

Interests first, democracy later: an historical approach of the interaction between natural resources and democracy building in french speaking central Africa states

Abstract

During the 1990s, many sub-Sahara African states started the process of regime change so as to join what was referred to as the third wave of democratization. Almost three decades after, apart from South Africa, very few if not none of them have consolidated democracy. The dominant discourses in explaining sub-Sahara African states' 'resistance' to liberal democracy emphasize the inadequacy of their social structures, their low economic development, and the grab of 'big men' in power. Drawing evidence from history, this article contends that foreign interests can also be an impending factor to democratic development. The study concerns the relationships between France and her former colonies in Central Africa. The data used is obtained mainly through documents analysis.

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Introduction

"Africa remains a key territory on the global map. Rich in natural resources especially oil, the continent holds a strategic position. It is the world's fastest-growing region for foreign direct investment and it has approximately 30 percent of the earth's remaining mineral resources".¹ This insightful picture informs from the strategical perspective how Africa is perceived by rich countries: the continent is just a reservoir of raw materials, of natural resources; and other allegedly symbolic interests. But we all know and as Batou² is quick to note when addressing specifically the issue of oil, although the statement can be extended to other natural resources, that oil resources are getting more and more scarce. The last major reserves of oil in Africa will become increasingly important. Consequently, early repositioning of oneself with a view to exploiting these resources is vital. The lesson that one can draw from such a statement is that multinational companies and their home countries (be they effective rational actors or potential ones) are very observant to everything that goes on in the continent. From the neo liberal economic perspective, it is common knowledge that altruism is a very marginal behavior. That is to say, as rational actors from a substantive perspective, they do not hesitate to fight through intermediaries, to corrupt governing elites, or to take side in national affairs of the African countries with a view to gaining or controlling parts of the natural resources; and preserving other additional and symbolic interests. This is probably why, as Aljazeera³ goes on to report, more than 130 years after the Berlin Conference, a new division of the African Continent is underway as new powers seek to ensure oil supplies, strategic minerals, arable land.

As the 'world's fastest-growing region for foreign direct investment', multinational firms have been investing in Africa and will continue to do so. But we also know that capital does not go along with noise, especially with bottom-up generated noise. But noise can be top-down generated as well specifically when a company or its home country feels frustrated because of losing part of its influence area or being substituted by another one. If the bottom-up generated

noise can be defined as a noise coming from the people through a kind of revolution because they feel very uncomfortable with a specific ruling order, the later conceptual category refers to troubles purportedly constructed by multinational firms or super powers in a view to gaining, controlling, or maintaining part of natural resources. By so doing those firms and their home countries do influence national affairs, therefore limiting the exercise of the sovereignty of the weak and fragile States. Even though Western companies are sometimes a major part of the problem, as Cheeseman³ notes with a lot of relevance, this aspect is hardly highlighted as an impending factor for democracy development. From this perspective, this article seeks to shed light on the relations between foreign interests and democratic stagnation. The question is, how can, or instead, how have foreign interests' impacted democratic development in central African countries? Our general argument is that firms and countries having interests in other countries are hardly neutral as concern domestic politics in those countries. They mostly take side in internal affairs and thus impeding democracy development; whatever content one gives to the word democracy. Such interferences are in contrast with the dominant discourse on the 'mission de civilisation' and promotion of democracy. We tackle this problem from the historical angle; and we look at it through the relationship between France and her former colonies of central Africa. Historical approach consists of proving the existence of causal relations between independent events that make history. This is probably the reason why some critics refer to historical explanation as partial. Reading through this paper, some may argue that historical method was purportedly chosen.⁴ While we agreed with them on some aspect, we would also add that there is no ontological link between one subject and a particular theoretical framework. What is important is providing evidence of French interests in the fragile countries of the sub-region, to connect the existence of such interests and the maneuvers to perpetuate them to the poor democratic development.

We develop our argument in four parts. The first section attempts an understanding of foreign interests and seeks, from our own lenses, the

most insightful and suitable meaning of democracy for this paper. The second section maps out Central Africa and its components; the third one catalogues natural resources available in the sub region, and goes on to identify multinational companies operating there. Finally, the fourth looks for evidence of interference of foreign firms and super powers in domestic political affairs of the fragile states of the sub-region under study.

Understanding foreign interests and democracy

Meaning of foreign interests

An interest is a personal advantage. The advantage is usually but not exclusively material. It is worth remembering that interest is just a container whose content can be changing according to circumstances. That is to say, the term interest does not have a substantive and static meaning. An interest can be material. For example, a multinational company can have a domestic subsidiary in a specific country. It can also be cultural, historical, and ideological, just to mention these few. This may be the situation of a former colonial power claiming a kind of “droit de regard” on everything happening in her former colonies on the basis of linguistic; economic; and monetary historical ties or the security it supposedly provides. This aspect is particularly relevant with France and its former colonies: this is what is sometimes referred to as ‘pré-carré’. In one case or another, interests here are foreign because neither the multinational firm nor the former colonial master is a national of the country. Social agents or actors who seek their interest are generally referred to as rational.

Understanding democracy

In Heywood⁵ own words, “a term that can mean anything to anyone is in danger of meaning nothing at all”. Finding ourselves in agreement with much of this view, we would just add, as Lynn-Jones⁶ noted two decades ago that attempts to define democracy are further complicated by the difference between its practice in ancient Greece and that of today. But following the way paved by Durkheim⁷ emphasizing the importance of previous definition indeed, some scholars and practitioners have offered some insightful definitions of this controversial concept. According to Abraham Lincoln’s seminal definition, democracy is a system of government of the people, by the people and for the people. From Huntington’s perspective,⁸ a twentieth century political system is democratic to the extent that “its most powerful collective decisions-makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote”. While the first definition emphasizes the strong sense of community, the second mainly raises the issue of political participation, and that of election as a means or a process through which decisions makers are selected.

Mapping out central Africa

Central Africa is generally mapped as two different geopolitical entities: the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) whose components are Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Congo Brazzaville. And the Economic Community of Central Africa States (ECCAS) with as many constitutive members state as Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Chad, Congo, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Sao Tomé and Principe, and Angola. States constituting both entities are comparable from democratic perspective: their governing elites all claim democratic belonging. But

from the western lenses, they all fall either into “illiberal democracies” or “electoral authoritarianisms” categories. Among other democratic illnesses, their elections are hardly fair, free, and competitive. Hence, there is no real democratic alternation of power. They also have corrupt and nepotistic leaders who mainly are disrespectful of human rights and other democratic benchmarks. This alarming picture of democracy development in the sub region is consistent with Nick Dearden’s⁹ general statement when he convincingly goes on to observe that “with few exceptions, countries with abundant mineral wealth experience poorer democracy, weaker economic growth, and worse development”. One plausible key of understanding such a situation is that natural resources and corruption are intrinsically linked to one another. Although countries of both entities seemingly share the same characteristics, in this article the mainstream of analysis is made of French speaking countries of the CEMAC zone that had earlier been identified. This is mostly for convenience for, apart from Equatorial Guinea, all the remaining constitutive elements, together with the French speaking West African countries, as we earlier put it, form what is usually referred to as the ‘pré carré français’ meaning a kind of France’s latent but exclusive domination or influence zone. Influence zone may also be synonymous to commercial zone that is a kind of destination of industrial and cultural products or a place where those products are being dominantly sold. Based on history, this kind of supposed but unbalance cooperation is an arbitrary legitimization of French interference in domestic affairs of those allegedly sovereign states.

Cataloging natural resources of the sub-region

The African continent as a whole is a reservoir of natural resources. The sub region of Central Africa that has just been delineated is a kind of ‘natural resources scandal’. For a wide range of resources are available in each constitutive State; and therefore making the whole sub region very attractive to multinational companies.

Natural resources of Cameroon

The natural resources of Cameroon are varied. Her mining industries are largely underdeveloped. This country has many mineral resources which include bauxite, nickel, petroleum, uranium, cassiterite, cobalt, diamond, gold, iron ore, cement, aluminum, itabirite, and pozzolana. Companies operating in this sector are as many as the Legend Mining Ltd. of Australia, Sundance Resources Ltd. of Australia, C&K Mining Inc. of Corea, Bowleven Oil & Gas plc, Perenco plc of UK, Mega Uranium Ltd. of Canada, ELF and TOTAL of France, Petronas of Malaysia, Chevron and ExxonMobil of the USA, and Sinopec of China.¹⁰

Central African Republic’s natural resources

Diamond, gold, clay and sand, and gravel are some of the natural resources that can be subject to foreign investment in the Central Africa Republic. International companies explore for gold, petroleum, and uranium resources. Other undeveloped mineral resources include copper, graphite, ilmenite, iron ore, kyanize, lignite, manganese, monazite, quartz, rutile, salt, and tin.¹¹

Natural resources of Chad

Hydrocarbons are the main pillar of Chad’s economy. But other minerals commodities are also available. These include gold, lime, limestone, soda, ash, cement, clay, salt, sand, and stone. By 2011, most of these minerals were being produced by small-scale local mining

companies. While the exploration and production of crude oil was handled mostly by foreign companies. Among these companies we have the global giant Glencore, Petronas of Malaysia, ExxonMobil, and Chevron¹² of the USA.

Natural resources of Congo Brazzaville

The economy of the Congo Brazzaville was based primarily on the production of crude oil. International interest in the development of the nonfuel mineral resources has increased in recent years, and much of the focus of multinational mining companies was on the country's gold, iron ore, limestone, diamond, and potash resources. In 2013, artisanal miners dominated the diamond and gold mining sectors. Since then, so many multinational companies through their subsidiary branches operate in the country. These companies are as diverse as the Core Mining Ltd of the United Kingdom, Exxaro Resources Ltd of South Africa, Equatorial Resources Ltd of Australia, the Glencore Xstrata plc of Switzerland, Sundance Resources Ltd of Australia, Equamineral Holdings Ltd of Australia, Dangote Group of Nigeria, West African Cement S.A. of Ghana, Ciment d'Afrique of Morocco, Cominco Resources Ltd of the United Kingdom, Mag Industries Corp. of Canada, Elemental Minerals Ltd of Australia, and Holle Potash Corp. of Canada. Congo Brazzaville's economy seems to be very attractive for foreign investments.¹³

Overview of natural resources of Gabon

Manganese and petroleum dominate Gabon's mining activities. But many other minerals exist in the country's mining landscape. As far as metals are concerned for example, a joint venture established between Africa-based Managem International A.G. and Search Gold Resources Inc. of Canada procured exploration and mining rights in 2010 to develop the Bakoudou-Magnima gold project. The same year, OAO Severstal Resources of Russia acquired 16.5% interest in Core Mining Ltd of the British Virgin Islands, while Core Mining Ltd, via its subsidiary Core Mining Gabon SRL procured 100% interest in the Kango project. In this same minerals sector, Eramet Group of France, the Government of Gabon, and a private investor jointly own Compagnie Minière de l'Ogoûé S.A. (COMILOG) with more than 60% of the shares belonging to the French group which also own the Moanda Manganese plant. In the same vein, the Compagnie Industrielle et Commerciale des Mines of Huazhou (CICMHZ), a local branch of Citic Resources Holdings Ltd of China, signed a mining right agreement with the government to develop the M'Bembele Manganese mine.

Heidelberg Cement Group of Germany with 75% interest in Société des Ciments du Gabon (Cimgabon) monopolizes the cement sector. As concerns the fossil fuels, in 2010, Total S.A. through its local branch (Total Gabon S.A.) came to an agreement with the Texas-based VAAA LCO Energy Inc. by which Total obtained 50% interest in the Mutumba Iron exploration license. Total also made a similar arrangement with Perenco Group of UK to obtain 30% of the shares in the DE7 exploration license and 20% in the Nziembou's one. Bowleven Plc of UK also detains a 100% equity interest in the EOY Block offshore and 50% interest of the same nature in the Epaemeno Block onshore.

In addition, AREVA's mining opportunities in Gabon were already increasing by 2010 since the group obtained 4 minerals exploration permits to cover N'Goutou, Andjogo, Mopia, and Lebaki. At the same time, the company was conducting uranium exploration campaigns

after being authorized by the Gabonese government. Similarly, another global mining leader, Volta Mining of Australia was attributed the Mbombo Iron Ore Project on August 2010.¹⁴

From the above perspective, the sub region has become a convergent point for multinational firms from all over the world and mostly from consolidated democracies. But, from the democracy expansion perspective, these companies have very little or no diffusional effect on the local culture. This is probably because their main objective in the area is instead making money or securing their investment and not expanding democratic governance. In fact, when France claims to be a watchdog of this part of the world, this could mean taking care of these diverse natural resources and other additional symbolic interests. The puzzling question is for whose sake? As to this question, one would have envisaged the liberal approach and conclude that France and her former colonies are engaged in a mutual profit cooperation. If this were the case, the Chinese approach to cooperation¹⁵ would not have been too harmful to the Western world when it officially claims to promote a "win-win" relation. Based on the forgoing discussion we demonstrated that France engaged her nationals in colonial adventure not for altruistic and humanitarian goals but for her interests. Considering this argument, the realistic perspective that suggests that friendship among nations is a controversial issue because their relationships are interests guided,¹⁶ seems to provide a more convincing answer.

Evidencing foreign interests' impact on democratic development of central African States

The 1990s came along with what Huntington¹⁷ labelled the third wave of democratization in certain regions of the world, notably Latin America, Eastern and former Soviet Republics, and Africa. That is to say, with the combining effects of domestic and international enabling factors, people of the countries of these areas asked for more openness of their respective political orders; for more freedom, in short for liberalization and democratization. Therefore, they had to go through a transitional process. As from that particular moment, democracy became a 'universal value' that had to be expanded. Western countries had to modify their diplomatic agenda to make promoting democracy a short term objective. Evidence in this line can partly be provided by the USA and France. As Sean Lynn Jones¹⁸ was quick to urge, "The U.S should make promoting democracy abroad one of its central foreign policy goals". French president François MITTERRAND met the African Heads of State and governments in La Baule and pushed them to democracy. From then, countless amount of money had been spent in the purpose of funding and promoting democracy worldwide.

The haunting question is how sincere were or are the democracy promoters whose likely main figures are France, the USA, Germany and Britain? The ontological antagonism between politics and moral suggests that sincerity in that area is a meaningless concept. Hypothetically, of course, some of these democracy's advocates may truly be adepts of global culture and just like the moral entrepreneurs in Howard Becker's¹⁹ formulation, they raise awareness on the existence of some universal moral principles. But the others, whose historical and permanent attitude has been imperialist, are likely the continuators of realism. From Abraham Lincoln's perspective, democracy, as earlier stated, 'is the government of the people, by the people'.²⁰ Government of the people and by the people seems to suggest the issue of self-determination and sovereignty which infers a supreme power. Or, to put in another way, sovereignty is a character of something that cannot admit any other thing above. In

democracies, the power allegedly belongs to the people. This certainly explains why France, the USA, and Britain got democratic through popular revolutions. Therefore, the question is, for the purpose of democracy, can these promoters tolerate a real bottom-up generated democratic revolution that compromises their interests? Or from another perspective, since democracy underpins self-determination, one can hasten to wonder whether its promoters can give African countries a kind of clearance consisting of choosing their own model of political and economic development? This is probably what the Chinese leadership did for that country to become a challenging power to America within a short period of time as Allison Graham's²¹ evidence demonstrates. A likely answer to the later question is in the negative because Africa with its component States enjoying weaker capacity, makes her a promise land of commodities and there are so many and diverse competing foreign interests interacting in its weaker component states. Countries of the sub-region subject of this analysis are dominantly French speaking. Past and recent evidence of their experience of 'cooperation' with France suggest a negative answer to the later question.

Historical evidence of the unsettling sincerity of France to promote democracy in the sub region

France's equivocal attitude as concern the democratization of her former colonies dates as far back as to the colonial period. Two major arguments can be developed in support of this statement. The first has concern with the colonial administration's theoretical framework while the second deals with the Brazzaville Conference. Two major philosophical frameworks with different expected outcomes guided the colonial action: assimilation and association. Assimilation was intended to incorporate the colonies into the colonial master's culture, economy; and politics. It is common knowledge that integration (be it sociological, economic or political) is always a long, permanent and endless process. Consequently, the administration system here was the direct rule. The direct rule consisted for the colonial master to send her nationals in the colonial territories as representatives for the purpose of running directly the daily colonial affairs, that is, without any native intermediary. To put it in another way, European nationals posted in different colonies were empowered to govern; that is, enforcing the laws drawn up in Europe in order to find solutions to the problems of their respective territories. The philosophical foundation of this system of administration was a kind of hierarchy of human beings and correlatively of their cultures with the assumption that native people had an undeveloped mindset, that they were not skillful to hold leading positions. This is what is sometimes referred to as civilizational gap. For the word civilization, as Karen Attiah²² comments, "when used in discussions of economic or political development, civilization often serves as a code, implying that a nation's successes and failures can be attributed to immutable, essentialist characteristics of its people". In this respect, very few natives who were involved held very marginal and non-influential positions. As a matter of fact, they could not be initiated to higher responsibility; to accountability and to decisions making.

In return, as Ngongo²³ notes, association stands on the acknowledgment of the particularity or the originality of the indigenous people in their culture and their political organization, and the possibility for different racial, cultural and ethnical entities to coexist. From the administrative perspective, the theoretical framework that was more suitable for running such a complex social and political system was the indirect rule which was a system of

administration whereby the colonial master had to recruit sons of the soil, give them some training and appoint them at intermediary positions in the decisions making process of the colony. Although Yenshu Vubo²⁴ refers to these positions as subordinate clerical ones in the colonial administration, they were all the advantaged as compared to what was going on in the assimilation systems. From this perspective, for the colonial master to intervene in the territory, he had to go through her indigenous masters. This early initiation to decisions making purportedly was intended to prepare the native masters to autonomy. Presumably, as they better knew the problems of their fellows, they had to think twice before taking decisions for they were, so to speak, accountable to them. While the British colonial master opted for the indirect rule, the French purportedly chose the direct rule system to navigate through, therefore making the dislocation of its colonial empire a dubious project. Of course, one can rightly argue that assimilation and association were both long terms objectives and that the colonial power either direct or indirect was fundamentally centralized.²⁵ While we agreed with such an opinion, we are just wondering whether from the etymological perspective, assimilation and association are likely to breed consequences of the same nature. Suggestive evidence in this line can be got through the observation of the type of relation that links Britain to its former colonies as compared to that of France and the 'pré-carré' for example: Britain seems to intervene the lesser in their national affairs than France does in terms of frequency and magnitude.

During the 1950s, freedom aspirations emerged all the colonies through consequently to the American president Theodor Roosevelt's anti-colonialism policy. Or, on Ngongo's²⁶ own analysis specifically addressing the case of France, the rise of freedom feelings was consequent upon the African 'trailers' back to Africa after their participation to the liberation of France from the German's occupation. This author's view seems to suggest that African soldiers enjoyed freedom in France and wanted to perpetuate that feeling at home. Whatever be the case, De Gaulle realized that France could lose her colonies. In order to thwart such a situation, he convened the Brazzaville Conference. The Brazzaville Conference was an opportunity for all the French colonial governors to come together and exchange views with their prominent colonial master De Gaulle on the future of the colonies so as to frame the new French colonial policy. From the analysis of the agenda and the resolutions of the conference, nowhere was the independence of those territories conceivable. As a matter of fact, in his opening address, De Gaulle clearly stated that the main objective of the conference was to lay down new basis for the exercise of the French sovereignty with a view of assimilating or including them in the community to come. This is the gist of one of the conference's resolutions: the goals of the civilizing mission of France in the colonies do not fit with any idea of autonomy or any possibility of evolution out of the French union; the setting up of self-governments even in a remote future is inconceivable.²⁷ In other words, moving from the French colonial empire to the French union is an incremental evolution in this colonial master's philosophy and cannot inform on its willingness to lead the colonies to political and economic independence as initially recommended by the League of Nations and later on by the United Nations. The analysis of this resolution leads to the conclusion that, from the ontological standpoint, colonialism is a permanent enterprise that aims at exploiting the colonies. For, as one of the then French colonial party's leader insightfully put it: the only criterion that should guide the French civilizing mission is the utility of the colony in terms of availability of raw materials and natural resources. That is to say, comparing colonization with

western civilization expansion mission meaning that colonial masters were humanitarians is euphemistic because, from its germination to its realization, colonialism was an economically profit oriented project. That could mean the influential American anti colonialism policy, the rise of independent movements in the colonial territories, and the role of the United Nations as well incrementally subverted the French agenda. In Howard Becker's²⁸ words, one could say that these "moral entrepreneurs" pushed French colonial leaders back wall. As a consequence of their pressure, colonies were conceded fake independence. From that end, the euphoria of independence last for a very short time because, France retained militaries' bases and maintained political influence over its former colonies.

This is seemingly the context within which was elaborated the naughtiest policy that is referred to as *Françafrique*²⁹ which had been structuring the relations between France and its former colonies for decades. The word which is coined from the association of France and Africa reflects a kind of mafia policy of guaranteeing and protecting by all means³⁰ the French interests on the continent. In Verschave³¹ words, the *Françafrique* is just like an iceberg which is approximately 10% visible and 90% invisible. The visible part is the front door that depicts France, as a country of human rights and the best friend of Africa. The invisible part which is far the most important encompasses a set of mechanisms whose functions are maintaining French domination, with the complicity of African leaders. Diana Fong's³² understanding of the phenomenon seems more insightful. According to this *Deutsche Welle*'s editorialist, the policy called *Françafrique* means serving France's strategic and commercial interests by continuing to exercise post-colonial influence through African rulers. On that very issue, Antoine Glaser³³ said that "France's Africa policy is a huge battleship of bad habits that can be neither turned around nor torpedoed overnight". While we agree with most of these paintings, we can just notice that from the rational and substantive perspective, this policy simply suggests that France's leadership had proven faithful to its philosophical position of considering Africa as an item of property up to independences. Could it have been otherwise? The question is not nonsensical, for, while elaborating the '*Françafrique*' policy, the French leadership was already victim of 'myside bias' in Mercier³⁴ terms. As this author goes on to explain, that is what psychologists often call confirmation bias which is the fact that people mostly reason to find arguments that whatever they were already thinking is a good idea. That is to say, enfranchising African colonies was neither deliberate nor sincere. Instead, it was just ceremonial. Are there new factors that might have shifted this stand point later?

Post-colonial evidence of France's anti democracy influence in Central Africa

Addressing the post-colonial era as a criterion of evidence identification, it is very tempting to distinguish the monolithic period from the post liberalization one. For, the *modus operandi* is a bit different from one period to another. While 'coup-d'Etats' and the assassination of nationalists could be considered as the most influential actions of France's mafia during the one party politics, political liberalization involved changing methods.

The 'Coup-d'Etats' and assassinations of nationalist leaders during the monolithic period

Doing politics evolves with time and environment. The one party politics which is referred to as monolithic period was characterized by darkness and African governments mostly deserved the David

Easton's³⁵ formula of "political black box". That is to say, from communicational perspective, apart from the foreign media and newspapers (provided they were 'governmentally correct'), citizens almost had no alternative than doing with the official information channels. Governance and human rights activists known as nongovernmental organizations, and civil societies organizations were very few and their actions merely ineffective because of poor networking and difficulties in communication. National political atmospheres were made of suspicion. This is the period during which the ordinance on subversion³⁶ and other liberticidal laws were being adopted and enforced in Cameroon. Similar legal provisions existed in other central African countries because of the cultural interpenetration of the political systems of the sub region and of course, the mutual influence of their leaders.

Environments of this nature are more suitable for the mafia. This is probably the reason why most of the asymmetrical 'cooperation' conventions date as far back as to the immediate post-independence period and concern security and natural resources, two interacting sectors. Under the terms of most of those treaties, the then central African governments knowingly or unknowingly were selling off their respective states' sovereignty very cheaply. But, could they do otherwise? The question deserves attention because in countries where the leadership was a bit patriotic the push was neither just a threat nor a jog. Evidence in this line can be provided by Chad and the Central African Republic, both countries where political instability had been present since independence. In addition, no opposition was tolerated. Those who tried to oppose the '*Françafrique*' policy were persecuted. This statement is consistent with Karen Attiah³⁷ contention when she is quick to remark that while France has spent money and effort to militarize its engagement with the continent, it has woefully under-invested in supporting democracy and good governance and has a long history of supporting dictators. This, as she goes on to emphasize might help to explain why so many former French colonies are wrecked by civil unrest and governance vacuums. In Cameroon, the nationalistic leaders and their adepts heavily pay their opposition to Amadou Ahidjo's regime. In this country for example, the France's inhuman crackdown on patriotic activities was intended to quash similar activities elsewhere in the country or in the sub-region: the secretary general of the UPC party was assassinated in late 1958, its president was poisoned on the 13 October 1960 in Geneva by a French agent, and thousands of people were killed in the Bassa and Bamiléké regions of the country for sharing patriotic ideology. In other words, France's 'attitude could be summed up as follows: 'you have limited access to independence and freedoms'. Or, 'feel free but do not nose about what we are doing'. This is probably the reason why in Doumergue's³⁸ findings, the '*Françafrique*' was experienced in Cameroon and then expanded in other African countries. In such an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and corruption, nothing could stop the former but permanent colonial master from obtaining everything it wanted. The possibilities range from imposing French made products for consumption to holding in the majority the chares of public corporations, public contracts not left out.

In this vein, it is bite knowledge that out of France, French made cars are not very competitive on the market. For one shall hardly find them in North America or elsewhere in Europe. But, for decades they had been imposed to most African states as vehicles for public workers. This aspect is a transnational phenomenon that can be tested not exclusively in the sub-regional countries but also in other former French colonies elsewhere in Africa. Even though we are witnessing the first signs of diversification with the arrival of China; to date,

Cameroon government, for example, mostly provides her civil servants with Citroen, Renault and Peugeot. By the way, Peugeot's advert used to be "Peugeot, la voiture de l'Afrique". For example, in 2001 when Cameroon hosted the France-Afrique summit in Yaoundé, Peugeot was the official car of the ceremony. So, the Cameroon government had to buy dozens of Peugeot for the transportation of participants' delegations.³⁹ By the same token, Total and Razel, two French famous companies have branches in almost all sub-regional countries. During the 1980s, when many African countries were going through the Bretton Woods institutions adjustment programs, France seized the opportunity and bought many public corporations. In Cameroon for example, out of the 23 public corporations that had been privatized, 13 of them were held by French groups.⁴⁰ It is certainly possible to find similar data in other sub regional countries. The Gabonese case for example is more illustrative of the general situation. French business men⁴¹ and companies overwhelmingly dominate all the economic sectors. In fact, France accounts for 80% of foreign investments in the country.⁴²

These data confirm our contention that no major change can happen in the sub regional political realm without France consent. For example, in 1990 Idriss Deby's success in overthrowing Hissen Habré's regime was blessed by Jacques Chirac. So, could the fallen president Habré take all his time to leave N'Djamena taking with him huge amount of money? It even seems that Idriss Deby was advised against moving to the capital until Habré had left. Upon France's request, the Cameroon government was supposed to welcome the outgoing president. Yaoundé pretended then that it was for humanitarian considerations. In an environment of this nature, no grassroots or bottom-up change (be it democratic or military) can arise unless the watchdog has given its clearance. Arguments like this are likely to provide a key of understanding of the sub regional's opposition leaders' effort to primordially find support among the French political elites. Such an attitude is transnational and can be observed in Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Congo, and the Central African Republic.

Legitimizing authoritarian governments in the post liberalization period

Consequential to the prodigious development of information and communication technology, to the connection between the national and the international political orders, to the earlier mentioned desire of some Western countries to make democracy a worldwide and shared value, and of course the pressure of the national political actors and other national resources, the 1990s witnessed the expansion of the third wave of democratization in many Sub-Sahara African countries. Even the French political leaders pleaded for more openness of the African governments, for liberalization. During the France-Africa summit held in La Baule on the 19th and 20th June 1990, French President, François MITTERRAND, stated in substance that his government was willing to support African countries that would engage in democratization by providing them more financial aid. And his foreign affairs minister Roland Dumas went on to comment: the wind of freedoms coming from East, sooner or later inevitably will blow towards the South.⁴³ Reacting then to this statement in a circumstantial interview granted to Radio France International, President Biya of Cameroon declared that 'le Cameroun est le meilleur élève de la démocratie'; implying that his country had already engaged in the process of liberalization.⁴⁴ Since liberalizing can be referred to as a process whereby political rights are being extended

to many people so as to involve them in public affairs management, one might have expected the end of *françafrique* as from the 1990s. But, as we stated earlier, it is just like a mafia which is a many faces phenomenon. Instead of disappearing, it has mutated; wearing new clothes and changing its *modus operandi*.

Analytically, one can say that France which, from the ideological stand point is a consolidated democracy; with human rights concern; and a law-abiding country did not just want to openly oppose the new wave of democratization. It would have been detrimental for its image to show the entire world that in France's vision, interests prevail against democracy. Among other arguments in support of such a statement, we realize that democratizing factors pressuring for more openness of the African regimes were as diverse as international; national; and more importantly technological. This is because outstanding technological breakthroughs have made the world "global village", in McLuhan's⁴⁵ words. Since democracy was then the only song on the air, a meager open obstruction to its 'expansion' would have been transmitted by mainstream Medias. This is a kind of remake of history, for the context is similar to that of the 1960s. Just like France granted independence without neither conviction nor altruism to its former colonies, it had to concede them liberalization and fake democratization. But this did not completely go without resistance. For example, the French former President Jacques Chirac purportedly considered democracy as a senseless and irrational option for African countries. That is to say, most of the democracy praise singers and development promoters, particularly among the French political elite have whimsical attitude. Their sincerity is very equivocal. Therefore, apart from the monetary mechanisms of exploitation through the CFA francs that had not yet changed, the new strategy of maintaining the status quo consists of supporting 'African friends'. We refer to this general category as African leaders who all in all are faithful to France, that is, whose loyalty is not questionable in terms of promoting, guaranteeing, defending, and protecting French interests in their home countries and who may be facing any kind of insurgency or worse, an electoral challenge. It may be surprising to envisage that a leader promotes, guarantees, and protects interests of a different country. But, this is not just a theoretical hypothesis. For example, certain social media users have witnessed the cases of some central Africa leaders, notably Ali Bongo of Gabon and Sassou Nguesso of Congo Brazzaville swearing during a mystical ceremony to protect French interests in their respective countries as element of their initiation to the French Mason lodge. Apart from them, some other leaders of central Africa can be part of this category. Presidents Ali Bongo and Sassou Nguesso's almost public commitment to protect French interests in their home countries may inform on the meaningfulness of the pressure that they are subject to. Surprisingly, have both recently gone through a very stormy electoral process and succeeded with the help of friends in France to hang on power.

Just like the relations between husband and wife are never one-dimensional, so do the interactions between France's African friends and their patron go through stormy periods from time to time? But as the saying goes, 'a friend in need is a friend indeed'. In international politics, friendship may be controversial concept. Because from the realistic perspective, there is no friendship among nations, only interests prevail and frame relationships among them. But interests can bring about a contextual friendship. This can be the case when interests do already exist and it happens that leaders in charge of their protection are in trouble and need some help that can be political and symbolic, military or both. Influencing national political processes of

weaker states is quite a common game of super powers. As Dankwart Rustow⁴⁶ notes with lot of relevance, this kind of influence is always present during political transitions. Apart from the Central African Republic which for reasons that are far beyond the ambit of this article did not have real concern with the Huntington's third wave, and which paradoxically has the regional highest alternation rate to supreme power, the other former French colonies have been organizing tropical and rigged elections all trough.

After the October 1992 most contested presidential election that the opposition candidate Ni John FRU NDI allegedly won, President François Mitterrand of France was the first western leader to authenticate Mr. BIYA's questionable victory. For, early on March of the same year, his party witnessed the opposition victory during the legislative elections. Since then, still with the blessing of different French governments, "he has proved adept at the day-to-day mechanics of holding on to power".⁴⁷ Andreas MEHLER provides a very insightful description of the variety of additional and multiform help of the French government to the regime of Yaoundé. The French help is primordially aimed at maintaining Cameroon under its influence zone. The Anglophone opposition candidate's victory was perceived as tantamount to reversing roles between France and England in the country. For since World War I, after Germany had been defeated, France was attributed the larger part of the territory as compared to that of Britain for administration purpose. Since then, France implicitly had interpreted this historical and contextual fact as a kind of division of power meaning that French speaking Cameroon will permanently play major and dominant roles as compared to the English speaking part. This perception provides an historical key of understanding one aspect of the many of the Anglophone problem that had been poisoning political life in Cameroon and giving nightmare to its leaders all through.

In 1997, France played a major role in Denis SASSOU NGUESSO's return to power in Congo Brazzaville. After the national and sovereign conference that processed transition in some African countries, his regime could not resist the wind of change that had swept over most monolithic regimes in Sub-Sahara Africa in the early 1990s. Within this context, Pascal Lissouba took over from Denis Sassou Nguesso for a short while. For, allegedly accused of turning off France and favoring American Oil companies, the newly elected president Lissouba quickly faced a rebellion led by Sassou Nguesso who, with an open support of France finally booted out of power the democratically chosen president. This was another repetition of history, for it was the second time that Mr. Sassou Nguesso was making history that way. Early in the 1970s, his country became a Marxist one-party state. But in 1977, "as the oil industry rapidly expanded, and amidst a climate of Cold War politics, the country's leftist President was assassinated under mysterious circumstances eventually leading to a takeover by a military officer, Mr. Sassou Nguesso". As this newspaper goes on to remark, Mr. Sassou Nguesso then "handed over the oil industry lock, stock and barrel to a French Conglomerate, enriching himself and his colleagues". It is worth remembering that either in 1977 or in 1997, French interests on oil guided Mr. Sassou Nguesso's actions. And since 1997, as his counterparts in the sub region, he is being re-elected in a vote that critics describe as rigged.

The French political elite are so concerned about their friends that at time they will suggest solutions even to potential or latent problems. This is a lesson that one can draw from President Idriss Déby interview to TV5 channel when he reveals that former French

president Jacques Chirac is the one who suggested him the idea and the content of the modification of the constitution to drag on power. As President Déby goes on to reveal, his patron sent him one famous French constitutional law scholar for the job. This is why, among other things, even loathed by human rights groups, he has nonetheless been an effective friend of the United States and France, its former colonial ruler, not just because of the Islamic militancy in the region that Chadian army is tracking, but more so because of their interests. As long as Mr. Déby will keep on playing the song of stability and mainly entertaining his friendly relations with the United States and France, he may show no signs of stepping down and nothing will happen to his regime. This statement is consistent with Tubiana and Debos' research when they note that both France and the United States are suspected of encouraging Déby to remain in power whatever the real results of the vote. From time to time and here and there, a civil society organization or a newspaper can have a real go at him and his regime, just like The New York Times noted in 2015 that Chadian police officers had beaten student demonstrators and that Chadian soldiers were accused of serious human rights abuses during their intervention in the Central-African Republic in 2014. But such actions are just epiphenomenon that generates side-effect or peripheral influence on the political system. At time foreign interests and the political system are so interconnected and overlapping that even the vote of the electors may prove less challenging.

Reasonably Gabon, if it were well led, would have been Central Africa's little miracle nation. That is to say, it would have been as developed as Mauritius. Unfortunately, with less than 2 million inhabitants and a wide range of enormous natural resources, this country's development is taking a long time to come. Evidence in this line can be drawn just from one sector of the many, that of roads: almost sixty years after its independence, the country counts 1055 kilometers of tared roads. This is likely due to the tight connection of the Bongos and French prominent political and economic leaders that just became obvious with the help of liberalization. French political actors, both from the right and left ideological spectrum have maneuvered with the purpose of influencing the elections results, namely the presidential elections. This is because in the tropical hyper presidential regime of central African States, the president of the Republic is the dominant figure in the institutional frame. It is worth remembering that most of these Constitutions are purportedly designed by French scholars and lawyers. Historically, France had been standing by the Bongo's family through the *françafrique*. During the 2009 presidential election for example, French President Nicolas Sarkozy earlier declared that his country had preference for no particular candidate. In fact, his statement was consistent with that of the secretary of state of the French government in charge of cooperation Alain Joyandet who also proclaimed France's neutrality and pretended that his country just wanted to make sure that everything was running smoothly. But as immediately as they realized that the results favorable to Ali Bongo were subject to controversy, on the 7th of September 2009, President Sarkozy congratulated Ali Bongo, wishing him success during his term in power. So could President Ali Bongo feel legitimate? This is because, in international politics, congratulations aftermath, notably those from consolidated democracies are equivalent to democratic certification of the process that led to the victory. However, from the realistic perspective, France's influence on the Gabonese electoral process is a helpful hand to a friend in need: the Bongos are shareholder in the French company TOTAL and Pascaline Bongo is the general manager of TOTAL Gabon. The 2016 presidential election held in a

bit different context. Ali Bongo, like many other African leaders, had a vague desire of turning to Asia and Jean Pin has become his main challenger. All the agitations and dirty tricks campaign purportedly orchestrated by the French political elite and some newspapers to disqualify Ali Bongo proved to be fruitless. Because, even though for now it remains to be proved, 'closed doors politics' took place. We ignore the content of such a deal. All what is known is that most of the Ali Bongo's critics kicked out against their initial allegations, and Ali Bongo won another françafrique term.

Conclusion

So many convergent French political and economic elites' attitudes and actions, and many policies suggest that France's commitment to promote development and democracy historically has been dubious. It would be very naïve to think that France has a philanthropic program for her African influence zone. This is because realism is the only principle that frames and guides relationship between the former and permanent colonial power and its former and perpetual colonies. Its survival relies on the upholding of the asymmetrical situation. France has had all through history a wide range of interests in central African countries that its withdrawal would undoubtedly be detrimental to its economy and consequently to its people. So, if central African countries really want to be emerging by the 2030s, as it seems to be the only song in the air now, they have to improve their governance. In addition, political elite should appropriate the many beneficial properties of democracy in terms of accountability and alternation to power, because France will find it very difficult, harmful and irrational to sacrifice her interests for their political and economic development.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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