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Politics in Francophone Africa

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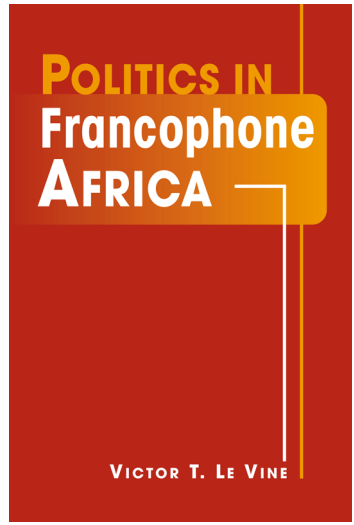

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Introduction

This book is about politics in fourteen African states that, before 1958–1961, were part of France's African empire. Twelve of the fourteen operated under the umbrella of what were then generally known as the administrative federations of French West and Equatorial Africa, Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF), and Afrique Equatoriale Française (AEF). French West Africa included Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, the Ivory Coast (now officially Côte d'Ivoire), Mali, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Dahomey (now Benin), and Niger. The UN Trust Territory of Togo, which was under French administration, operated in part under the aegis of the AOF but, because of its special international status, was treated as a separate political and juridical entity. The AEF group was made up of Chad, Ubangui-Shari (now the Central African Republic), Gabon, and the French Congo (now the Republic of Congo, or Congo-Brazzaville*). The UN Trust Territory of Cameroon (now the Cameroon Republic, or Cameroon)[1] was ruled by France under a set of dispensations similar to those that governed Togo.

France's African empire at one time also included French Somaliland (which was renamed the Territory of the Afars and Issas after 1966, then became the Republic of Djibouti in 1977); the great island of Madagascar; and three North African territories—Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. It also included several islands and island groups near Madagascar (the present Comoros Federal Islamic Republic plus Mayotte/Maore, the Îles Glorieuses, Réunion, the Îles Tromelin, Juan de Nova, Bassas da India, and Europa), of which all but the three islands of the Comoros Republic still belong to France.[2] A neighbor of Cameroon and the old AEF states, the

* In this text the Republic of Congo will be referred to as Congo-Brazzaville. The country formerly known as Zaire will be referred to as the Democratic Republic of Congo (or DRC).

Republic of Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony, is tied monetarily to the Communauté Financière Africaine (and the CFA franc), but is only marginally involved with the politics of its member states, that is, to the extent that refugees from the Equatorial Guinean regimes of the late Maçias Nguéma and his nephew Teodoro Obiang (Nguema Mbasogo) still reside in Cameroon and the ex-AEF countries and agitate against Teodoro's dictatorship.

In any event, we will not deal with this latter group of states and territories, principally because their politics and political histories are largely peripheral to those of the fourteen of our focus. The modern political destinies of the Maghreb states (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) in particular have connected them largely with the Arab world of North Africa and the Middle East rather than with sub-Saharan Africa. (Madagascar is a partial exception: it played a role in the preindependence politics of French Africa, and its leaders continue to meet with their West and Equatorial African peers at the francophone summits and the venues of the Francophonie organization.) Finally, the ex-Belgian colonies of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi are also officially francophone, but for most purposes they also lie outside our purview.

Why focus on Togo, Cameroon, and the twelve states of former French West and Equatorial Africa? The reasons are many and complex, but for now suffice it simply to stress that the fourteen share not only what amounts to a colonial past, but also social, political, and economic linkages born of common and sometimes shared postindependence political experiences, plus a set of surprisingly resilient and durable ties to France itself.

That such links to a former colonial metropole should persist some forty years after independence is not at all surprising: Belgium continues to play a role in the politics of its former dominions;[3] Portugal remains an active presence in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau;[4] and Britain does the same in its former colonies in West and East Africa. For example, when Sierra Leone's government, ECOMOG, (the Military Observers' Group of the ECOWAS, the Economic Organization of West African States), and the UN (which had sent peacekeepers) were unable to end Sierra Leone's three-year civil war, they turned to Britain, whose troops finally forced the surrender of warlord Foday Sankoh's rebels in 2001. In like fashion, in 2002–2003 French intervention ended—at least temporarily—a military mutiny and near–civil war in Côte d'Ivoire. This resulted in an agreement that melded—again, more or less temporarily—the rebels and the government into a new regime. Spain retains ties to one of its former colonies, Equatorial Guinea, though not with the other, now called the Western Sahara, which it surrendered to Morocco and Mauritania when General Franco died in 1975.

What is surprising in the case of the fourteen states that are the subject of this study is the strength and salience of their ties with France: involved are educational and cultural exchange, including the diffusion of French popular culture, particularly in urban areas; trade and investment; technical and financial assistance; French financial arrangements; periodic "Francophone" leaders' conferences chaired by the incumbent French president; membership in the international francophone cultural organization, La Francophonie; and the presence of some one hundred thousand Frenchmen living or doing business in the fourteen states while maintaining multiple links to France.[5]

Occasionally one or another of these states calls for French military intervention in a local conflict, and units of the French Force d'Action Rapide (FAR) have been stationed at some eight francophone African venues.[6] For example, between May 1996 and April 1997, France repeatedly used elements of its 1,300-soldier force in the Central African Republic, plus additional troops from France itself, to support the country's civilian president Ange-Félix Patassé, whose government was threatened by recurrent mutinies within its army.[7]

In the aggregate these past and present ties have tended to perpetuate a sense of connection among a variety of politically and economically active populations in the fourteen states and, thereby, among the fourteen political systems. It is not, of course, simply that French remains the lingua franca of the educated, the elites, and high politics, though the common language has obviously continued to facilitate these relationships; it is that when added up, these connections and continuities amount to a loose but durable political community. Admittedly one can make too much of all this. Indeed, France no longer wields the big stick it once did, and francophone African leaders periodically pick fights with their French friends. Furthermore, the old institutional and economic links have declined as France itself, beginning with the tenure of President François Mitterand and continuing during that of President Jacques Chirac, has been pulling back from its African commitments, and these fourteen states have been cultivating new connections with other members of the European Community, other African states, and a growing number of recently acquired non-African trading partners. Yet a loose and surprisingly durable base of political commonality persists and thus provides the principal reason for studying these fourteen states as a group.

This is the perspective, of course, that considers the French-African connection to be more or less benign. The opposing view sees the long relationship in a highly critical light, in which official France, in league with French corporations and businessmen-politicians and with the willing cooperation of a variety of corrupt and venal African leaders, maintains

these links with the ultimate purpose of exploiting Africans and African wealth.While the first perspective reflects the reality of a variety of salutary Franco-African relationships, it is also the image official France has sought to project. The other view, in the eyes of its proponents, reflects the hidden reality of the connection, one that portrays francophone Africa as the *pré carré* (backyard) and *chasse gardée* (private hunting preserve) of official and corporate France and its African clients. The second, opposing view has been represented in the work of investigative journalists like Georges Chaffard, Antoine Glaser, Stephen Smith, and François-Xavier Verschave in the pages of the periodical *Jeune Afrique,* as well as in the academic efforts of Jean-François Bayart and the journal *Politique Africaine*. Granted, much of this work comes from the French left-wing tradition of *engagé* politics, but because so much of it is based on solid research, is often unblinkingly truthful, and is convincingly argued, I turn to it later, in Chapters 8 through 11.

Although it is true that after independence each of the fourteen states went its own particular political and economic way, the French connections remained both between the states and France and among the states themselves. Francophone leaders stayed in touch with one another, even to the point of creating—sometimes successfully, sometimes not—formal political and economic links between their countries. These include the ill-fated Mali Federation (1959–1961, mainly joining Mali and Senegal), the Council of the Entente (founded in 1959, which loosely connects Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Niger), the Central African Customs Union (the Union Douanière et Économique de l'Afrique Centrale, UDEAC, founded in 1964, which included Chad, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea), and the West African Economic Community (Communauté Économique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, CEAO, founded in 1974 and including Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal). These connections represent only the more visible, institutionalized part of a much larger array of continuous formal and informal postindependence interstate linkages.

It was a francophone country, Benin, that in 1989 finally led the way in the surprising resurgence of democratic politics on the continent, begetting similar processes in Mali, Niger, Congo, Chad, Cameroon, Togo, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire—all francophone countries as well. While the results of this "redemocratization" process have been disappointing, the point is that the process diffused first to the francophone countries, an effect surely brought about by the existence of a community of political interest among the fourteen states. (Chapter 8 addresses the issue of redemocratization.) At the very least, the existence of that community is a hypothesis worth testing; at most, it establishes one set of analytic concurrences, a field of commonali-

ties, that makes valid comparative analysis possible.[8] In all, then, there is ample justification for this study. But how to approach the subject?

The latest general work in English on francophone Africa is the 1997 volume edited by John Clark and David Gardinier, *Political Reform in Francophone Africa,* a series of essays taking its cue from Benin's 1989 national conference and its effects elsewhere in francophone Africa. Another recent such volume is that edited by Anthony Kirk-Greene and Daniel Bach, *State and Society in Francophone Africa Since Independence,* the revised product of a 1988 symposium on francophone Africa held at St. Anthony's College and the Maison Française, Oxford.[9] The book organizes eighteen contributions under four broad categories: political systems, economic and financial dynamics, external relations, and literature and philosophy. Patrick Manning's excellent history, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, 1880–1995,* is presented under three general rubrics (economy and society, government and politics, culture and religion), with two chapters on each set of topics, that is, one dealing with events before 1940, and the other with those after. In the second edition of this book, published in 1998, Manning added a chapter called "Democracy and Dependence, 1985–1995," which extended the story ten years further.

Manning resisted organizing his book under country-specific rubrics, and I follow suit mainly because the monographic and periodic literature on the fourteen states is by now extensive enough in both English and French to satisfy readers wishing to explore in detail the politics, society, and economy of each. (The bibliography references the most important and useful of those works.) Instead, I've chosen to organize the book under a series of themes. Some of them offer broad historical analysis; others present arguments about some comparable, as well as territorially specific, facets of politics; and still others convey topical analysis and the results of comparative empirical research. It is, admittedly, a mixed bag, but one that I hope will prove both useful and interesting as it is unpacked.

The book begins with a set of three related chapters: the first on the physical and human contexts of politics, the second on the general character of the colonial legacy bequeathed to the fourteen states at independence, and the third on the growth of political and institutional life from the end of World War II to independence. The second set of three chapters addresses the interface of society and politics, speaking first to the growth of transterritorial and national political cultures, then to the intersection of ideology and political style, and finally to the role of religion and ethnicity in the politics of the fourteen states. The third set of chapters explores themes on the structures, processes, and exercise of power in the fourteen states. Chapter 7 discusses the variety of governance experiments from 1958 to 2003. Chapter 8 examines the remarkable redemocratization surge during the early 1990s. Chapter 9 looks at who rules and leads in the fourteen

states, and Chapter 10 throws some light onto their political shadows—the "parapolitics" of the systems themselves. The final chapter considers some important facets of political economy and the linkages of the fourteen states to the international economic and political contexts in which they operate, including, notably and critically, those with France itself.

I freely admit that no single theoretical or methodological perspective informs these chapters, and I acknowledge that I have borrowed extensively from the work and ideas of friends and colleagues, as well as using my own studies and research to address the questions and issues raised in each chapter. Over forty years as a student of African politics, scholar-researcher, part-time journalist, visiting professor and lecturer throughout Africa, participant-observer, and eyewitness to extraordinary change have taught me that there are no simple or definitive answers to most Africa-related questions. Thus my own continuing doubts about the interpretations and answers presented here will be evident throughout the work, and I hope they will be accepted as honest uncertainties, not evasions.

Notes

1. The name Cameroon derives from Rio dos Camarões, or River of Shrimp, given to what is today the Wouri River by Portuguese explorers, the first Europeans to sail up the estuary of the Wouri in ca. 1472.

The Spanish called the river Rio Camerões; the Germans named the territory Kamerun when they annexed it in 1884. It passed to the French and British in 1916, and the French called their part Cameroun, the British named theirs the Cameroons (the British held two disconnected pieces). As League of Nations mandates in 1921–1946, and later as UN trust territories, the names were anglicized to be French Cameroon and the British Cameroons. When the French Cameroon became independent in 1961, it formally became La Republique du Cameroun, or the Cameroon Republic.

The British Cameroons, under the League of Nations and the UN, consisted of the Southern Cameroons and the Northern Cameroons. In 1961, as a result of a UN plebiscite, the Northern Cameroons joined Nigeria, the Southern Cameroons joined the Republic of Cameroon. The latter became the Federal Republic of Cameroon, until 1972 when the federation was dissolved and the whole was renamed the United Cameroon Republic. The "United" was dropped in 1982 when Paul Biya succeeded to the Cameroonian presidency.

To complicate matters further, an Anglophone secessionist group, the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), announced the former Southern Cameroon's secession, renaming the territory the Ambazonia/Federal Republic of Southern Cameroon. Ambazonia derives from "Ambozes," what the folk at the mouth of the Wouri (now Douala) used to call the area. They insist on calling the francophone Cameroon by its French name, La République du Cameroun. The SCNC has not yet managed to secede the territory, but has given the central government a lot of grief.

2. Juan de Nova, Bassas da India, Europa, and the Îles Glorieuses, located in the Madagascar Channel, are uninhabited; all are administered by the French overseas department of Réunion but claimed by Madagascar. The Îles Tromelin, east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean, are claimed by both Mauritius and Seychelles. The

island of Mayotte (Maore) is geographically and culturally part of the Comoros group, but in 1976 its inhabitants opted to remain part of France after the rest of the Comoros became an independent state in 1975. The leaders of the Comoros Republic apparently hope the citizens of Mayotte will someday change their minds; the green Comoros national flag includes a half-moon with four, not three, stars between its cusps.

3. Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo all send representatives to the meetings of the French-sponsored international Francophonie organization, as well as to the periodic Franco-African summits. Until its relations with Burundi soured in 1985—in part because of the misuse of some fifty million francs allocated by the French Ministry of Cooperation for the 1984 Franco-African Summit in Bujumbura—France had a special relationship with that country. France had a similar relationship with the military regime in Rwanda (under President Habyarimana) when it helped arm the Rwandan army and trained many Rwandan soldiers and militiamen. During the early 1990s, French military "assistants" tried to prevent the regime's collapse and, when it did collapse in 1994, helped its remnants to escape to the DRC.

4. In 1996, after a twenty-year period of limited connections, Portugal reasserted her political and economic ties with her former African colonies by giving them pride of place in a new Community of Portuguese-Language Countries (CPLP). See Matloff, "New Kids on Trade Bloc: Portugal and Ex-Colonies."

5. McNamara, *France in Black Africa;* Chipman, *French Power in Africa;* Andereggen, *France's Relationship with Sub-Saharan Africa;* Corbett, *The French Presence in Africa;* Mortimer, *France and the Africans, 1944–1960: A Political History;* Frederick Quinn, *The French Overseas Empire.*

6. FAR was dissolved on June 30, 1998, and its units incorporated under the new overall structure for land forces, the Commandement de la Force d'Action Terrestre (CFAT). The FAR, which consisted of two divisions, two brigades, and several specialized regiments, saw action in Lebanon (1983), Chad (1986), Rwanda (1990), the Persian Gulf (1990–1991), Cambodia (1992–1993), and the former Yugoslavia (1992).

7. See Leymarie, "Gendarmes et voleurs en Centrafrique," 25.

8. The problem of making valid comparisons about African politics is an old one recently revisited by Chris Allen, who argues for the existence of a limited number of different event-sequences within individual state histories and of "the political forms that feature in them" ("Understanding African Politics," 303). I agree with much of his analysis, but insist that francophone, anglophone, lusophone (Portuguese-speaking), and even hispanophone African countries represent analytically discrete ensembles for comparative analysis, always given sufficient—and empirically demonstrable—commonalities among the component units.

9. The French edition was *Etats et sociétés en Afrique francophone*.