diversionary trading arrangements scarcely record any significant improvements in integration efforts. Nevertheless, French frustrating gambits concerning integration efforts in Africa are not to be swept under the carpet.

The end of the Cold War was to mark a watershed in the relations between Africa and France. As Ugwuja (2017) remarked, Africa no longer held any strategic import for the US. Furthermore, "many of the key actors in the Franco-Africa relations began to disappear from the scene: the doyen of l*a Francafrique*, Houphouet-Boigny, died in December 1993; Mitterand fell seriously ill and came to the end of his presidential mandate in 1995." Forccart, too, we are told, even with his come back to politics in 1995 until he died in 1997, was no longer the same old vivacious maverick of African affairs (Chafer, 2008). The gospel of neoliberalism, with its logic of market forces and removal of trade barriers, began to gain an unprecedented ascendancy as even Britain opened up for admission to the EU, countries of East and Central Europe, which had been hitherto socialist economies also sought to be admitted to the EU. Neoliberalism's loudest message', notes Chomsky (2011), "is that there is no alternative to the status quo

and that humanity has reached its highest level." In this spirit, the managers of the neoliberal age, the Washington Consensus, began to pressure its former allies to conform to the tenets of the new world order or be shoved to irrelevance. The Genesis in the Bible of neoliberalism was political reform – political democracy became the vanguard of other forms of democracy – economic, social, and cultural. The United States was bent on fashioning the world to suit its philosophy.

The first sign of the beginning of a new era for Africa was at the 1990 Franco-Africa summit in La Baule, close to Paris. President Mitterand was to make it clear to African leaders that a new world had overtaken the old. He pointedly told them thenceforth, French aid to African states would be tied to political reforms. What is more, three years afterward, in 1993, Prime Minister Balladur announced that budgetary aid to franc zone countries would henceforth be conditional upon their having previously signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. This became known as the 'Abidjan' or 'Balladur' Doctrine (Chafer, 2008). The implications of this development do not require much amplification. France, by that doctrine, had shown the abandonment of its former colonies to the vagaries of globalization. The former discontinued bail-outs of her former colonies whose coffers were bare at the end of the month. Perhaps the most compelling signal of retreating France was the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc. France unilaterally devalued by 50 percent the CFA franc, which had been pegged to it since 1948. As was to be expected, African leaders and intellectuals saw the devaluation as a betrayal. The French appeared to have waited for the demise of Houphouet-Boigny before the ax fell on the savings of francophone countries. Creevey, Vengroff, and Gaye (1995) inform us that public reaction was uniform and immediate in all fourteen countries of the Community. "African newspapers screamed betrayal by their own regimes and the French." In a fell swoop, the rate of living increased by 100 percent, as food prices, electricity bills, access to credits, transportation costs, cost of spaces, and wages employees were negatively impacted. World Bank officials on whose behest the devaluation was carried out claimed that the devaluation would result in national economic growth. Like in Senegal, as in other parts of Francophone Africa, as indeed, anywhere else in Africa where the dictates of the Washington Consensus were heeded, the evidence does not reflect the claims of the Bretton Woods (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1998). To make matters worse, the involvement of France in the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and her continual support to Mobutu in Zaire until his final ouster in 1997 irked not a few Africans. This, as McNulty (1996) shows, undermined France's claim of an African darling. More significantly, it helped to turn many younger Africans away from France. Coupled with the declining financial muscle of France – which had prompted restrictive immigration into France, especially from her former colonies, most Africans began to go to the United States more for higher education and employment. As an observer in Benin noted, France was to become just one of the Western European countries. France nevertheless struggled for relevance in its former African colonies. And through its multinational businesses in Africa, France still considers Africa strategic, at least, for economic reasons.

Conclusion: Africa-France relations since the 21st century

An African proverb states that a desperate hunter would make do with the tail of a game rather than lose it entirely. This captures the relationship between France and Africa with the turn of the new millennium. Starting with the Ivorian crisis, France initially did not intend to intervene in the fray, even though Laurent Gbagbo had requested assistance against General Bedie, who, losing in an election, refused to relinquish power. This was clearly in contradistinction to the Franco-Ivorian defense agreements. However, remembering that it had vested interests in the country, France sent troops to serve as a demarcation between the two sides and its nationals and other Europeans. Although France succeeded in involving ECOWAS in the Ivorian debacle, there is no gainsaying the fact that France was deeply involved. In fact, in anger against the tantrums of President Gbagbo, whom France had recognized at some point, the French president ordered the Ivorian air force to be crushed.

Although France is the fourth largest aid giver in the world, its international aid to Africa has significantly shrunk since the 2000s. And even when Africa continues to remain strategic to French energy interests,

Franco-Africa trade has declined considerably; the French market share has moved down from 77.73 percent of exports and 9.08 of imports in 1960 to 2.82 and 2.05, respectively in 2011 (Melly and Darracq, 2013). This has been made so largely by the increased involvement of emerging powers, especially China in Africa. In this way, France has attempted to rejig its relations with Africa by increasing the involvement of regional organizations, especially ECOWAS, as it did in Ivory Coast between 2002 and 2004 and in Mali in 2012.

Apart from aiming to legitimize her involvement in Africa, France also aims to secure her trade interests by increasing her involvement in economic partnerships in Africa. In this regard, France has expanded its partnership agreements to extend beyond its former colonies to include South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Ultimately, France's major concern in Africa today is how best to respond to China and other emerging powers in Africa. From available data, the signs appear to show a fusion of economic interests between France and the emerging powers in Africa. Those who have examined the matter aver that Chinese and Brazilian economic interests in Africa seem both competitive and complementary. Melly and Darracq (2013) inform us that ‘the effect of this new and unexpected competition varies, depending on the sector and scale.’ We are told that the ‘French companies present in Africa in sectors such as telecoms, shipping, port operations, railways, and air transport stand to benefit from the growth in investment by emerging powers south of the Sahara – because this generates more business for the services that they provide (Melly and Darracq 2013:22). What are the implications of these trends for Africa in the 21st century?

We make bold to state that the African continent will continue to remain a pawn in the chessboard of old and new powers if it does not move beyond primary goods. The lavish and unproductive consumption habits of Africa are also a major challenge for the continent. For instance, in 2012, ‘Nigeria ranked 22nd in the world for champagne imports and in terms of France's total champagne imports, Africa's percentage rose to 1.36 percent from 0.93 in 2005.' A continent of consumers, to parody Nkrumah, is not and cannot be the master of her destiny. Finally, we submit that as Africa and France continue to grapple with both old and new challenges to their relations, they will continue to be confronted by their past, and the factors that have driven the relationship in the past will continue to remain central in the future.

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