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**DOCTORAL THESIS**  
**FROM FRANÇA-FRIQUE TO AFRIQUE-FRANCE.**  
**FRENCH-AFRICAN RELATIONS AFTER 1990**  
**A Study Case on Ivory Coast, Gabon, Benin**

*-Summary-*

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**Key-words :** *Françafrique*, *Afrique-France*, Theory of International Regimes, Network Analysis, French-African Relations

## Summary

The doctoral thesis “From *Françafrique* to *Afrique-France*. *French-African Relations after 1990. Case Studies: Ivory Coast, Gabon, Benin*” is a research project meant to analyze and assess the evolution of the French-African relations from the last three decades, expressed through what we have defined as the change from *Françafrique* to *Afrique-France*. The main objective is to comprehensively explain this transforming process through the lens of the Theory of International Regimes and the Network Analysis.

The thesis is the result of a doctoral study program, but the interests for the topic resides back to other researches such as the bachelor degree. Nevertheless, the thesis cannot be perceived as an exhaustive academic research but rather as a starting point for deeper and broader scientific research focused on the study and analysis of the applicability of the theories of international relations especially on the political phenomena that occurred on the African continent. Lastly, the thesis is an important step in approaching new insights and theories that originate from other disciplines such as sociology and applying them in the study of political and historical evolutions.

Setting as reference point the year of 1990, seen as a turning point generally in the evolution of international relations (redesigning and redefining the international system), the thesis mainly focuses on the impact of these transformations on France’s relations with its former African colonies.

In this demarche, from a historical point of view, the thesis works with a two-folded temporal axis of the French-African relations: before and after 1990. To better approach this transformation process in all its dimensions, the thesis has been split into four chapters, each of them trying to better explain and assess the main purpose of the research paper.

Considering the complexity, uniqueness and, most of all, the intensity of the French-African relations in their most prolific time (during the colonialism era) as well as in the aftermath of it, the paper operates with an extended theoretical and methodological framework in order to facilitate the understanding of the transformations that took place as well as to have a deeper analysis of the phenomenon.

From this perspective, the main purpose of the thesis is that of reflecting, as clear as possible, the change that occurred in the French-African relations after 1990, with a special emphasis on

the cases of Ivory Coast, Gabon and Benin. In highlighting these changes, the thesis calls upon the theory of international regimes and network analysis.

At the same time, an important bet of the research paper is to elaborate a complex analysis grid so as to show this deep transformation and to have also the capacity to highlight the concrete areas in which this change produced, by formulating hypotheses are then tested throughout the paper as well as by defining four transversal criteria.

Having as starting point the well-known historical reality and also the traditional way of both the French and the African leaders used to relate to one another, the thesis analyses thoroughly the concept of *Françafrique*<sup>1</sup> seen as an essential element in defining the French-African relations before 1990.

For the second part of our temporal axis (after 1990), the key-term to present the new situations is that of *Afrique-France*.<sup>2</sup> The major transformation that occurred after 1990 and claimed to redefine the French-African relations took the shape of a reversal of the power in which the African leaders won their grip on the other side. Specifically, they start not only to deliberately condition France's access to their resources but to use their own raw materials in exchange for gaining new advantages and pursuing their objectives not just in relation with France but also at global level.

On one hand, this change is the result of the geopolitical transformations that took place globally after 1900. On the other hand, it is the result of some internal evolutions and changes, whether we see the formation of an authentic African civil society, or the emergence of new leaders that fiercely support the complete detachment from the colonial past and from the former French-African practices.

The purpose of this paper has been achieved by using a complex and innovative theoretical framework as well as a targeted methodology that enabled a more profound analysis of the phenomenon in all its dimensions. Specifically, the Theory of International Regimes and the Network Analysis are the two theoretical instruments that have been used as a framework of analysis for the two main concepts: *Françafrique* and *Afrique- France*. The uniqueness and complexity of the French-African relations required a particular attention in choosing the proper

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<sup>1</sup> Term coined by the first president of the Ivory Coast, Félix Houphouët-Boigny to illustrate the high degree of intensity and complexity of the French-African relations. Later on, it has been often used in a pejorative sense (starting with François-Xavier Verschave) to underline the corruption of the French-African relations.

<sup>2</sup> Term proposed by Antoine Glaser to describe the new way of interaction inside the French-African network, within which the African leaders started to gain a more prominent role.

theory of international relations for the following reasons: we looked for the theory that is the best suitable in capturing the nature and evolution of these relations and also to bring a new perspective on the phenomenon, by using new approaches that emerged within the discipline.

From this perspective, the thesis operates with the definition of International Regimes proposed by Stephen Krasner, considered to be the most influential in the field, a real reconciliation of the two concurrent visions from the classical theories of international relations (realism and liberalism).

Beyond that, in order to increase the complexity of the theoretical framework, the second component of the theoretical dimension originates from sociology: The Network Analysis. It has been chosen not only because for the deeper understanding it brings to the phenomenon but also because for the new keys of interpretation it offers, derived from sociology. Moreover, this dual theoretical framework can be seen as an advocacy to extend the possibilities of analysis of the historical and political phenomena through the application of the theories of international relations.

Taking into consideration the main purpose of the thesis, it is clear that such a complex bet requires also an adequate methodological framework that can reflect the applicability of the theories used and also allows testing the thesis' hypotheses. Therefore, we used the study case method, which we considered to be the most complex and deep of the methods that did not imply a direct evaluation of the situation on the field.

Since the paper assumes a dominant theoretical character trying to offer new theoretical insights on the political evolutions that take place in a geographical space often neglected from the main researches in the field, we fully believed that the case study can ensure properly the connection between the theoretical and the empirical part. This is why the case study remains the core of the methodology, complemented by text and documents analysis as well as the process-tracing method.

At the same time, the existence of many documentaries which comprise interviews of former and current French and African leaders exactly on this subject, facilitated our access to many information that proved to be of most use for the purpose of this paper.

Taking into consideration all these elements, it becomes even more clear that due to the pure theoretical and analytical nature of the thesis, the case study is the best option in terms of methodological aspects. It has the merit to perfectly harness the concepts and to facilitate the connection between the theoretical premises and the empirical elements.

Moreover, we drafted an analysis grid so as to have a clearer and objective assessment of the evolution and transformation of the French-African relations. Starting with the research questions, we have built the central hypothesis and the secondary hypotheses, we defined the specific objectives and lastly, we have established four cross-cutting criteria so as to better define the framework in which the French-African relations developed.

Considering all these elements, as well as the new realities after 1990 and the new way of interaction we have seen lately, we tried, on the one hand, to identify the best way to explain clearly and briefly what this change actually meant (by testing the hypotheses) and after that to shortly but deeply analyze the main dimensions of this change, the areas in which it became visible.

The analysis grid proved to be very useful in connecting the theoretical and empirical dimensions and in validating the central hypothesis of the thesis. The secondary hypotheses and the cross-cutting criteria had an essential role in settling the means of interaction between France and the three case studies: Ivory Coast, Gabon and Benin both before and after 1990.

Having as starting point all these aspects, we noticed that this shorting and reversal of the French-African relations has been a fundamental element in rethinking France's policy towards Africa and has been also essential for the evolution of the African states especially after 1990. Without being a fully external phenomenon and even less under the unilateral coordination of France, the remapping of the French-African relations as *Afrique-France* is immensely relevant in highlighting the evolution of the African states from multiple perspectives. First of all, as we have seen in all the three case studies, the change is rather the result of an intrinsic process that these states have known.

Secondly, we have seen that this change cannot be solely awarded to the international context after 1990. The change has been also guided by the will of African leaders to make that change, by the disappearance of the classical figures of the French-African network, by the emergence of a new African elite (that at least the discourse level plead for a detachment from the former colonial power) and by the new French political rulers (Hollande, Macron). Besides not having a long and strong history of personal relations with the African leaders, they are fully aware of the depth of the globalization process as well as of the new characteristics of the current international system and completely understand the need of reform towards Africa and the archaic character of the old neocolonial policies of the past.

It is becoming even more clear that France itself has seen its role undermined and assisted to a reversal of forces. This time, the role in coordinating the French-African relations has been taken over by the African leaders for which the dialogue with France remains a matter of external policy and has now a strong transactional dimension.

Whereas in the past Africa ensured the necessary fuel to ensure the proper functioning of the so-called machine of *Françafrique*, while France was the driver and guided it, after 1990 and especially nowadays, we can easily notice that the reality is completely different. Africa is still an important source of “fuel”, of raw materials for France, but it is not showing willingness anymore in sharing them with France. The opening of the African markets for other trade routes and commercial actors as China or USA proves the limits of the current France influence in its former African colonies.

The African leaders have become more and more aware of the importance of their own resources and engaged themselves in a process of diversification of their trade routes and in pursuing a more ambitious external policy generally, within which the connection with France it is just a small part of the external political-diplomatic dialogue.

Moreover, the French model, in all its dimensions- political, economic, social, military, cultural- is no longer attractive for the African societies. The African leaders start to portray themselves as important actors at regional level (Alassane Ouattara, the president of the Ivory Coast has become the president of ECOWAS for one term), the monetary system imposed by France after the end of the decolonization process is being constantly contested, the president of Benin, Patrice Talon becoming one of the promoters of the new coin, ECO to replace the current CFA. As well, from a cultural perspective, the American model proves to be more attractive, the current president of Gabon, Ali Bongo seeking to ensure a strong, long-lasting partnership with the USA including on this dimension.

It is becoming clearer that the relationship with France knows a different dynamic even though it is still present on the agenda of the new African leaders. This is an out of the ordinary thing if we compare it to the French-African relations during the colonial period (which have been the expression of a unique colonial system, centered on a civilizing and assimilation policy deliberately assumed by France during that time).

Therefore, the new relation of France with Africa still expresses the nostalgia of the past, but bears within itself new dimensions and possibilities of development, especially for the countries that once did not succeed in their search and promotion of their own values, traditions or way

of living. This *France-Afrique* can be the expression of a new beginning solely if France, at its turn, decides to willingly end the old practices and if the African states themselves have the desire to learn from the past and are not simply trying to completely erase it from the collective memory as well as from their history.

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