



POST-COLONIALISM AT ITS FINEST OR WHAT? EXPLAINING LA 'FRANCAFRIQUE' IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract:

This research examines the extent to which 'Françafrique' exists in the 21st century in view of the recent coup d'états' in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Gabon as case-studies. Four schools of thought are presented on 'Françafrique's' robustness: *the Ideological school*, the *Regime theory school*, *the post-colonial theory* and *the Afrocentric School*. 'Françafrique' is analysed within five concrete, observable implications: the rationale for dismantling French Military bases in those countries, severing the deeply rooted preconceived financial servitude, military interventionism, corruption of African leaders, and an over-estimation of France's economic interest in the continent. At the heart of all these lies a profound ignorance of bilateral and contextual dynamics in favour of outdated generalisations and economic relations with Metropolitan France. The overall trends and takeaways are evaluated, considering all implications and the changes over time. The question we ask is: is 'Francafrique' waning as 'a policy of engagement' within Francophone Africa? Alternatively, is Gaston Monnerville, the former French head of the Senate's addressed in France, a truism when he said: "*Without overseas territory, today's France would decline to be a lesser power needing to be liberated instead of the winner of WWII*". In contexture: 'Are chickens coming home to roost' as in Former President François Mitterrand's earlier assertion that "*without Africa, there would be no history of France in the 21st century.*"

Keywords: La Francafrique; Francophone Africa; international relations; French Post-colonial policy, French New Africa policy

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1. Introduction

The rhetoric about 'Francafrique' in Francophone sub-Saharan Africa is contextualized in the English idiom; are "*chicken coming home to roost*"? This expression or idiom translates to how chickens will definitely return to their base to 'settle down for rest or sleep' after being released all day to wonder. The phrase goes back to Chaucer, though he expressed it rather differently in *The Parson's Tale*, around 1390, insinuating that curses are like "*a bird that returns again to his own nest*".

About this paper's title, we attribute this to African American, anti-imperialist, revolutionary leader Malcolm X's political translation; following the assassination of former President of the United States of America, JF Kennedy, in 1963. The phrase was made in reference to the wrongs committed by an individual or political entity that has a 'boomerang effect' to punish the wrongdoing party in a similar vein. One example for the reference to the slain president was the 'Bay of Pigs Kennedy,' as he was considered responsible for the abortive CIA- sponsored invasion of Cuba in 1961. When applied to the 'almost successful' January 6, 2021 (attempted) coup at the U.S. Capitol, it can only bring to mind the numerous similar right-wing coups the U.S. government has organized around the world, from Guatemala, Africa (Ghana, DR Congo in the 1060s), to Indonesia and to Chile, among others. We subsequently found out that the phrase is indeed strongly tilted toward the suggestion that the 'metaphorical chickens' are undesirable results of past conduct or actions. Specifically, the phrase seems to have originated with a proverb equating curses to chickens returning home to roost. Nevertheless, is the connection of the phrase to curses being lost in modern, informal usage? Can the phrase reasonably be used today to express a notion of either positive or negative consequences flowing from correspondingly positive or negative actions?

For this paper, the expression is not at all restful but placed in context as a reference to France's croquet, state-sponsored actions, plots, and omissions or wrongdoings – that may be coming back to cause them problems. In this paper, we are dealing with decades of bad decisions, military coup d'états, sponsored by France and the removal of Francophone presidents; countless – Former President Olympio of Togo; former President Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea; former President Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso and lately, of former President Gbabo of Cote d'Ivoire) - who were against France's interferences through 'Francafrique'. In the 21st century and not too long ago (Manboah-Rockson, 2020), West and Central Francophone countries started resisting the presence of French soldiers and policies; hence, France's croquet historical past started hunting Metropolitan France, dating back to the 17th century. The history begins from the period of colonial expansion in the 19th century, starting with the invasion of Ottoman Algiers in 1830.

'La Francafrique' began at the end of the Algerian war in 1962, prompting numerous coup d'états' (military takeovers) (with the knowledge of France), by the soldiers who retired from the French army and returned to their respective countries in Africa. Confirmed by Foccart in his memoirs: "*over 214 military coups took place on the*

African continent, with France's explicit or implicit; direct or indirect influence". Foccart is known as the father of the neo-colonial order called "Françafrique."

From 1960 to 1974, Foccart was Secretary-General for African and Malagasy Affairs under Presidents Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou and was pivotal in maintaining France's sphere of influence in sub-Saharan Africa (or Françafrique) (Bourmaud, 2000). Nevertheless, in today's engagements with France, the military regimes that have seized power in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger and lately, Gabon have decided to rather sever relations with France while looking towards Russia for emancipation. Thus far, the relations between France and her former colonies have been exploitative rather than the norm – 'La francafrique.'

1.1 La 'Francafrique' in Perspective

La francafrique all begun with the experience the former soldiers gained from fighting alongside Charles de Gaulle's Free French forces during World War II, which raised the profile and the political consciousness of French African colonies. After the war, the African colonies felt they had the right to demand a more equitable relationship with France. The French government, realizing that need, introduced reforms; but was reluctant to take further steps that might compromise its control over the colonies. The French government stuck to these reforms by writing limited concessions in the form of 'reforms' into the new constitution of 1946. In the reforms, the French colonial empire was renamed the French Union. Its territories were given a token level of self-rule and allowed to elect a few representatives to the French National Assembly. Although the 1946 constitution marked the only minimal progress extended toward political participation for Africans, nationalists seized that moment.

The nationalists' parties came together to form a unified political organization known as the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA; African Democratic Rally). The organization's president, Felix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, used the clout acquired to become a member of the National Assembly and to win passage of the Loi Cadre (Outline Law) in 1956. The law reserved control of economic development, defence, and foreign policy within the union for France but gave responsibility for all other matters to the individual territories. Despite its provisions for unprecedented self-rule, the Loi Cadre was opposed by prominent African leaders like Leopold Senghor of Senegal and Sekou Toure of Guinea. They believed that Houphouët-Boigny's approach had divided West Africa into states that would be too small and poor to avoid dependency on France. However, the situation in West Africa changed during the Algerian War for Independence; a period that also witnessed the independence of the North African French colonies of Morocco and Tunisia. The crisis returned De Gaulle to power in France in May 1958, and in a September referendum, he offered the territories of the French Union a choice between complete independence from France or internal self-government within a new French Community (Hamilton and Langhorne, 1995).

De Gaulle's referendum made it clear that any nation that rejected membership in the French Community would lose all economic aid from France. Among the newly

liberated Francophone colonies, only Guinea, under the guidance of Sekou Toure, voted for independence. That vote for independence resulted in the withdrawal of French support, which nearly brought the nation to the verge of economic collapse; only to recover with the assistance from Ghana, who had won independence from Britain the year before (March 6, 1957). However, Guinea's success with its boldness of refusing 'juicy' offers from France encouraged the other French colonies to reconsider their positions, as well as, their further demands for independence. By the end of 1960, the territories of Equatorial Africa had emerged as the independent nations of the [Central African Republic](#), [Chad](#), [Congo](#), and [Gabon](#); those of French West Africa had become independent as [Senegal](#), [Côte d'Ivoire](#), [Mauritania](#), Upper Volta (renamed [Burkina Faso](#) in 1984), [Niger](#), and [Mali](#); and the Malagasy Republic had proclaimed independence as [Madagascar](#). The former colonies, however, remained heavily dependent on French aid from then until the present. In the north of Africa, the protracted conflict in [Algeria](#) delayed that nation's independence until 1962. In East Africa, the colony known as French Somaliland became an overseas territory of France in 1967 and was granted independence as the Republic of [Djibouti](#) ten years later.

2. The Conceptual Framework of the Study

To conceptualize this study, it is important to define 'Françafrique' from the onset as it can be a somewhat nebulous word. The word applies to sub-Saharan, former French colonies. The neologism *France-Afrique* was first used in 1956 by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the first president of Côte d'Ivoire, to describe the strong relationship between his country and its then colonizer, France (Chafer T., 2001).

Houphouët-Boigny, at the time, used the term with a positive connotation, in which he viewed France's involvement in African affairs as a benefit or a win-win situation for both France and African relations (Bourmaud, 2000). But 'France-Afrique' was later changed to Françafrique, and from then on, the word began to attract or develop a negative undercurrent. The understanding intended from this paper is that 'La Françafrique' is an expression today of decades of good intentions that have degenerated into 'bad decisions' or relations by the French government against Francophone African countries in their international relations. The term 'Françafrique' is based on deeply rooted preconceived ideas about France's relations with Africa in the areas of:

- 1) financial servitude,
- 2) military interventionism,
- 3) corruption of African leaders and an over-estimation of France's economic interest on the continent.

At the heart of all this lies a profound ignorance of bilateral and contextual dynamics in favour of outdated generalisations. Indeed, France promised enduring formal and informal political, economic, and personal networks among Francophone Africa and those in France with common views of world politics. As a result, ruling elites in the newly independent countries aligned their policy choices with those of France and

the West. The policy limited the geopolitical influence of the Soviet Union over these African countries during the Cold War. Nevertheless, the special relationship was declared to be over when former French president François Mitterrand spoke against La Francafrique at La Baule in 1990 (Chafer, 2001). In that speech, Mitterrand asserted that France would, from that time, begin to give preference to democratic partners. Nevertheless, from this paper's analysis, it was such rhetoric that it did not begin with Mitterrand but has echoed throughout French presidents since the Cold War era and more than 60 years after the end of colonization.

2.1 Excerpts from Francafrique

- Dated 1990: François Mitterrand on June 20, 1990, before 37 heads of state and government gathered for a summit in La Baule (Loire-Atlantique) and remarked that: "*France does not intend to intervene in the internal affairs of friendly African states.*" This "*subtle form of colonialism, under which France would attempt to coordinate internal political changes through plotting or conspiring*", is over. Nevertheless, during the time when the 'winds of freedom' were blowing in the East, with the fall of the Iron Curtain and the USSR, the French president warned that his economic aid to African countries would remain linked to "*efforts made to move toward greater democracy...*" essentially, a way to continue interfering.
- Dated 2008: Nicolas Sarkozy's overzealous minister on March 18, 2008, former Socialist and Secretary of State for Cooperation and La Francophonie Jean-Marie Bockel (under Prime Minister François Fillon) was reassigned as secretary of defense and veterans. His mistake? ...having stated two months earlier, in an interview with *Le Monde*, that he wanted to sign "*the death certificate*" of "*Françafrique*," including its "*rent-seeking*" and "*parallel networks*."
- Dated 2012: An ambiguous coda under François Hollande. You might have thought you were hearing an echo. "*The era of what used to be called 'Françafrique' is over,*" said François Hollande on October 12, 2012, in Dakar, Senegal, five months after he took office. He asserted, "*There is France, and there is Africa. There is a partnership between France and Africa, with relations based on respect, clarity and solidarity.*"
- Dated 2017: The dream of a new world by Emmanuel Macron, delivering a speech in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, on November 28, 2017, six months after his election, President Macron was determined to embrace the future. He portrayed himself as the representative for "*a generation that has never known Africa as a colonized continent.*" He again asserted: "*I am from a generation where we don't come to tell Africa what it should do or what the standards are for the rule of law,*" said the former economic minister, noting that "*there is no longer an African policy by France.*"
- Dated 2023: Emmanuel Macron's promise of neutrality. A new reality, however reflected in the promise of a "visible decrease" in French military presence. Nonetheless, this did not stop the tenant of the Élysée Palace, during his four-day tour of Central Africa, from meeting with Congolese President Denis Sassou-

Nguesso at his presidential palace in Brazzaville on March 3, 2023. The latter has been in power for more than 40 years and represents the legacy of past relations.

2.2 Expectations and Anxieties of Françafrique

In Africa, these repeated farewells of Françafrique's demise or continuance have created expectations in the following decades. More so, France's inconsistent treatment of some of its allies, including support for authoritarian regimes like those in Central Africa, has at times provoked mockery and fuelled popular disappointment regarding Paris's human rights rhetoric. Moreover, several African heads of state maintained personal relations with French presidents who supported their governments in exchange. Party-to-party political links, personal networks, and financing of French political campaigns and parties have been highlighted in various scandals. Although former French president Nicolas Sarkozy claimed that Françafrique was over in 2008 during a visit to South Africa, rumours and allegations of ongoing financing or political connections have persisted from then till the present.

Nevertheless, France has remained a privileged partner for many African presidents because of ongoing intelligence and military cooperation, political alliances, the possibility of military intervention, and a public development aid regime that has kept many regimes afloat. However, French policy stances still have a symbolic role in Francophone African public debates, given Paris's rhetoric in favour of democracy and fair elections. Yet there are signs that this status quo cannot last and has deteriorated very fast. So, in the questioning of this paper - "*Are chickens coming home to roost*" - it is an analysis of how France is being rejected left and right from Francophone African countries through military take-overs in an unprecedented manner. Indeed, someone - whether France or the Francophone countries is suffering from the unpleasant consequences of their bad actions. Is a France-African relation on the brinks? There are growing reasons to think that France's long-time arrangement with, particularly, Francophone African partners is becoming more threatened and unsustainable over time. There are potential reasons, partly due to the fact that young Africans have started realizing negative perceptions of France as a former colonial power. In a current affairs episode, the world is changing because France now faces greater diplomatic competition, as other powerful states such as China, India, Israel, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates are emerging and committing to Francophone African countries as new development partners. More so, there is the sway of traditional multilateral institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund - now willing to lessen their stance in their rules for lending to Francophone Africa. In view of all these changes, among others, as well as since the end of the Cold War, these evolutions have challenged France's global stature and its ability to act as a political broker for African states.

3. Methodology of the Study

A qualitative approach fits the nature of the research question asked in the abstract, which cannot be answered in a quantitative way. However, any statistics and data may be used to support findings when appropriate. The data collection for this research comes from academic articles and news reports taking place within the 21st century, whose time period in question is currently ongoing. More so, there is enormous scholarly work on more recent developments regarding francophone–French relations. In a qualitative type of research, news reports and academic articles are the main sources of information. The methodology proceeds as follows. First, three hypotheses were developed after the identification of the four schools of thought, which were based on current academic literature. Then, the categories of Françafrique's concrete, observable implications were developed based on all sources' signals to the most prevalent and significant implications of Françafrique; the actions of the youth; the latest coup d' tats in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and others. Each implication was analysed during the Françafrique period from 1960 to the 1990s and again in the 21st century, occasioned by the recent coup d'états in francophone West Africa. The changes, or lack thereof, between the two time periods were noted along with the recent takeovers by the military officers and ECOWAS' demands for the restoration of democracy in those countries.

4. The Review of Relevant Literature

'Françafrique' is the key term in this analysis. 'Françafrique' refers to the neo-colonial, often exploitative relationships between France and its former sub-Saharan African colonies. It is a continuation of objectives and behaviours from the colonial period till date of Franco-African relations. 'Françafrique' relies on relationships between mainly political elites on both sides. It manifests in political, economic, cultural, and military ways and is upheld both formally and informally. Neo-colonialism is another important term to define. Neo-colonialism is *"the control of less-developed countries by developed countries through indirect means...to produce a colonial-like exploitation"* (Bourmaud, 2000). Under neo-colonialism, powerful countries, or sometimes corporations, practice the basic principles of colonial exploitation without technical colonial rule.

Françafrique—a pejorative derivation from Félix Houphouët Boigny's "France-Afrique"; describes the close ties between France and Africa – or France's neo-colonial footprint in Africa that has been characterised by allegations of corruption and other covert activities perpetrated through various Franco-African economic, political and military networks. An essential feature of Françafrique is the mafia-like relations between French leaders and their African counterparts, reinforced by a dense web of personal networks. On the French side, African ties, which had been French presidents' *domaine réservé* (sole responsibility) since 1958, were managed by an "African cell" founded and run by Jacques Foccart. Comprising French presidents, powerful and influential members of the French business community and the French secret service, this cell

operated outside the purview of the French parliament, its civil society organisations, and non-governmental organisations. This created a window for corruption, as politicians and state officials took part in business arrangements that amounted to state racketeering.

4.1 How La 'Françafrique' infested Francophone

Enjoying free rein in the region – and backed mainly by the United States and Britain since the Cold War – France used 'La Françafrique' to strengthen its hold on its former colonies. This translated into the development of a franc zone – a restrictive monetary policy tying the economies of Francophone countries to France – as well as the adoption of an active interventionist approach, which has produced over 120 military interventions across fourteen dependent states between 1960 and the 1990s. These interventions, which were either to rescue stranded French citizens, or to put down rebellions, or prevent coups, restore order, or uphold French-favoured regimes, have rarely been about improving the fortunes of the general population of Francophone Africa. More so, French interventions have maintained undemocratic regimes in Cameroon, Senegal, Chad, Gabon, and Niger due to the influence of Françafrique. At the same time, France's joint military action in Libya is responsible for unleashing Islamic terrorism threatening the same countries under review - Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria in pursuit of its interests in Africa. More to the point, France has made little secret of its contempt for all independent and populist reasons despite upholding puppet regimes. There are many instances of these: in Guinea in 1958, de Gaulle embarked on a ruthless agenda to undermine the government of Ahmed Sékou Touré – destroying infrastructure and flooding the economy with fake currency – for voting to stay out of the French Community. This behaviour was again replicated in Togo, where that country's first president, Sylvio Olympio, was overthrown and gruesomely murdered for daring to establish a central bank for the country outside the Franc CFA Zone. Subsequently, his killer, Gnassingbé Eyadema, assumed office and ruled from 1967 until he died in 2005 – after which he was succeeded by his son, who still rules.

4.2 Subjugation under La Françafrique

In Gabon, you had the Bongo family, who ran a regime of corruption and oppression with the open support of France throughout 56 years of unproductive rule. As for Cameroun, its most promising, Pan-Africanist pro-independence leader, Félix Moumié, died under mysterious circumstances in Switzerland, paving the way for the likes of Paul Biya, who has been president since 1982. France also backs a Senegalese government that today holds over 1,500 political prisoners and singlehandedly installed Alhassan Ouattara as president of Cote d'Ivoire. Therefore, the widespread anti-France sentiment among the populations of Francophone Africa and beyond is not unfounded, as it has become apparent to all and sundry that these countries have not fared well under the shadow of France. In Niger, France carried out one of the bloodiest campaigns of colonial pacification in Africa – murdering and pillaging entire villages – and which is now

France's most important source of uranium, whose income per capita was 59 per cent lower in 2022 than it was in 1965. In Cote d'Ivoire, the largest producer of cocoa in the world, the income per capita was 25 per cent lower in 2022 than in 1975.

The critical difference between Anglophone and Francophone Africa was their post-war relations with Britain and France regarding their colonies. Whereas London (the United Kingdom), in principle, accepted the inevitability of independence already in a 1943 declaration pledging to guide its colonies on the road to self-government within the Commonwealth, Paris (France) envisaged retaining its African colonies as an integral single entity within the French nation. Thus, when the Free France movement led by Charles de Gaulle adopted the "Brazzaville Declaration" during a meeting of politicians and high-ranking colonial officials from the French African colonies in the then-capital of French Equatorial Africa, Brazzaville in January 1944 to discuss the future of francophone colonies, de Gaulle made several concessions, to get their assistance. Nevertheless, he explicitly rejected independence as a future possibility (Kirk-Greene, 1995; Brazzaville Conference, Wikipedia).

5. Francophone and 'Françafrique'

The first point in the analysis of this paper begins with the neo-Marxist influence of the 1970s, which continues to shape the thinking of many African intellectuals in the 21st century. Rooted in the concept of ideological school and regime theory in the era of dependence, the world view is that African countries are dominated by world powers like France, who manipulate them in various ways and, in return, extend support to their puppet governments in Francophone Africa. In fact, this reality is an accurate and disturbing occurrence of the relationship between France and her African former colonies. Indeed, over the years, Francophone political systems have still not acquired their own logic and historicity because many of the heads of state in Africa have no vision of how to transform or develop their countries. Their relationship with France has been that of aiding France's bureaucratic system to loot their individual countries. In addition, the term 'Françafrique,' glosses over individual African states' characteristics and dynamics, thereby reducing their relations with the former colonial power to a common denominator of paternalism and domination. We argue that the legacy of 'Françafrique' is applied today inconsistently by French political actors; as 'Françafrique' is no more the formal structure that it was in the mid-to-late 20th century. In summary, 'Françafrique' is on the ascendancy in view of the recent spate of military coups in Francophone West Africa. This is evident in the closing down of key institutions of their own democratically-elected governments; such as economic, language, cultural and social bases of the French polity. Within the lenses of the *regime school*, three factors persist of Françafrique: the first is that France in the 21st century wants to hide its declining global power in view of the recent speeches by President Macron of France's declining influence in Francophone Africa. Second, from the opposing end, African leaders' want the continuous utilization of Françafrique for their own benefit, but the youth, through their recent demonstrations

and agitations, want 'Francafrique' 'abolished. Finally, there is an "apparent inability" of elites on both sides; who want to design and implement other 'new structures' of Francafrique in the 21st Century but are pressured by the youth to abandon it entirely (). Indeed, as this paper argue, regime theory treats Francafrique as a hegemonic system in decline because of the call by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) of harsh sanctions against the leaders of the coup in Niger, Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso – all ECOWAS members – would have halted and empowered France's resolve to 'hold-on' to their 'colonial rights' as usual. But these countries have refused to implement them and have warned against any military intervention. Are we seeing an ideological conflict emerge between two West African blocks? African and French observers say that France, under pressure, is finally shedding its postcolonial tradition of "Francafrique" – an unflattering term that smacks of paternalistic influence and quiet deal-making among elites – as its economic and political powers wane and an increasingly self-confident Africa looks elsewhere (Bourmaud, 2000).

5.1 The case of Gabon and 'Francafrique'

In Gabon, the enduring ties to France for generations have been severed through the recent coup. Writer and analyst Thomas Borrel calls it "emblematic" of Francafrique – "a local dynasty marked by corruption, French business ties and a vague guise of democratic practices."

The late Jacques Foccart, a shadowy French high-ranking bureaucrat known as "Monsieur Afrique" - for his efforts to keep former French colonies close, recalled in his memoirs how in the mid-1980s, the younger Bongo quietly floated in Paris the idea to set up a constitutional monarchy in Gabon. The Gabon coup reminds us of many other long-standing dynasties - of former French colonies that are still standing with a collective of 122 years in office: Cameroon's Paul Biya with 41 years, Republic of Congo's Denis Sassou Nguesso with 39 years; Djibouti's Ismail Omar Guelleh with 24 years; and Togo's Faure Gnassingbe with 18 years and counting. However, many French connections remain, even in coup-affected countries like Mali and Gabon.

According to Borrel, a spokesperson for Survie – an advocacy group that denounces France's postcolonial policies in Africa; "it's tempting to talk about an end to Francafrique" (Chambord, 2014) a spokesperson for Survie, an advocacy group that denounces France's postcolonial policies in Africa. "Francafrique is characterized by institutions still in place – for example, he indicates, there are still French troops still in Africa; the CFA franc currency is still a relic of domination; and a French paternalistic culture that must be changed, including at the summit of the French state." Indeed, France still retains more than 5,500 troops across six African countries, including more than 3,000 in permanent bases in Gabon, Djibouti, Senegal and Ivory Coast, plus about 2,500 involved in its military operation in Chad and Niger.

5.2 The Case of Mali and 'Francafrique'

After repeated military interventions in its former colonies in recent decades, the era of France as Africa's "gendarme" may finally be over. It first began with the recent military coups in the West African francophone states and the reactions thereof. A recent while ago, more than 20,000 French soldiers were deployed outside metropolitan France within Francophone Africa. Claiming to be an advocate of peace, France intervenes in many African conflicts using the pretext of 'intervention against terrorism' or 'help to restore security at the request of the country concerned President'.

This was the case with 'Operation Serval' in Mali (2013-2014) and 'Operation Barkhane' in the Sahel since 2014. Derived from a misdivision (due to colonization), many African States are inhabited by several ethnic groups with different cultures and religions. Ethnic differences, poverty and political instability are thus major sources of conflict threatening the African continent. For instance, Mali is divided between more than 10 different ethnic groups.

The Malian conflict started when some terrorists (AQMI, ANSAR DINE, MUJAO) and an arabo-berber group (Touaregs) invaded North Mali. The image of France – as 'a saviour' - coming to stop such 'terrorism' was welcomed, but the French intervention soon lost its value when Mali realized that its sole purpose for the intervention in the conflict was to rather preserve French interests. Even though the repression of rebel movements or the elimination of terrorist groups was a good relief for Mali, it became easier implantation and exploitation of natural resources by French multinational companies.

5.3 The case-study of Niger and 'Francafrique'

The Republic of Niger is the fourth West African country in three years to have its government overturned by the military. Its geographical position is at the crossroads of North, West, and Central Africa: mineral and oil resources; potential for the development of renewable energies; and its strong demographic growth that can help explain the seemingly outsize interest of medium and large powers in the current crisis. Political upheaval in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger has taken place against a backdrop of widespread poverty. Along their shared borders, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger also face an acute security threat from encroaching jihadi terrorist groups that are threatening regional cohesion. In Niger before the military take-over, there were varying opinions about 'Francafrique': one side wanted a fundamental change in national politics, even if that came about through a military takeover because the democratically-elected government did not understand the changing trends in 'francafrique' and Franco-African relations. Another side is of the view that, even if civil and democratic governance is dysfunctional, the military is not the solution. In the background of this ideological conflict, however, is the relationship between West African countries and the rest of the world, especially France, as condescending about Africa and Africans.

6. Theoretical Interpretations of 'Françafrique'

6.1 The Regime Theory

Regime theory is an approach within international relations theory, a sub-discipline of political science, which seeks to explain the occurrence of cooperation among states by focusing on the role that regimes play in mitigating international anarchy and overcoming various collective action problems among states, which emerged in the 1970s. One of the key figures in establishing regime theory is Stephen D Krasner. His definition of regime theory remains the standard of all definitions. More so, regime theory is a set of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which people's expectations converge in a given area of international relations (Krasner, 1988).

A regime is a set of principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures in a given substantive area in international relations. The concept of an international regime is that La Françafrique was a set of agreements between French and African elites, codes of conduct to govern their relations in specific areas of international politics. In here, francophone countries in Africa were guided through Françafrique with a set of norms, rules, and decision-making applied inconsistently by French political actors. These were, for example, collective security regimes (including United Nations [UN] norms, principles, and procedures constraining the use of force in francophone countries by Anglophone countries, foreign affairs; use of force, prohibition of), economic regimes (including international trade regime and international monetary regime - International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [IBRD]; International Monetary Fund [IMF]; World Trade Organization [WTO]), human rights regimes (including the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms [1950] and various international treaties and customary norms protecting civil, political, economic, and social rights), our arguments is that Françafrique is no longer that formal structure that it used to be in the mid-to-late 20th century. More so, françafrique is also not absent from Franco-African relations. We think the regime school presents three factors that enable the persistence of Françafrique: the first, the regimes within La Françafrique that were created existed when there was a potential gain from agreements, but when these agreements become costly or difficult to reach, they have been either abandoned or relegated to the banner. And instead of pursuing negotiations on an ad hoc basis henceforth, agreements were now nested within a more comprehensive regime that can facilitate the negotiation of, and compliance with other agreements. This is especially true when issue density, such as the disagreements with France and Niger, or the disagreements with the same France and Burkina Faso or oil deposits and remunerations from the French government fell apart. Secondly, African leaders' wanted the continuous utilization of Françafrique for their own benefit, as such; they were revolving around grandiose financial deals between them and France; thereby leaving their people in abject poverty. Furthermore, third, the "*apparent inability*" and lack of elites on both sides to design and implement another structure for close relations between francophone Africa

and Metropolitan France (Renou, 2002). Indeed, regime theory treats Françafrique as a hegemonic system in decline. The regime theory school is more complex than the other schools of thought and can be seen as an umbrella under which other schools fall. For instance, Bovcon (2009b) evokes three slightly older schools of thought to explain Françafrique as part of regime theory. Bovcon calls these “*schools the normalization paradigm, the incremental adaptation paradigm, and the confusion paradigm*”, respectively (Bovcon, 2009a). She first references Médard, who argues that Franco-African relations became normalized (leaving the neo-colonial state) out of economic and political need rather than out of a desire to change (Bovcon, 2009b). Importantly, Médard emphasizes that French policy towards Francophone Africa has never been in response to African needs – but has always been influenced by France’s “*civilizing mission*” and its own specific interests (Chafer, 2001).

Second, Bovcon references Chafer, whose work refutes that of Médard. Here, Chafer argues that recent French action in sub-Saharan Africa is “*reactive and incremental,*” setting it in contrast with Françafrique (Chafer, 2001). Chafer directly disagrees with the theory of normalization, pointing out that the “*emotional force*” of symbols and popular memory of colonization will prevent the sort of normalization for which Médard argues. And finally, Bovcon references Bayart, who argues that France is “*confused*” in its African policy, resulting from France’s declining role in sub-Saharan Africa (Kühne, 1994). In fact, Bovcon argues further that these schools are like “*three corners of a triangle*” and any situation involving Franco-African relations today falls somewhere in between them (Bovcon, 2009a). It is, therefore, important to include these three theories as part of regime theory, as they highlight the interdependence of theories regarding Françafrique’s presence in modern Franco-African relations, and they are proof of the ever-changing, difficult-to-define nature of Franco-African relations. The hypothesis derived from the regime theory school is that if Françafrique as a regime is in decline - but not totally extinct - all concrete, observable implications should show the meaningful decreases that Françafrique is presenting in the 21st-century Franco-African relations, such as the recent spate of military takeovers and the severing of economic, military and other relations with the French polity.

7. The Afrocentric School

The Afrocentric School analyses the whole discourse surrounding modern Françafrique as a Western-led coalition to interfere in the actions and inactions of Africans. There are instances of former and recent French involvement in African political crises; emanating from the media criticizing the perceived revival of Françafrique and the unwanted imposition of French wishes on former African colonies. The Afrocentric School argues that the media’s outlook is both too simplistic and too Eurocentric. Political reorganization and a rise in democratic systems were occurring in Africa during the 1990s at the same time as the decline of Françafrique. The Afrocentric School explains that unlike the 1960s, when most African countries were under colonial rule, the late 1990s

witnessed as many as forty-seven sub-Saharan countries holding multiparty presidential or parliamentary elections, which was a drastic change from 1989 when just five of these countries had democratic, multiparty systems in place (Bovcon, 2009a). The Afrocentric school points to how groups like the AU and ECOWAS have a consistent track record of denouncing coups and acting against political actors who go against established, democratic processes in African countries (Egerton, 1983).

The question is: why can't ECOWAS find out why these countries are staging coups now; rather than suspending them outright for refusing to restore democracy? What is "*acting against established democratic norms*"? If one is being suppressed and subjugated in one's country; why do you ask? In fact, African organizations, such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), have exercised increasing political action, such as formally sanctioning leaders for undemocratic actions. Nevertheless, what is democratic within ECOWAS? Within ECOWAS seats the just defeated president of Senegal, who was a dictator in disguise and that of Ghana's Akuffo Addo, who is very incompetent, arrogant and even does not respect the Ghana Constitution at all. These individuals and organizations can call on the UN to help re-establish order, but that is how outside organizations like the French military can get reconnected again with these countries, who do not want them forever in international relations. The Afrocentric School is an important reminder for scholars to take a closer look at these recent coup d tats. Are they just internal actions or the actions are remnants of French intervention in francophone Africa, which is being rejected outright by the youth, businesses, well-educated African folks and well-meaning Anglophone countries as well? The Afrocentric School's hypothesis presented here is that if Francafrique does not exist today and is only perpetuated by Eurocentrism, the concrete, observable implications would show a meaningful decline, and there would also be a notable shift in attitudes of African leaders.

7.1 Theory of Post-colonialism

The theory rests on the colonial history of the countries in the world. As the name suggests, post-colonialism is a faction against imperialism and colonialism and came through scholars in the 1970s. This faction comes with it a new perspective to analyse the phenomenon of international relations from the history of colonized nations. A notable exhaustion to the theory is espoused by Seth, Sanjay (2011) – in "*Postcolonial Theory and International Relations: a critical introduction*" – which entails the collection of essays critiquing IR from a postcolonial perspective. The collection defines postcolonial-ism as "*not an attempt to elaborate a theory of the world as it would look from the vantage point of the Third World or developing world or the global South,*" (Sanjay Seth, 2011: 12). In fact, Sanjay believes the theory is "*not an attempt to foster a 'non-western IR'*". But that post-colonialism strives beyond such narrow concerns to tackle much broader epistemological issues such as questioning "the universality of the categories of modern social scientific thought" (Sanjay, 2011: *ibid*), and challenging and critiquing current disciplines, of which international relations is one. Other scholars argue that "*post-colonialism is simply a lens*

through which we study literature for colonized countries or postcolonial treatments" (Achebe, 2009). Many versions of this theory can be used in contradiction of the Western tradition in seeing some behaviour of states in international relations. Along with the creation of global economic liberalism is the behaviour of states in the international system affecting the running of international relations between countries. It is adjacent to colonialism that makes powerful countries colonize weak countries on their behalf; however, francophone countries were lured into signing pacts that did not benefit them but were surrogates of international business.

7.2 The Ideological School

The ideological school posits that *Françafrique* manifests today as the *"ideological discourse that organizes Franco-African relations"* (Stevenson, 1988). This school asserts that *Françafrique's* political and cultural ideology has not disappeared. An ideology of *Françafrique* is that there is a continuation of the neo-colonial mentality under *Françafrique*, which has survived for two reasons. The first reason is that France fears losing its nostalgia for an illustrious and colonial past as a cultural and political power (Bovcon, 2000).

The second reason postulates that already-present roles, networks, and political mechanisms have enabled actors to continue with the same basic practices as during *Françafrique* (Paul-Simon and Djilo, 2021). The ideological school claims that elements like ongoing relationships between political elites enable *Françafrique* to live on in a less formal manner. The cultural mentality of *Françafrique* is thus supported in tangible ways, and it manifests itself in present-day policy decisions. France still pursues cultural ties through policies with former sub-Saharan colonies, even as leaders insist that neo-colonial ideology is not a factor in France's policy towards Africa. Furthermore, this school points out that French political campaigns, primarily those of the centre-right, evoke France's colonial past to garner votes based on the nostalgia of *françafrique* ideology (Paul-Simon and Djilo, 2021). In sum, the ideological school argues that the *"special relationship"* between France and its former sub-Saharan colonies persists as more of a *"bad habit"* in the form of political and cultural ideology than as a formal policy of neo-colonialism (Al Jazeera, 2023). The hypothesis presented by the ideological school is that if *Françafrique* exists only as an ideological framework, *Françafrique's* concrete, observable implications, which are defined later, would not be in evidence, except those relating to attitudes.

8. Will *Françafrique* die or live?

Firstly, *Francafrique* still has a long life span. This is because this paper considers the realization of quite a number of reliefs for the francophone African countries to put their places in order before the end of *Francafrique*. *Francafrique* has multi-layered stages to its disengagement with Metropolitan France: One of the more important features is the French franc Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA), the official currency of 15 former

French colonies, including Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali. Although these countries have expelled French troops, their expressed wish to replace the CFA with a national currency will be much more complicated, as economic agents, public and private, have much to lose in such an outcome. The West African CFA's central bank is in Dakar and is managed in cooperation with the French treasury, which guarantees the currency's stability. Leaving the system would mean replacing it with a new currency; probably, the much-talk-about 'eco', which would almost certainly be devalued, leading to inflation and perhaps barter. In turn, this could increase transaction costs domestically and internationally and further weaken ECOWAS' delicate economic position. In practice, this gives France and its allies in the Sahel some leverage in future negotiations and will definitely give longevity to FrancAfrique.

Secondly, the Organization Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) is another feature that helps to bind former colonies to France. Paris commits 600 million Euros annually to fund various activities, including major diplomatic summits, the promotion of development, democracy, and human rights, and the adoption of common positions in global governance institutions, including the UN, where it has observer status. For underdeveloped states in the Sahel, membership includes opportunities to gain privileged access to world-class universities in France and Quebec. Thus, although there appears to be a rupture in military ties; financial, economic, and cultural ones remain in place. More so, other countries in francophone Africa, including key members such as Senegal and Ivory Coast, are still committed to the present system. This suggests that FrancAfrique will continue in the foreseeable future. Rather than its collapse—which has been proclaimed multiple times but never realized—the more likely scenario is that African member states will use it to their advantage, even while they develop closer ties to Western rivals such as Brazil, China and Russia.

Then there is the third. Furthermore, this may be a shrewd strategy given the geopolitical competition between the current great powers. As many African leaders recognize, policymakers in Western capitals, especially Washington, but including Paris and Brussels, are obsessed with Russia and China and are willing to expend large amounts of resources to stymie their influence. Nevertheless, in the meantime, Russia and China are fast seeking opportunities for their firms to gain from the fall of Western-aligned African leaders. For Niger, as well as Mali and Burkina Faso, completely severing ties with France and the West may not be in their interest for now; rather, relations with Western powers should be strategically deployed to increase their leverage in relation to other powers which are increasingly active in the region and seeking an integration or the formation of their own to integrate themselves in the international system.

It is indeed overdue for France to cut its losses – whatever it envisages them to be – and step back from its permanent colonies to allow the people of Francophone Africa to decide on their preferred path to the future. After nearly 200 years of pillage, the people have good reasons to demand that France should leave. The restlessness and the coups that have become commonplace in the region are symptoms of deeper underlying social, economic and political problems, including weak institutions, systematic

disenfranchisement, poverty, corruption and the misappropriation of national wealth. And as we call on France to do the honourable thing and withdraw, we should also rebuke Africa's leaders who have not only put their interests above those of their people but have also turned the instruments of regional intervention and development (like the AU and ECOWAS) into tools for ensuring their political survival. After all, the ranking of France among the most powerful nations of the world still depends to a large extent on its political, economic, military and cultural role in Africa.

9. Conclusion

The term 'Françafrique' is based on deeply rooted preconceived ideas about France's relations with African French countries: financial servitude, military interventionism, corruption of African leaders, and an overestimation of France's economic interest in the continent. At the heart of all this lies a profound ignorance of bilateral and contextual dynamics in favour of outdated generalizations. 'La Françafrique' is a term connoting African-French relations in aspects that are economic as well as geopolitical in context over time. But 'La Françafrique' is not completely over, as former French president François Hollande affirms. Nevertheless, even if relations between France and Africa are weaker today than they were in colonial times, is 'Françafrique' waning as a foreign policy of France, or is it still en vogue? Indeed, insofar as the CFA Franc – a relic of French colonialism exists, there is still widespread subjugation of Francophone African countries. For instance, most of them are forced to speak French, cooperation and defence agreements are not suppressed, and France interferes in African affairs as far as its needs are still intact. Indeed, we cannot speak of an eventual end of 'La Françafrique'. Africa and its resources are still a topical issue in French politics. The good news is that today, France is facing growing competition from emerging countries, especially China and Russia. Chinese firms are challenging those in France and emerging as leading trading partners on the African continent for Francophone countries in many sectors. For example, Bolloré, a French conglomerate, lost the construction project of a railway line connecting the Ivory Coast to Benin against a Chinese company, according to a survey published by 'Afrobaromètre' in 2016, 63% of which Africans are in the majority now of allowing in Chinese companies than those of the French. The French influence is therefore decreasing while the Chinese one increases, hence a transition from 'Françafrique' to 'Chinafrique' in the future.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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