THEORETICAL APPROACHES ON *FRANÇAFRIQUE* THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL REGIMES

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Abstract

The French-African relations have always been considered a special and yet genuine case of international relations due to their history, intensity and particular way of cooperation even after decolonization. This is why this subject remains of keen interest for the scholars in the International Relations Theories.

In this context, the article aims to apply the framework of IR theory on Françafrique relations so as to identify the fundaments as well as the functioning system of this unique form of cooperation. Having as a starting point the conceptualization of the notions that are going to be dealt with in the article, the paper will then look upon defining the main premises of regime theory and their relevance in the study of French-Ivorian relations. Thus, the main purpose of the paper is that of bringing new theoretical perspectives and insights derived from IR Theory's lens to the African studies.

Keywords: Françafrique, Regime Theory, French-African relations, International Relations theory

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Introduction

The African continent has been almost neglected for decades as a favourite or often used study case while testing the theories of international relations by the specialised scholars. Even more, if we take into consideration particular situations like the relations between France and its former colonies, the literature in the field is also lacking many of the studies and articles related to this matter of utmost importance.

In this particular framework, the concept of *Françafrique* illustrates a form of interaction and a symbiosis different from all the other forms of colonialism implemented by the former European colonialist states. *Françafrique* is relevant and very interesting from a theoretical point of view as it can be defined, understood and reinterpreted through IR Theories' lens and as it embraces new forms and manifestation and intensity if we take into consideration the different and numerous former French colonies from Western Africa.

Even if in the decades of history of relations between the former African colonies and the French Republic revealed new ways of cooperation and perception from the both sides on each other, emerging new concepts such as *Afrique-France,* for the purpose of this paper we will only consider the *Françafrique* concept.

The first part of the paper will mainly focus on defining the concept and setting up the framework in which it will be used for the analysis. The second part will merely describe the premises of International Regimes Theory and will highlight the landmarks of Stephen Krasner's theory on the matter. The last part of the paper will primarily concentrate on testing Krasner's definition of international regimes on French-African Relations.

Definitions

The concept of *Françafrique* has its own long-decades history as well as its uniqueness in the field. No other former great European power which had colonies in Africa has then defined its relations with its subordinates in

the way France did, nor has it known such a level of intensity in interactions.

The case of French- African relations is indeed unique and special. Moreover, it has been and still is an ongoing process of cooperation and adaptation that reaches new dimensions constantly and permanently. *Françafrique* itself emerged from the need of highlighting these particular French-African relations and is enshrined in decades of history of interactions between the former colonies and the former patron-state.

This is why, the concept bears two primary connotations, a positive one during the period of colonialism and a rather critique one, after the decolonization process. Both of them are relevant and defining for the period of time in which they emerged.

At first, in its initial form and interpretation, the concept was an African emulation and not an imposed term by the French Republic. It was first coined by Ivory Coast's first president, Félix Boigny in 1955" to encapsulate the close and amicable ties between his own country and the former colonial power, France, referring to the specificity in which the Franco-African relationship have proliferated" [1].

From this perspective, a positive connotation was granted to the term as it was meant to grasp the intensity and uniqueness of French-African relations. Considering this, Boigny's term was meant to define, in a positive way the partnership set up with France as a way to pursue Ivory Coast's own prosperity and economic development.

On the other hand, from the French point of view, the meaning of *Françafrique* also beared a positive connotation but with a special emphasis put on France's supremacy on the African colonies. This vision was portrayed by the doctrine of Jacques Foccart, the so-called "lord of Africa"

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[1] Maja Bovcon, "Françafrique and Regime Theory" in *European Journal of International Relations*, no. 1(19), 2013, pp. 5-26.

and can be summarized in the following way: "What is good for France is good as well for Africa"[2].

This positive meaning of the term prevailed even after the end of the decolonization process. A change occurred although starting with the 1990's when the new political, economic and institutional arrangements showed and brought a different perception of the concept.

In this context, the term received a negative connotation, especially after the publishing of François-Xavier Verschave's well-known book, "*La Françafrique, le plus long scandale de la République*".

In his work, Verschave claimed that *Françafrique* was, nevertheless a network of corruption between the French leaders and the African authoritarian leaders, meant to impose still France's rule on the former French colonies, and to exploit their resources. He defined the concept as "the secret criminality in the upper echelons of French politics and economy, where a kind of underground Republic is hidden from view" [3].

This pejorative definition of *Françafrique* was mainly used during the last years as has been seen that France helped in the survival of some authoritarian regimes in the former African colonies. This is why, the negative connotation is merely used even today in the main studies related to this subject.

Having defined these two perspectives, it is definitely clear that French-African relations have known a distinct path of intensity than other forms of colonialism. The concept of *Françafrique* is a vivid example of a particular form of cooperation and interaction that no other parent-state used in relation with its former African colonies neither in the colonialism period nor in the decades after the end of the decolonization process.

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[2] Antoine Glaser, *AfricaFrance. Quand les dirigeants africains deviennent les maîtres du jeu*, Paris: Pluriel, 2017, p. 11.

[3] François-Xavier Verschave, *La Françafrique, le plus long scandale de la République*, Paris: Stock, 2003.

International Regimes Theory

International Regimes Theory emerged from different approaches in the Theories of International Relations starting with realism, liberalism as well as the cognitive theories. Considering that the arguments and premises of the so-called theories of high-politics are insufficient to explain the realities and changes happening in the international arena (being preoccupied exclusively if the strategic dilemmas as well as of the armed conflicts), the Theory of International Regimes focused mainly on the causes and structural features of the international system [4].

Therefore, the Theory of International Regimes aimed to overcome and address the shortcomings of the main theories of international relations by "defining a central objective, which is neither as broad as the concept of international structure nor as narrow as the study of the formal organizations"[5]. The main merit of the theory is that it starts with the main concepts of the "classic" theories of international relations but it extends the framework of analysis to complement it with new concepts and fields of analysis that allow an in-depth study of the subjects.

Therefore, there are multiple schools of thought in studying international regimes: "realists that focus on the relations of power, the neo-liberals that focus their analysis on the constellation of interest and the cognitivists which emphasize the matter of knowledge dynamic, the communication and the identities " [6].

The Theory of International Regimes is not a state-centric theory, considering a distribution of power among different types of actors as: international organizations, multinational companies and other agent-actors, without focusing exclusively on the role of states in international

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[4] Stephan Haggard and Simmons A. Beth, "Theories of International Regimes" in *International Organization*, no. 3(41), 1987, pp. 491-517.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 492.

[6] Andreas Hasenclever, Peter Mayer and Volker Rittberger, *Theories of International Regimes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

relations. It therefore pays attention to both the state-actors (as in realism) but extending the field of analysis to other categories of actors.

From a realist perspective, the approach of Kenneth Waltz is of particular importance. In his vision, in an anarchic system in which the main actors are the states acting in their own selfish interest, they can be constrained just by their own interaction with other states [7]. So, for Waltz "regimes are just small pieces deriving from the power capabilities that support them, that are their very basis" [8].

On the other hand, a liberal approach is offered by Keohane and Nye which define international regimes as "sets of governing arrangements" that include "networks of rules, norms and procedures that regularize behavior and   control its effects" [9].

In this way, international regimes are directly linked with the institution, which are essential elements in the international relations showing the will to cooperate, contrary to the arguments of the realists on this matter. At the same time, they emphasize the role of norms and procedures in the international arena, which can regulate and structure the behavior of states and other actors.

Moreover, Ernst Haas shows that "regime encompasses a mutually coherent set of procedures, rules, and norms" [10]. He, therefore, focuses as well on the role of norms in defining an international regime. Moreover, he considers the international regime "are arrangements created by the people (social institutions) to manage conflicts in a framework of interdependence as a part of the system, a part of the whole"[11].

Another important author of IR Theory, Hedley Bull appreciates that institutions help to secure adherence to rules by formulating,

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[7] Stephen D. Krasner (ed.), *International Regimes*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983.

[8] *Ibidem.*

[9] Andreas Hasenclever, Peter Mayer and Volker Rittberger, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[10] Stephen Krasner, *op. cit.*, 1983, p.2.

[11] *Ibidem,* pp.26-27.

communicating, administering, enforcing, interpreting, legitimating, and adapting them [12].

At the same time, Bull pays attention to the concept of international order and emphasizes the importance of institutions in the international scene bringing a significant contribution in advancing the international regimes theory.

Stephen Krasner is the author which offered a consensus definition in IR Theory in an article published in 1983. He and other theoreticians advanced the most influential definition of international regimes which became a reference point in the IR Theories 'field: "Regimes can be defined as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations"[13].

The definition offered by Krasner can be therefore seen as an effort of reconciliation between realist and liberal theories and a balanced approach/ middle-way solution, granting a main role to norms and principles without neglecting the need of an international order within the international system. The main elements identified by Stephen Krasner as defining for an international regime are explicated as follows: "The principles are beliefs of facts, causation and rectitude. Norms are standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations. Rules are specific prescriptions or proscriptions for action. Decision-making procedures are prevailing practices for making and implementing collective choice"[14].

In this framework it is definitely clear that norms and principles are *a sine qua non* condition in the establishment of an international regimes. These elements are in fact the features and specific conditions of setting up this kind of arrangement in the international arena.

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[12] *Ibidem*, p. 3.

[13] Stephen Krasner, "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables" in *International Organization*, no. 36(2),1982, p. 186.

[14] *Ibidem*.

Therefore, regimes can be created in times of fundamental discontinuity in the international system (like the end of major wars, such as World War II) by powerful states that want to enhance their interests.

What Krasner suggests is that international regimes are willingly and intentionally created structures of order in international arena. They emerge from the needs of powerful states which usually establish different kind of arrangements in order to properly reach their objects and follow their national interests.

Even though Krasner's definition of international regimes has reached a consensus among the scholars and theoreticians of international relations, it has also raised some critiques. The main discontents came from all the major theories of international relations, the premises and core-principles of Krasner's definition being contest through arguments of the other theories in the field.

The realists have mainly claimed the ambiguity and imprecision of the concept, considering that it doesn't have the same meaning within the discipline, as Susan Strange argued in 1983[15].

Oran Young continues the line of critiques against the Regime Theory both due to the ambiguous/imprecise character of the concept and referring also to some specific issues as: the elements lined up in the definition are concepts that are hard to differentiate and in this case the theory doesn't have enough conceptual consistency and fails in the attempt to connect the main concepts with a broader system of ideas or to another theory [16].

John Mearsheimer has also criticized the Theory of International Regimes bringing in attention the problem of the so-called false promise of international institutions considering that "the international system

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[15] Hasenclever, Mayer and Rittberger, *op. cit.*, p.8.
[16] *Ibidem*, pp. 11-12.

strongly shapes the behavior of states, limiting the amount of damage that the false faith in institutional theories can cause"[17].

Considering all these elements, we are going to use the definition offered by Stephen Krasner to further define the French-African relations. The last part of the paper will therefore focus on analyzing the *Françafrique* as a potential International Regime with a special emphasis on the French-Ivorian relations.

Françafrique as a regime of France

The particularity of the French-African relations evoked by the concept of *Françafrique* has many of the features of an international regime. It was built by France as a system in which the former patron-state held the necessary instruments to fulfill its objectives in all the areas of interest.

As we have seen that International Regimes appear in time of discontinuity of the international system, it is clear that the decolonization process marked a significant change in the usual way of French- African interactions. In this specific context, France has developed new ways of cooperation with the former colonies which embraced the form of an international regime.

From a general perspective, "France's foreign policy is characterized by exclusivity, stability and continuity". [18]Considering these premises, its policy towards Africa was founded on these elements of paramount importance for the French Republic.

Paying a particular attention to maintaining its status of great power in the aftermath of the Second World War, France seized an opportunity in the otherwise inevitable decolonization process, to preserve its own interest in the former African colonies. "De Gaulle's personal conception of *France-Afrique* was translated into his project of a

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[17] John Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions" in *International Security*, no. 3(19), 1995, p. 49.

[18] Guy Martin, "Continuity and Change in Franco-African Relations" in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, no. 1(33), 1995, p. 5 .

Communauté franco-africaine granting autonomy and internal self-government to African colonies, while France would retain control over such essential matters as defence and foreign affairs as well as economic, monetary and strategic-minerals policy".[19]

In this way, France assured a strong link with its former colonies and a privileged position which guided permanently their development and evolution The French- African relations continued to have a special form of interaction even after the decolonization process.

De Gaulle's proposal was then submitted to public vote of the African former colonies in 1958's referendum and by the end of 1960 all the French colonies became independent. [20] However, it is definitely clear that De Gaulle's proposal was actually meant to establish forms of interaction and cooperation with the former colonies that had a similar intensity to those from the colonialism period of time.

Therefore, after recognizing the independence of its former African colonies, France established a network of interdependent links, covering numerous issue-areas such as trade (trade agreements), the monetary system (CFA franc), security (defence agreements), the education system and so on. "The transition was smoothed before the formal granting of independence by the negotiation of comprehensive bilateral agreements covering defence and security; foreign policy and diplomatic consultation; economic, financial, commercial and monetary matters; and technical assistance". [21]

Indeed, these issue-areas, tying France to the newly established African states, were so tightly intertwined that together they could be perceived as constituting one great regime, *Françafrique.*

Following Stephen Krasner's definition of an international regime, we can see that *Françafrique* covers all the elements identified by Krasner as being the very basis of such an arrangement. The guiding principle of the

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[19] *Ibidem*, p. 3.

[20] *Ibidem*, pp. 3-4.

[21] *Ibidem,* p. 4

regime was General de Gaulle's overarching political ideology of preserving France's *grandeur*. After the Second World War and the process of decolonization, France needed to maintain a privileged position in the international arena and the relations with the former French colony have been one important solution to this matter. Having close links with its former sub-Saharan African colonies seemed to offer one way of restoring its image as a great power and imposing France onto the international stage as a counterbalancing force between the two Cold War superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

The norms governing the regime were established in the framework defined by De Gaulle, *la Communauté franco-africaine* that entailed specific norms set up by France for its former African colonies. In this way, it assured exchanges between former colonies and France and helped establishing the framework of future cooperation.

The rules and decision-making procedures of the *Françafrique* regime involved institutional, semi-institutional and informal levels, and comprised political, economic, military and cultural spheres. The CFA imposed orders of economic rule and then the numerous troops that were preserved on the territory of the former colonies are a sign that the French influence prevails in these countries. [22] Moreover, the defence agreements had even a "secret clause" that ensured France's right to intervene and even the involvement in those countries 'internal affairs. [23]

The Republic maintained a significant number of troops developed in its former French colonies and has not refrained in the past years from intervening both politically and military when it saw its interests questioned in that region. We can therefore consider that France's influence on the African represents an important element of French relative amount of power in the international system and in its fight for maximising it, on

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[22] Guy Arnold, *Historical Dictionary of Civil Wars in Africa*, Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2008, p. 177.

[23] Antoine Glaser and Stephen Smith, *Comment la France a perdu l'Afrique,* Paris: Calmann-lévy, 2005, p. 82.

one side, and it is meant to protect its international position, on the other side. Statistics are very relevant in this issue, showing a profound engagement at the military level. For example, in the period 1960-2006, France launched 37 major military operations in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa.[24]

Moreover, France's military commitment to its former African colonies finds expression in the great number of French soldiers deployed permanently on African soil and used when necessary in missions of UN or EU, or independently, unilaterally, decided by the leaders from Elysée. France held 7800 troops engaged in military operations abroad in 2013.[25] 82% of these forces where deployed on the African continent, distributed in the following regions: 3085 in Sahel, 2260 in Central Africa, 810 in West Africa, and 270 by the Indian Ocean.[26] These numbers show the level of implication as well as the importance that France grants even today to the former African colonies.

The language and the French culture played, equally, a significant role in the foundation of the regime called *Françafrique*. Moreover, the concept that emerged in defining the space of speaking the French language was named "*francophonie*". This concept is essential in the framework of the French-buit international regime and is one of its most important principles. The concept itself, however reflects different marks of identification and levels of intensity: "For some this means only the use of French language; (…) most users of French see *francophonie* as an element of shared identity by which citizens of states with no indigenous national

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[24] Christopher Griffin, "French Military Interventions in Africa: Realism vs. Ideology in French Defense Policy and Grand Strategy" in I*nternational Studies Association*, 48th Annual Convention, Hilton Chicago, 2007, p. 3,

[25] Ministère de la défense (2013) Carte des opérations extérieures <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/rubriques_complementaires/carte-des-operationsexterieures> accessed on 1 December 2019.

[26] *Ibidem*.

language (…) can communicate (…) in its nationalistic extreme *francophonie* becomes *francité*; the distinguishing mark of French civilization". [27]

It is definitely clear that the French language and French culture are two paramount principles that are an important part of the *Françafrique* regime. Together with the economic and military dimension are part of the principles and norms that define the new way of interaction that emerged after the end of the decolonization process.

Other rules that played a crucial role in the functioning of the *Françafrique* regime were the conferences and meetings that the French leaders proposed and organized on a current basis. "At a lower level, a number of *ad hoc* conferences periodically bring together the French and African ministers who deal with similar areas of competence in their respective countries- foreign affairs, economy and finance, telecommunications, justice and culture, health, sports, etc.". [28] This was an important mean of ensuring a coordination in areas of keen interest and an efficient way to pursue France's own interests.

Regarding the decision-making process of the international regime we call *Françafrique*, we can notice it was founded on a well-established framework in which the African leaders had a special place- in the French Government. On this matter, France's policy towards Africa was actually a shared responsibility of the president and his advisers on African matters - the African cell. Moreover, the most significant part of the *Françafrique* regime was the salience of its informal component, which was put in place by Jacques Foccart, gathering together both French and African elites. Therefore, Franco-African diplomacy resembled domestic politics more than formal inter-state relations.[29]

Considering all these arguments, it is noticeable that, in its simplest sense, *Françafrique* can be interpreted within IR literature as meaning France's 'sphere of influence' or its 'pré carré' (backyard), which

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[27] Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 8.

[29] Bovcon, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

presupposes the hierarchical order of an otherwise anarchical international system. "To this day, Francophone Africa is perceived as belonging to the French traditional sphere of influence by virtue of historical links and geographical proximity".[30]

The so-called changes that France promoted in the aftermath of the decolonization process, were actually new forms of preserving its interest which, by embracing all the main areas of cooperation, built up a genuine form of an international regime, *Françafrique*.

Conclusion

Starting from the need of finding the best theoretical approach in the IR Theory field when analyzing the French-African relations, the paper mainly focused on defining the genuine and very interesting concept of *Françafrique* and on identifying the theory that could bring important insights in studying this subject. It is definitely clear that IR theory offers an adequate framework in studying *Françafrique* and the Theory of International Regimes offers significant explanations in the efforts of understanding *Françafrique.*

From the perspective of the numerous schools of thought that payed attention to International Regimes 'formation, we consider that Stephen Krasner's definition of regimes encompasses a very complex approach to the concept. Therefore, we can notice that IR Theory brings new perspectives in studying complex phenomena as *Françafrique.* So, the future application of this theoretical framework on more study cases might bring new approaches in deepening the understanding on *Françafrique.* Considering all these elements, it is essential to deepen and test more often the hypotheses of both the so-called classic IR Theories and the new approaches on new areas/fields that were not so much subjected to study until now, as it is the case with the African continent.

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[30] Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

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