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France And The Economic Integration Project In Francophone Africa

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Introduction

In the contemporary context of global political-economic relations, in particular within the context of networking of nation states wanting to pull resources together for co-development, regional integration is the name of the game. Indeed, the decade of the 1980's – as seen for instance, through the EU and NAFTA – witnessed an accelerated growth in the creation of regional structures. In this respect, Africa is the world's *laggard numero uno* notwithstanding the fact that the continent possesses no fewer than 200 interstate organizations, which is indicative of how the continent is balkanised both politically and economically. It is also an indication of the lack of political will internally, the growing poverty of regional integration initiatives, and of the largely extroverted nature of their economies. Nowhere is this last more pronounced than in France's ex-colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). It is perhaps the aggregate of the unfavourable factors in the international economic environment that tends to subvert the political will of African leaderships. The result has been a most disappointing political praxis on the issue of integration. Hence, for example, in 1991 the Secretary of ECOWAS openly admitted that in the first fifteen years (1975-1990) of the organization "politically nothing was done to apply the laws and decisions of the Community".[1]

Poor results in the business of regional integration seem not to have deterred more and more formal efforts in that direction; because it does appear that there is an emerging consensus amongst integration students and political leaders alike that only African-driven integration enterprises have a chance of success. For instance, after noting that the 46 ACP States in Lomé, I accounted for 8% of EEC total imports in 1975 and that in 1987 the 66 ACP States accounted for only 3.8% of EEC's imports, Browson N. Dede argues that "the future of Africa does not depend, and cannot depend, on such arrangements as the Lomé Conventions". He

concludes that "continental economic integration is the only viable route to sustained and sustainable growth and development".[2] By the same token, at the 26th Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU in June 1990, the African leaders present made the following solemn declaration:

> We affirm that Africa's development is the responsibility of our governments and people. We are now more than before determined to lay a solid foundation for self-reliant human-centred and sustainable development on the basis of social justice and collective self-reliance so as to achieve accelerated structural transformation of our economies. Within this context, we are determined to work assiduously towards economic integration through regional cooperation.[3]

For French-speaking African States, whatever positive pay-offs accrue from supra-national approaches to integration are often thwarted by France's insistence on bilateral relations. It has indeed been increasingly difficult to wean Francophone Africa away from France's sphere of influence. Thus, whereas the logic of regional integration is the institutionalization of multilateralism in the conduct of foreign economic, financial and allied relations; in much of Francophone Africa, multilateralism is constantly put in jeopardy by bilateral relations or by what Ernst Haas calls "the politics of conflicting interests" [4] on the one hand, between France and her ex-colonies and. on the other, among the latter. Daniel Bach argues that in France's drive to maintain this status quo, Franco-African bilateral relations are based on clientelism[5] – a phenomenon that, inter alia, has engendered opportunism and sentimental dependency in the public pronouncements and political comportment of some of Francophone Africa's heads of state. For example, in the current debate on the need to reduce France's high profile and ambition in Francophone Africa, President Omar Bongo of Gabon had this to say: "France without Gabon is like a car without petrol, Gabon without France is analogous to a car without a driver." [6]

His views are echoed more or less among Right-wing ideologues in French academia and politics – that, in this post cold-war era, the hitherto profitable idea of French precarré (backyard) in Africa lacks both logic and coherence given the highly competitive e international environment of today. This is why during his long tenure (1981-1995), Francois Mitterand ruled out the "possibility of France 'abandoning' Africa" [7] – a conception that is, in itself, essentially neopatriarchal. However, some recent developments seem to point in the direction of France's gradual disengagement from its main sphere of influence in Africa. An example is the slashing of France's cooperation budget in the context of the so-called wider principle of "spending less in order to spend better" [8] enunciated by the government of President Jacques Chirac's first Prime Minister Alain Juppé. Another is the

justification given to the devaluation of the CFA Franc; namely, that France would no longer allow its well-known economic, monetary and financial interests to play second fiddle to putative Francophonie whose benefits are more intangible than tangible. Hence, Soji Akomolafe has argued that in the post cold war era "more and more French citizens begin to talk about a disengagement process; whereby they want France to embark gradually but steadily on a hands-off policy".[9]

There are other interesting indicators to this effect: the gradual phasing out of French military bases started, in 1995, even though the Force d'Action Rapide (FAR) of five units with 44,500 men capable of intervening, at short notice, almost every where in Africa would continue to remain on African soil; the announcement in July 1997 by the French Defence Minister Alain Richard that in the spirit of France's current defence cuts, the military bases at Bouar and the Beal camps – both in the Central Africa Republic – were slated for phasing out, but only over a five-year period. However the airbase at Mpoko International Airport would be maintained within the framework of a so-called "consolidation of means of intervention by France".[10] Barely two months after Richard's announcement President Jacques Chirac himself surprised not only his global audience, but perhaps also himself by speaking in "the spirit of a new era". At the yearly forum of ambassadors of French-speaking African countries, Chirac who in 1995 had pledged that France would maintain its strong military profile in Africa and also that he was an "Afro-optimist", declared that "we have to rule out any intervention of whatever kind – political, military, or otherwise. France would not accept it at home, and it is not to be practised with others". Indeed, apparently energised by the liberal ideology of the new socialist government led by Lionel Jospin, Chirac's rival in the 1995 presidential election run-off, France is seemingly set to dissolve the famous Ministry of Cooperation which had been used over several decades to undermine Francophone Africa as well as to further the interests of France.[11]

The debate surrounding contemporary relations between France and Francophone Africa may well constitute a diversion from the business-as-usual thrust of France's Africa policy. If a socialist France under Mitterand did little to whittle down a neocolonial relationship *par excellence* with her ex-colonies, there should be no illusion about a probable disconnection under the conservative neo-Gaullist presidency of Chirac. To be sure, France is under increasing domestic and international pressure to reduce the cost of her interventions in Africa. Not the least of the domestic pressures is the one from the Extreme Right wing represented by the National Front and its leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. The latter has in the last one-and-a-half decades or so conceptualised the need for France to be reserved only for the French and other Europeans, insisting that neither Black Africa nor Arab Africa should have a niche in France. While it can be argued that other right-wing political parties share most of the political ideas of the National Front, they hardly have had the courage to give them such a public vent à la National. Front

For all the so-called "danger signals" to Francophone African states, however, France is hard put to close shop in Africa, particularly because relations between France and Francophone Africa are constructed on particularistic interests as well as on permanent interactions between ruling elites sharing common interests[12] with little or no reference to whether or not these interests are compatible with those of the masses of the people. The vacillation of France may have its positive side: the devaluation of the CFA franc for instance may have engendered in the leaders of Francophone Africa a pragmatic consciousness and realisation that when the chips are down, they are on their own; that the ongoing reconfiguration of the global system has led to a shift of resources from Africa to Eastern Europe and Asia; and that they probably need their kith and kin in Africa more than they need France. All this may have prompted one observer to postulate the possibility of closer ties among francophone and anglophone African states and an easier path to integration among them in West and Central Africa.[13]

The principal argument of this paper is therefore as follows. To the extent that France, and not the African States that set up regional groups "has been a beneficiary of the monetary system of the ECOWAS franc zone", has recycled surpluses to herself whenever and wherever these occur, and "the market is a privileged one for French exports – technology and industry, and for French investment in industry, agriculture, etc." [14] the integration-projects in Francophone Africa is a historic necessity. But in so far as the bilateral relations between Francophone Africa and France remain what they are, the latter's integration project is bound to remain a futile underaking. A viable alternative route to development in Africa, including economic and, perhaps, also political integration of Francophone Africa will have to look inwards for solutions to her deepening crisis of underdevelopment before she can begin to look outwards for authentic trade and development partners.

I argue in conclusion, that the logical starting point of a successful integration project should be the micro-level. That is, each state has to transform its economic, social and political structures with the people as the subject of development before it can take on the problem of integration with any reasonable hope for success.

The Integration Thesis

To say that in virtually all continents integration constitutes a major collaborative and developmental strategy is to state the obvious. As already alluded to, the greatest economic integration, namely an economic union, has often been recommended to developing countries as the best recipe for accelerated development. Especially for Africa, it has been suggested that "the only way to achieve the economic reconstruction and development essential to fulfill the aspirations, needs and demands of the peoples of Africa is through a substantial shift to continental planning so as to unite increasingly the resources. markets and capital of Africa in

a single economic unit".[14] The net result of economic integration is said to be larger, viable economic units capable of remedying "distortions in the location of productive activity".[15]

The optimism in the foregoing claims is inconsistent with the fact that Africa hardly satisfies the salient requisites for economic integration. For instance. the continent lacks what Karl Deutsch refers to as "significant growth in capabilities among all participant units" even though a few states enjoy some form of superior economic growth capable of serving as "core area around which integration occurs".[16] This is what Ben E. Aigbokhan refers to as the absence of well diversified production structures. He also notes that there is a relatively high dependence on agriculture compared to manufacturing. For Aigbokhan, this phenomenon suggests that "(Africa) does not satisfy the criterion which requires that the structure of production should be well diversified".[17] In the same vein given, the unequal endowment of resources African states are hardly capable of fulfilling a second important requirement namely, the satisfaction of integrating members with the flow and ebb of distribution of benefits accruing from integration.[18] Nor can it be asserted with much confidence that, save where external rewards are involved, much of Africa is eager to compromise internal sovereignties, however precarious and tenuous these are in reality. Moreover, it is not in all cases that integration gives a fillip to the acquisition of "new techniques" for the resolution of conflicts amongst states. Indeed as in the case of French speaking Africa the French factor, rather than integration, seems to be perceived by the Francophone leaders as a necessary condition for the resolution of interstate disputes.

It has been argued that most of the relevant theories on integration are not only essentially functionalist or neo-functionalist but also Euro-centric. The focus is said to be on the process by which"political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing national state".[19] But much of this is deemed incapable of explicating the integration problems in Africa. Unlike in Europe for example, only some form of cooperation as against wide-ranging integrative efforts is currently in vogue. Hence, whereas Europe is now moving inexorably towards an economic union (with a single currency (EU) in 1999), the OAU's vision of a common market for African by 2025 continues to be blurred by a general lack of commitment to some of the basic requirements of integration – such as regular and prompt payment of annual dues by member states. In a similar vein, whereas the revised ECOWAS treaty provides for the establishment of common institutions such as a Community Parliament, Court of Justice, and Economic and Social Council, implementation of many of the necessary protocols, where signed, remains almost a dead letter because they are yet to be ratified. Hence, the appeal by the Chairman of the

Community – former Nigerian ruler, General Abacha – to fellow Heads of State at the August 1997 summit in Abuja that they should ensure the speedy ratification and implementation of all protocols and decisions under the treaty. He concluded that "the coming into force of these protocols will definitely accelerate the social and economic integration process within our sub-region".[20] Yet, this is a community that has set some otherwise laudable targets for itself, amongst which are the creation of a customs union by the beginning of January 2000 and the birth of a fully fledged economic and monetary union by the year 2005.

Because a "new centre" for Africa's integration is perhaps a forlorn hope even in the medium term some students of integration in Africa are of the opinion that the concept of costs and benefits deriving from integration schemes is the most apposite for understanding the prospects for the African integration project. In this respect, certain important considerations have been underlined. The first incentive for states to integrate is economic benefits even though this is itself often far to seek. Thus, "the basic problem of regional economic integration schemes in Africa has been and remains that the economic costs of participation in such schemes are immediate, while the economic benefits are long-term and uncertain".[21] Second, while integration schemes have their stated objectives, they also do have unintended goals. These include defensive diplomacy, meaning "the avoidance of isolation and an expression of regional solidarity", a good instrument for "conducting quiet regional politicking under the guise of discussing economic matters". Another unintended objective is that annual meetings of Heads of State provide an important forum for African leaders seeking legitimacy to get much-needed succour, however fleeting or momentary, from their colleagues. An open show of such acceptance and solidarity by friendly heads of sister states often sends the wrong signals to agitated domestic civil societies which may be led to think that, perhaps, the problem is not so much with their contested political or military leaders, as with themselves. Thus, the answer to the question by Lancaster – "why do African governments, on the one hand, fail to honour integration commitments and yet, on the other go ahead to adopt new integration incentives?" lies partly in the extroverted nature of the states' economies and the resultant dependency that often circumscribes original initiatives; and partly in the leaders' lack of legitimacy so that more time, energy and resources are devoted to political survival and stability and fewer to matters as critical and as important as integration. Third, the process of economic integration tends to broadly polarise participating states in terms of who bears much of the cost and who enjoys most of the benefits. In respect of Franchophone Africa, it follows, logically that whereas France has almost always been there to pick up the bill, including that for integration failure, they do not constitute a homogeneous bloc. The relatively more developed states that are economically better off than their relatively less developed counterparts are not likely to support integrative efforts as much as the latter. The reason for this is

simple: they are likely to bear more of the costs whilst enjoying fewer of the benefits. This phenomenon is likely to continue for as long as "there are no regional hegemons (*sic*) that are able and willing to sponsor effective economic integration schemes in Sub-Saharan Africa".[22] Nigeria and South Africa are perhaps the only exceptions to the rule. But few can count on them for different reasons. In the case of Nigeria, it is because while it is willing, it is unable owing largely to econmomic mismanagement and corruption which have gravely undermined the economy. For South Africa, while it is able because of a strong economy, and because of the overwhelming influence of its leader, President Mandela, it nonetheless appears unwilling to play the role of a supreme leader. More specifically in Francophone Africa the states that appear capable of propelling integrative efforts are either too tied to what Crawford Young refers to as "the closely woven fabric of the French Connection (that) is too sturdy to quickly unravel[23] (e.g. Ivory Coast Senegal, Gabon, etc.), or have been devastated by several years of dictatorship. Chief among them was Mobutu's Zaire.

Furthermore, many of the French African states lack internal unity. Significant pluralist interests capable of decolonising the leadership continue to be harassed or driven underground in spite of some form of opening up of the political space in the beginning of the 1990's. Consequently the state, as presently constituted, can hardly be decolonised if only because those social classes that control the state do not seem to have disconnection from the capitalist countries on their agenda. To the extent that class and state are relevant categories in the African context, and that the structural context of under-development is ever present, such African leadership, especially its French-speaking variant, can best be seen within the context of dependency and neo-colonialism. Thus S.K.B. Asante is right to have argued that neither in theory nor in implementation do regional integration schemes in Africa give much substance to the need to extricate the continent from neo-colonialism and dependency. He elaborates:

> ... none of the regional schemes has adequate provisions for attacking the all embracing issue of dependency reduction nor have the efforts made towards this objective had any significant impact.

Asante also underlines the pernicious effects of dependency:

> ... the problem of dependency poses difficulties for African countries attempting a strategy of regional integration. Dependency serves as an obstacle to de-development it not only limits the beneficial effects of integration but it also forments disintegration in both national and regional economy.[24]

French Africa's Integration Efforts

Over the years several regional organizations have been formed in Francophone Africa. The Organization Commune Africaine Malgache et Mauricienne (OCAM), established in 1965, regrouped sixteen French-speaking states minus Guinea and Burundi. In spite of its lofty objectives of strengthening cooperation, facilitating foreign policy consultations among states and harmonization of the economic. social, technical and cultural policies of member states, one of its major weaknesses was the lack of a common currency. This lacuna was to be filled in subsequent regroupings, and with the introduction of a common currency – the CFA Franc – which integrated the member countries in the franc zone. Indeed, one of the facilitating factors for France's recrudescence in that region is the unwillingness of the states in question to give up the advantages of the convertibility of their currencies, notwithstanding the many socio-economic difficulties encountered for example, in the aftermath of the CFA devaluation in January 1994. The Central African Customs and Economic Union (UDEAC), formed in 1964, is an exclusive Central African affair, its members being Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, CAR and Chad (which quit in 1968). The instrument establishing the union put the emphasis on common external tariff on imports, and the industrial development of members.

The Conseil de L'Entente, established earlier on May 29, 1959, and hostile to any form of restructuring of the French Community framework of September 1958, was conceived by its founding fathers as a pragmatic cooperative effort ultimately leading to authentic integration. Côte d'Ivoire dominated it in a situation where the idea of a flexible form of association and cooperation seems to continually triumph over competing paradigms such as a united political entity and a common, unitary parliament. Other member states are Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger and Togo (which joined in 1966).

The Communaute Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO) regrouping Ivory Coast, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Senegal was constituted in Bamako in May 1970 but its treaty of association was signed only in June 1972. Its main objective remains the creation of an economic zone where commercial exchanges and economic integration would be facilitated through common custom tariffs and fiscal measures and free circulation of persons and goods. It has been shown that progress in CEAO, as in ECOWAS, remains modest. Intra-community trade in 1989 was put at only 10%. Two major factors that explain such dismal performance, according to Lancaster, are: the organization is weakened by numerous internal scandals; and there is slow progress towards trade liberalization.[25]

The most recent addition is the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC), which came into existence in 1987 on the initiative of Gabon's President Omar Bongo. The Community consists of ten member states, all but one – Equatorial Guinea – being Francophone with a high French profile. The member

states are Cameroon, CAR, Congo, Gabon, Burundi, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe Chad and the DRC (fomerly Zaire). Conceived as the economic counterpart of the UDEAC, the activities of CEEAC include the boosting of' intra-regional trade, particularly in the areas of customs, finance, transport and communication as well as the convertibility of five currencies within the member states of the community through the Community Clearing House. The five currencies in question were the Zaire franc, Burundi franc, Rwandan franc, Sao Tome dobra, and the CFA. Its ultimate aim is the creation of a common market for the Central Africa region by AD 2000. It has been suggested that "the CEEAC has not yet reached the stage of conflict with the UDEAC, but this may come in the future".[26]

Neo-Colonialism and Integration in Francophone Africa

Integration à la Europe or, rather, in an orthodox manner makes little sense in Africa insofar as, to borrow from John Ravenhill, "the problems (are) non-orthodox". Thus, instead of talking about consolidating existing production "according to comparative advantage", the issue may well be how to maximally employ underutilized and unutilized factors of production.[27] In other words, there is the need *ab initio* to create the requisites for integration by, for example, facilitating the production of goods, however few, for distribution and exchange. Francophone Africa, like its Anglophone and Lusophone Africa counterparts, runs into problems here for little is obtained for distribution since indigenous "capitalists" gain little within the context of internecine competition with foreign investors as, without external linkages accumulation on a national scale would be insignificant.

Given the stark poverty of the Francophone countries, the emphasis has often been more on joint distribution than on collective production. The underdevelopment of the economies has, in several significant respects, forced the states to seek to reduce their poverty through collaboration or cooperation with France. From independence, while Francophone Africa has collectively not had anything close to national capitalism which, *mutatis mutandis*, constitutes a counter-force to international capitalism – for instance in Latin America – it espouses some form of transnational ideology or sovereignty anchored on cooperation with the ex-metropolis. I do not suggest by "transnational sovereignty" that the states are too eager to surrender even part of their sovereignty. The latter is jealously guarded even as some of the states nurse regional or sub-regional leadership ambitions. The case of Côte d'Ivoire is significant in this regard but it must be emphasized that Senegal, particularly Senghor's Senegal, was for a long time tied to French colonial capital when she was the economic and administrative capital of French West Africa and until the turn of the 1980s she saw herself as the leader of that subregion.

Consequent upon prolonged Franco-Ivorian propaganda, Francophone Africa has come to see independence as a mirage. At independence, the myth was

sustained that in order for the new states to realize harmonious development, they would need neither Asia nor America but Europe and, more specifically, France. For Felix Houphouet Boigny, the Ivorian leader from 1960 to 1993, Francophone Africa's natural ally was France and her natural rival Nigeria. He not only elaborated the thesis of Franco-African brotherhood, he also "championed the subjection of foreign policy orientation of the (Brazzaville) group (in the United Nations) to the strategic and tactical goals of the Foreign policy of de Gaulle's government".[28] The Brazzaville group, it should be recalled, was constituted mainly by ex-French Colonies. It had earlier met at Abidjan in October and December 1960 and because it sought to operate independently of the Afro-Asian group, it caused a split in the latter.

Thus, very early after political independence, the French-speaking African states had, with a few notable exceptions, (Guinea, for example), constituted themselves into a separate bloc and tied their development to the ex-metropolis. The latter naturally responded favourably to this development which, by perpetuating the balkanization of Africa into different spheres of foreign, imperialistic influence had the effect of preserving France's hegemony in her ex-colonies. As Crawford Young has argued, France "had little choice but to seek a regional hegemonic status in Sub-Saharan Africa-a more vulnerable region" because of its disastrous imperialistic adventures in North Africa and Indochina.[29] Indeed, according to Paul-Marie de la Gorce, the future of Francophone Africa has always been a recurring political counter in France's perspective planning. Charles de Gaulle was said to have included the problems of Africa's future in the French political institutions he created.[30] His successors merely followed in his footsteps.

To be sure, this future was envisaged mainly, if not solely, within a grand Francophone world anchored on France's interests. The most common modality for achieving this has been cooperation. While explicitly, for de Gaulle, cooperation on a bilateral basis was meant to cushion the brutal division of the world into the rich and the poor it was implicitly the grand axis on which revolves France's continued exploitation of her ex-colonies. This de Gaullian myth, which presented France as a disinterested and altruistic defender of the Third World has now become a battle cry for French political leaders irrespective of their ideological orientations. Yet, the logic of this "cooperation" can hardly be missed: French cooperation policy tends to trap Francophone Africa in the neo-colonial strategies and designs of France rather than make a conscious and cultivated attempt at South-Central cooperative e agreements and integration.

While France does not in theory, foreclose the possibility of larger groupings to her ex-colonies, she does not actively support or cultivate it. There is a double-edged sword here. Article 78 of the French (Gaullist) Constitution of September 1958 made provision for integration in her former colonies. In fact, the Mali Federation between Soudan (now Mali) and Senegal took its inspiration directly

from this provision. Yet France was partly responsible for the demise of the Federation. Henceforth, there was the provision that the sovereignty of members be respected absolutely; so each state was often to exploit this requirement to hold economic cooperation efforts to ransom; becoming solely concerned with the extent of gains and losses accruing to it within the cooperative and integrative networks. Moreover, the Loi Cadre of June 1956 had weakened inter-territorial governments and circumscribed internal autonomy, leaving little or no choice for the countries concerned. The lesson was that they either stayed with France or were asphyxiated economically and financially.

Thus, the colonial experience of *dependence tous azimut* on France was to continue after independence. Even though there were some forms of intra-regional trade and mutual dependence among the Francophone states (e.g. dependence of hinterland states on the coastal ones for trade and commerce, culminating in an intimate similarity of elite culture and values), this did little to provide a conducive soil for integration amongst the states. Again, partly because the economies of many of the Francophone states are almost always in severe distress and crisis, nationalism, as against Pan-Africanism, seems to be the vogue. But this was rabid nationalism -- with economic cooperation or, rather, the beginning of economic integration, ending where France's interests commenced. In this respect, Bassey Ate talks about "a pathological condition whereby most French-speaking states continue to project in their behaviour, greater loyalty towards metropolitan France at the expense of forging a collective African identity and autonomy".[31] Similarly, speaking specifically on the Union Africaine et Malgache (UAM), extant between September 1961 and March 1964 Albert Tevoedjre, the organisation's Secretary-General from 1961-3 complained that "the greatest shortcoming of the UAM in diplomacy was the impression it sometimes gave of an excessive dependence on France. The ties between each of the UAM states and France were in effect so close as to give the impression that the organisation itself drew its every inspiration from the former metropole (*sic*)".[32]

Indeed, from UAM, OAMCE (Organisation Africaine et Malgache de Cooperation Economique – founded April 1964), through OCAM to CEAO, the French factor and France's presence loom large rendering integration almost meaningless. In fact, once French interests manifest themselves the issues that are most important to members are excluded from the regional context. For instance, OCAM came into existence at Nouakchott in February 1965 as a more or less wretched compromise between, on the one hand, protagonists of a purely economic-technical organisation and, on the other, those who canvassed for political union. In the victory of the latter, France's key role in the shift of emphasis was very apparent. In the same vein, the protectionist economic policy of Francophone African states does not affect France. Yet, CEAO has no single trade liberalisation scheme with ECOWAS. Thus, while CEAO has remained both in concept and in

practice a thorough-going Francophone group,[33] thereby excluding sister English speaking African countries from its areas of privilege, France has continued to be part and parcel of CEAO's free trade area. As Musa Abutudu:

> Reductions in tariffs are ... essentially bilateral affairs which are largely determined by reference to existing arrangements with France. In this way, each community is assured that community arrangements would not adversely affect individual relations with France ... CEAO's s commercial relations simply confirm and guarantee the historical position of France in the economy of the member states.[34]

Thus, while the founding fathers of CEAO conceptualized the new regional body as a stepping stone to a West Africa-wide economic grouping, it has become more useful for feathering the nests of foreign capitalist interests and investors (mainly French) than deepening intra-African economic cooperation. For instance ownership is not one of the criteria for preferential treatment in the CEAO as it is in ECOWAS and the Mano River Union (MRU), Indeed, CEAO's originating rules involve a higher degree of concessions to foreign capital.[35] The Community Development Fund (CDF) of CEAO also offers a more attractive package to member states than does ECOWAS. To be sure, this is welcome to states whose economies, we have averred, are in perpetual crisis. Thus, while the ECOWAS Fund for Cooperation, Compensation and Development is put into vague use (e.g. provision of compensation to members where necessary for the development of the poorer member states, etc.). CEAO's CFD is used to subsidize state budgets; establish enterprises in member states on their request; help states which have suffered from the negative economic and social impact of the creation of the Community, etc.

Even within ECOWAS, the French factor – and, generally speaking, external orientation – once more come into bold relief. For instance, external guarantors are expected to render currencies convertible so as to permit a more intense trade amongst member states. By contrast, the benefits accruing to member states of UNOA and CEAO – particularly the French franc zone and the EEC connections – are advertised for the doubting Thomases in English-speaking Africa to see and, if possible, believe and imitate. According to a close observer "the attempt to create an ECOWAS monetary zone in the 'image' of the UMOA would inevitably formalize the ECOWAS collectivity as a subordinate sub-system of the European community".[36]

The insertion of commercial, as against economic integration in the ECOWAS treaty represents yet another form of colonial imprint. While there is the provision for some form of monetary integration in the future this appears possible only within the context of an EU guarantee. Indeed, to talk about an ECOWAS or a

CEAO free trade area is to imply a "no holds barred" operation ground for transnational corporations (TNCs) and their local subsidiaries. Even in areas as innocuous as free movement of persons, and freedom of residence and establishment, the economic nationalism of leading Francophone African states tends to stiffle bold initiatives.

Tied to the French factor is the impact of EU's high profile in Africa. Of the 45 African countries linked to the EU under the Lomé Conventions, at least 21 are French-speaking. It has been argued that before the United Kingdom joined the EU French political and economic interests dominated the Community both in policy and in practice. For economic blocs whose member states are noted for their dependence on foreign aid and investments, ECOWAS and CEAO, the majority of whom are Francophone, could easily become dependent on economic transactions with the EU. Already many of Africa's exports of primary products – over 53% – go to the European market; and the bulk of its bilateral aid also comes from there via articles of the Lomé Convention This is due partly to the fact that "... the compensatory mechanism which stabex and sysmin typify tends to present the EEC as a more attractive market under whose regime no compensatory mechanism exists to cushion the unstable nature of primary products".[37] The fact that in 1975-80, 33% of all transfers to 46 ACP states went to Senegal (20%), Mauritania (7%) and Ivory Coast (6%) further underscores the linkages between the EEC, France and Francophone Africa.[38] The point therefore is that the EEC offers some concessions to ACP exports but mainly in order to guarantee itself easy access to cheap raw materials. With France playing the role of the *interlocuteur valable* both within the EU and outside, and both multilaterally and bilaterally but more especially the latter, the poor Francophone African countries are bound to see her (and, by extension, the EU) as necessary conditions for any meaningful economic development, cooperation and integration.

But clearly, the logic of neo-colonial economic relations is at variance with the logic of autonomous "Afro-centric" economic growth and integration. Virtually all the trade liberalization mechanisms put in place by both the CEAO and ECOWAS reinforce, perhaps unwittingly, external ties. Free trade policy is, in Africa, little more than a licence for the unbridled outflow of foreign exchange and investments. Similarly, expanded cooperative as well as integrative markets benefit mainly foreign commercial conglomerates. Consequently, heads or tails, France and the EU cannot lose in a region whose economies have over the years, experienced severe structural distortions and systemic crises. In fact, "CEAO's commercial relations simply confirm and guarantee the historical position of France in the economy of member-states".[39] What this amounts to is that, notwithstanding the rhetoric to the contrary, France is more interested in the division, rather than the integration, of Africa.

Similarly, France finds easy surrogates in some of her former possessions. The

doyen of the dependent loyalists is certainly Côte d'Ivoire. There is something sinister about the role of Côte d'Ivoire in retarding the process of integration on the continent. As already argued, that country has a peculiar vision of Franco-African cooperation. She envisages a large group of ex-French colonies and rejects any serious integration efforts. This explains why Felix Houphouet-Boigny rejected the short-lived Mali Federation and sponsored the Conseil de L'Entente. Indeed, the need, at the beginning of the 1970s for a more concerted intra-Francophone solidarity and rapproachment, particularly between Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, led to the establishment of the CEAO. To be sure, there is Nigeria which, possessing all that was necessary to aspire to regional and continental leadership, projected an image of a regional power soon after its civil war of 1967-70. Before then i.e when the Senegalese economy was bouyant, Dakar was to all intents and purposes as economically attractive as Abidjan. The two cities in their respesctive countries played the role of Paris. However, except for manufacturing the other areas of the Senegalese national economy recorded appreciable decline from 1960-1970. Not unexpectedly, it was during this period that Senegal demonstrated a strong support for sub-regional integration efforts. This posture changed later but only because of the alleged threat from Nigeria because of her enormous economic potential and political strength. Thenceforth, Senegal became more inward looking and indicated her preference for a more or less exclusive Francophone organisation from which Nigeria was excluded.

It has been suggested that Côte d'Ivoire has been less combative and more accommodating towards Nigeria because, unlike Senegal, "that country's planners saw Nigeria not just as a potential competitor but especially as a market for their own industrial products".[40] This has however, not always been the Ivorian posture on critical political-economic issues affecting Francophone Africa. For instance, in the 1960s, while not being antagonistic to either the OAU or the UAMCE, Houphouet-Boigny canvassed the view that the specificity and uniqueness of Francophonie ought not be lost in the maze of general Africanness. A good portion of Ivorian diplomacy at the time was woven around the theme of not sacrificing concrete affinities among Francophone states on the altar of global African solidarity.

The so-called "Ivorian miracle" of the 1970s and 1980s changed all that. In parenthesis, the Ivorian miracle was France's miracle in the Côte d'Ivoire to the extent that the technology, expertise and even personnel were in the main., French and not Ivorian. But this is just an aside. The point is that by the middle of the 1970s Côte d'Ivoire could afford to look beyond the frontiers of the Francophone world, in search of markets for her products and wider fields of political influence and power. Her sudden wealth and greater financial capability had facilitated her assumption of the *numero uno* position in the community of French speaking African states. Houphouet-Boigny started to preside over, and largely determine,

the fortunes of other states' relations with both Anglophone Africa and France. Côte d'Ivoire's major weapon in this respect was an informal one namely, the Ivorian model. In an excellent exposé M.M. Traore argues that for the Conseil de L'Entente which was perhaps Côte d'Ivoire's most potent diplomatic weapon in West Africa, to warmly embrace new leaders and sanction internal changes in sister states, "it is imperative that the changes are not such as can essentially transform the foundations of the Ivorian model or question the leadership of Houphouet-Boigny".[41] *Le vieux*, as Houphouet-Boigny was called, certainly enjoyed considerable influence and prestige in the sub-region and in the continent as a whole. Yet, he and all those of his ilk who are still in power and who insist on a "special relationship" with France – a phrase that is little more than a stark euphemism for international clientelism – must be regarded as leaders with little or no consequence for Afro-centric integration.

The Future in Perspective

There is no denying the fact that the integration project in Africa, particularly in the Francophone region, faces an uphill task. There seems to be a rather poor conception of economic integration. Francophone Africa continues to be haunted by the ghost of its colonial past. It is also guided from distance by the ex-metropolis which has successfully preserved that region as her exclusive sphere of influence to date, suggesting that the contemporary thesis of partial abandonment and disconnection may be short-lived in view of the essentially positive pay-offs of Francophone Africa to France.[42] Thus, whatever the gains of ECOWAS these have been inadequate to deter the formation of exclusive Francophone economic blocs such as CEAO and CEEAC. Similarly, the existence of the UMOA which is the governing body of the Central Banks of French West Africa which issues CFA francis incompatible with obligations for monetary harmonization under the ECOWAS treaty. If it is the case that France is a major hindrance to integration in French Africa, the internal causal factors can be overlooked only at the peril of the economic, social and political future of Francophone Africa.

But should the Chirac-Jospin alliance insist on partially abandoning Francophone Africa through a thinly veiled process of minimising the costs of intervention, without minimising the benefits of a largely unequal relationship, Francophone Africa will have to articulate a positive response to it.[43] The response has to be either making fundamental changes that will facilitate growth, development and economic integration or face "a rapid process of disintegration".[44] An element of the envisaged fundamental changes may well include a reasonable period of premeditated, deliberative and deliberate partial delinking by Francophone Africa from France with a view to sorting out itself. This is far from being a novel idea; indeed, it sounds trite to rehash the idea in the dying years of the 20th century. Yet, disconnection continues to be a relevant diplomatic and political strategy capable

of permitting internal cleansing of the augean stables putting them in order and consequently building institutions and capacities that will make Francophone Africa fairly competitive and largely self-reliant.

Another fundamental change in perspective is the urgent need for that part of Africa to develop its own sub-regional organisations with a view to addressing the problem of under-development in the post cold war era. This process can hardly begin without a serious-minded, committed and people-friendly political leadership. "The first step" in this direction, writes the Nigerian economist, Pius Okigbo, "will have to be taken by Africans themselves to convince their peoples of the seriousness of their problems to the international agenda not for charity or relief, but for cooperation on a mutually beneficial basis".[45]

Where will these kinds of public-spirited political leader come from? How will the people get involved in order that there will not only be actual change but that the change will endure? The political leaders will not only come out of Africa, but they will also be Africans who within the context of contemporary domestic and international power configurations will ignore the yearnings of the people for development and better life that can come only from economic integration at their own peril. The people will have to be observed more closely than some analysts have done, to show that they, already tired of the current wretched status quo; are demanding the termination of merely formal independence and asking for a better although domestic and international order. Thus, Kaye Whiteman argus that "one still awaits evidence of a movement within Francophone Africa that seeks real change in its relations with France as only that will bring change",[46] there are already some interesting shreds of such evidence on the ground. As I have shown elsewhere,[47] over 300 US-based Francophone African leaders had, in January 1994 addressed an open letter to France and French politicians complaining about that country's double standards in Africa. More significantly they invited France "to espouse a policy that serves not only the interests of the African peoples but also the well thought out interests of the French people".

There are also a thousand and one opposition newspapers, magazines, politicians, academics, journalists, students, workers, etc. who are enmeshed in daily struggles to bring qualitative changes to bear on the African state and societies. Generally, such people and media, with little or no official voice, are extensively underreported by state media. In this regard, the harrowing experiences of John Fru Ndi and La Messagere and L'Expression Nouvelle (amongst other opposition-driven newspaper titles in Cameroon) are instructive indeed. Such elements deserve encouragement and support from relevant components of the international community in the pursuit of the agenda for national as well as regional growth, cooperation and integration. Those relevant components may not include France's official African policy and interests since, in the foreseeable future, these are likely to remain anti-Francophone Africa, notwithstanding the attractiveness of the

thesis of Francophone Africa's "partial abandonment" by Chirac and Jospin's France.

Notes

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1. Cited in Daniel C. Bach "L'Integration Economique regionale en Afrique" *Economique Perspective Internationale*, 48 4e trimestre, 1991 p. 37.
2. See Brownson N. Dede "Keynote Address" in M.N. Ojomo and A.O. Mobolaji (*eds.*) *African Economic Community Treaty: Issues, Problems and Prospects* (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, 1993) p. XXXVII. In the same volume, O.O. Fafowora contends that "progress towards market integration and increased cooperation in a whole range of areas is central to Africa's long-term development strategy" See his piece "The Private Sector and the Prospects of African Economic Integration" in *Ibid.* p. 131.
3. Cited in Dede, Keynote Address p. XXXVIII-IX.
4. Ernst Haas, *Beyond the Nation State* (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1964) p. 103.
5. D.C. Bach, Les Dynamiques Paradoxales de L'Integration en Afrique Subsaharienne. Le Mythe du hors Jeu: *Occasional Paper Series* No. 3, (Centro de Estudos Africanos, Lisbon, 1995 p. 17.
6. Cited in Philippe Marchesin "Mitterand L'Africain". *Politique Africaine*, 58, Juin 1995 p. 22.
7. Mitterand notably argued that "the security, the protection, the defence of Africa, all these create an obligation for us ... without Africa there will be no history of France in the 21st century. There can be no authentic history of Africa if France is not present there . "*Ibid.*, p 8. In the pursuit of her multiple interests in Africa, the indispensability of Arica to France's future was hardly brought into bold relief, however. See also "Jospin's Africa" *West Africa* 16-22 June 1997.
8. Cf *West Africa* 11-17 December 1995.
9. Soji Akomolafe "France and Francophone Africa into the 21st century. From Afro. Pessimisn to Economic Disengagement" *African Journal of International Affairs and Development*, 1, 1, 1995 p. 36.
10. See "CAR: France to close bases" *West Africa* 26-31 August 1997 p. 1365.
11. Guy Martin has contended that "although camouflaged under the mantle of 'cooperation', France's Africa policy is ... primarely motivated by a narrow conception of its national interest and it blatantly disregards African concerns and interests" See G. Martin "Francophone Africa in the Context of Franco-African Relations" in J.W. Harbeson and D. Rotchild (*eds.*) *Africa in World Politics: Post-Cold War Challenges* (Boulder *et al* Westview Press, 1995) p. 168 See also Kaye Whiteman "Africa after Foccart" *West Africa* 18-24 August

1997 p. 1341-2 where he reports Jospin's recent decisions on Africa policy as including a 40% cut in French military personnel in Africa; his unabated criticism of the chequered Cooperation Ministry; in his attack on the idea of Africa as a *domaine reservée* of the President Whiteman opines that the result of the foregoing is that the "Franco-African village" has been thrown into a state of feverish uncertainty whilst also "receiving heightened media attention".

12. Marchesin, "Mitterand ..." p. 22. Cf J.F. Medard's argument that "it is not a question of relations between states, it is not a question of relations between France and Sweden it is about relations between the members of two ruling classes" p. 22-23. Furthermore Kaye Whiteman argues that "Foccartism" a philosophy of Franco-African cooperation named after the late legendary, if somewhat mysterious, Jacques Foccart, (the 5th Republic successive conservative governments' most cherished "Mr. Africa") is all about "the personalised, manipulative approach to French-African relations treated as part of the President's *domaine reservée*", Whiteman adds a propos of the African adviser to the French President that "the idea of an adviser on Africa just behind the President, in charge of a cell ... and a network, became a powerful myth in Francophone Africa itself and French leaders found it a useful one to exploit". See Matchets Diary "Foccart and Foccartism" *West Africa* 15-21 May 1995 p. 738. For Guy Martin, "because they are said to be based on historical links, geographical proximity and linguistic and cultural affinity relations between France and Francophone Africa are invested with a special quality in the sense that they are particularly close and intimate, almost familiar". See Martin's "Continuity and Change in Franco-African Relations" *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33, 1, 1995 p. 6.
13. See Carol Lancaster "The Lagos Three: Economic Regionalism in Sub-Saharan Africa" in J.W. Harbeson and D. Rotchild (*eds.*) *Africa in World Politics: Post-Cold War Challenges* (Boulder *et al* Westview Press, 1995) p. 190. Cf "Good News out of France" (Editorial) *The Guardian* (Lagos) September 9, 1997 p. 14 "The new thinking in France offers both Nigeria and its francophone neighbours the best opportunity for a remodelling of their ties along more complementary lines that emphasise cooperation while enhancing their status as sovereign entities".
14. Reginald H. Green and A. Seidman *Unity or Poverty? The Economics of Pan-Africanism* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1968) p. 22.
15. See Bela Belassa *The Theory of Economic Integration* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1965) p. 39.
16. Cited in Abdul A. Jalloh. *Political Integration in French-speaking Africa Research Series* No. 20, Institute of International Studies (Berkeley; University of California 1973) p. 88.
17. Ben E. Aigbokhan "Integration: Theory and Lessons from Europe" Paper read

at the IDRC Conference on "Integration in West Africa", Dakar 11-15 January 1993 p. 14.

18. See Arthur Hazlewood "The End of the East African Community: What are the Lessons for Regional Integration Schemes?" in R.I. Onwuka and A. Sesay (*eds.*) *The Future of Regionalism in Africa* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers, 1985) p. 175.
19. Lancaster, "The Lagos Three" p. 200-1.
20. Cf O. Obayuwana: "ECOWAS Still Dogged by Old Ambivalence, Distrust" *The Guardian* (Lagos), September 5, 1997 p. 13.
21. Lancaster, p. 202.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
23. Crawford Young "The Heritage of Colonialism" in J.W. Harbeson and D. Rotchild (*eds.*) *Africa in World Politics: Post-Cold War Challenges* (Boulder *et al* Westview Press, 1995) p. 33.
24. S.K.B. Asante "Development and Regional Integration since 1980" in A. Adedeji and T.M. Shaw (*eds.*) *Economic Crisis in Africa: African Perspectives on Development Problems and Potentials* (Colorado: Lynne Riener Publishers, 1985) p. 86, 95.
25. Lancaster, "The Lagos Three ... p. 202.
26. *Ibid.*
27. John Ravenhill "The Future of Regionalism in Africa" in Onwuka and Sesay, *op cit.* p. 207-8.
28. See Vaclar Oplustil "The Evolution and Role of Non-Alignment in the Policy of the African State" in *Foreign Policy of Non-Alignment* (Prague: IIPE, 1964).
29. Young "The Heritage ..." *op cit.* p. 30.
30. P M de la Gorce "De Gaulle et la decolonisation du Continent noir" *Le Mois en Afrique*, 60, December 1970 p 44-60.
31. Bassey Ate "France in Africa: the NATO Dimension and Implications for Nigeria". Paper read at the Seminar on French Policy in Africa". Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 27 May 1981.
32. Cited in Jalloh. *Op cit.* p. 70.
33. Cf Daniel Bach "Some French Flavours in ECOWAS" *West Africa*, November 19, 1984 p. 2334.
34. M. Abutudu "Underdevelopment and Collective Self-Reliance in the Economic Community of West African States" Ph.D Thesis (Dept. of Political Science, University of Ibadan, December 1989) p. 302.
35. Abutudu "Underdevelopment ." *Ibid.* p 306ff.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 363.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
38. Cf. Chris Stephens (*eds.*) *EEC and The Third World: A Survey* (London Hodder and Stoughton. 1982) For a very recent treatment of this linkage between the

EEC, France and French Africa, see Kunle Amuwo "France and Africa in Post-Cold War Era" *Africa*, LII, 2, July 1997 pp. 274-288.

39. Abutudu "Underdevelopment " p. 302.
40. *Ibid.* p. 278. But that was only after Houpouet-Boigny's support for Biafra had failed miserably. See K Amuwo "Resumption of Diplomatic Relations with Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia and Tanzania after the 1971 Nigerian Civil War" in G.O. Olusanya and R.A. Akindele (*eds.*). *The Structure and Processes of Foreign Policy-Making and Implementation in Nigeria 1960-1990* (Ibadan: Vantage Publishers, 1990) pp. 306-321.
41. See M.M. Traore "La Variable Militaire dans la Politique Africaine de la Haute Volta" These de zemecycle. CEAN, IEP, Bordeaux, 1981 p. 214.
42. In this respect, Ali Mazrui has made the important point that whilst French Africa may have become an economic liability to France, it still has its *rayonnement culturel.* His words: "As custodian of the fortunes of French civilisation, France could not afford to abandon the cultural constituency of Africa entirely in favour of a more open Europe. France may need Africa more culturally but less economically" Mazrui "Africa and Other Civilisations: Conquest and Counter Conquest" in *Africa in World Politics* p. 84.
43. Roland Louvel says that "(French) Africa is sick of France's disquiet about her discontent" See his Quelle Afrique pour Quelle Cooperation'? *Mythologie de l'Aide Francaise* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1994).
44. See J.O. Ihonvbere and T. Turner "Africa in the Post-Containment Era: Constraints, Pressures and Prospects for the 21st Century" *Africa Quarterly* 33, 1993, p. 53.
45. See Pius N.C. Okigbo *Essays in the Public Philosophy of Development* Vol. 5. *Studies in the Political Economy of Africa* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Coy, 1993) p. 112.
46. K. Whiteman "4 Presidents and Africa" *West Africa* 15-21, May 1995 p. 743.
47. See K. Amuwo "A Political Economy of Human Rights Violation in Africa" *Annals of the Social Science Council of Nigeria, 7*, January-December 1995 p. 37 in Africa (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers? 1985) p. 175.