

French Geopolitics in Africa: From Neocolonialism to Identity

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Abstract: This article is placed within the post-colonial theory of geopolitics. Its goal is to prove the hypothesis that 'France's declining influence in material terms (traditional geopolitics) has not had much influence on its colonial identity constructs (post-colonial geopolitics).' Analysing the relations between France and Africa I try to show that France once had substantial influence on Africa, and in turn, Africa was an important source of French identity. With the neoliberal changes France started to lose its influence, but as Sarkozy's speech in Dakar shows, Africa remains an important source of French identity.

Key words: geopolitics, France, Africa, identity, post-colonial theory

INTRODUCTION

What is geopolitics? 'Geopolitics, in short, is about politics!' (Ó Tuathail, 1998: 3). This quasi-definition has three meanings. The first is the traditional one, in which geopolitics' general concern is with geography and politics. The second is the post-modern one, in which geopolitics in the sense of science is itself politics. The very nature of thinking is political and *la science de la géopolitique* is not an exception. The third meaning lies in the fact that there is no real definition that excludes any social science from the study of geopolitics. One could find a connection to the political or the spatial dimension in probably all fields of social science.

The meaning of the concept of geopolitics has been changing throughout history, according to the historical circumstances. In the first period of Kjellen, Haushofer and Ratzel, geopolitics was the knowledge of the relation between the space and politics in the service of the imperial aims of the state. During the Cold War the term was used to cover the analyses of the super-power relations in different areas around the world. The main emphasis lay in the influence and control over other states and strategic resources. Kissinger gave the term 'geopolitics' his own meaning: the study of the balance of power between the USA and the USSR. Such a view was present in the works of other international relations scientists analysing the possible models of bi-, tri- and multi-polarity, which culminated in the neo-realist and schematic work of Kenneth Waltz.

The reason why geopolitics, together with some other IR explanatory frameworks, is so popular is that it enables the authors to address the big picture of the world and to claim to have the capacity to explain how things are happening in the world. It makes it possible to bring together different kinds of actors, relations and dynamics that influence one another in the chosen localities and state that they are all results of geopolitical forces.

Such a macro-view has been attacked by many authors. Criticism of this sort, however, is not the goal of this article. It suffices to say that Norman Long's interface approach (see, e.g., Long, 1992; Long, 2001) has brought forth many insights and helped us to understand local politics and societies in a manner that the geopolitics by its own definition is incapable of.¹ A possible response from geopolitical studies would be the incorporation of the interface approach and a widening of the study of geopolitics. Such a widening, however, would make the term useless for scientific purposes and merely create a nice label to be used on the covers of books. It would be then possible to call any social analysis 'geopolitical', because we all live in 'a place' which has spatial relations. Rather than widening geopolitics, one may prefer pluri-disciplinarity as a means of gaining knowledge from several disciplines which deal with different levels of analysis.

Such a pluri-disciplinarity has been achieved by adding another dimension to geopolitics from post-colonial studies. Not only does geopolitics study obvious relationships among political actors on the basis of their geopolitical features, but the question of identity as approached within post-colonial studies has become an important part of geopolitics.

Therefore, analysing the French geopolitics in Africa, I would like to follow a line of argument moving back and forth between two views on geopolitics. One could be called 'traditional geopolitics' and the other 'critical or post-colonial geopolitics'. The first one is connected to the traditional geopolitical framework of raw materials, while the second has more to do with the identities of the actors of geopolitics and with the influence of geopolitics on these identities. These two notions of geopolitics are, of course, interconnected and the distinction between them is, to a certain extent, artificial. As the first notion constitutes the core of geopolitics since the beginning of the field, and post-colonial studies offer an important critique of such a one-dimensional view on geopolitics, it is useful to use both dimensions as frameworks of analysis.

Based on this dichotomy, I would like to present my hypothesis that '*France's declining influence in material terms (traditional geopolitics) has not had much influence on its colonial identity constructs (post-colonial geopolitics).*' The hypothesis rests on two theoretical foundations. The first one stems from the realist tradition within the IR field. An actor is presented as a rational unit acting especially to serve its own interests regardless of other actors. The second theoretical foundation focuses on the construction of identity. Actors' identities are perceived as relational –

based on their relationship to other actors. The question that comes up from connecting these two dimensions is to what extent the first dimension influences the second. If France is indeed losing its geopolitical position, can its self-perception remain unquestioned? Thus geopolitical analysis, which remains within the realist tradition on the basis of certain assumptions such as self-interest, can be deconstructed by analysing a completely different aspect of spatial relations.

The hypothesis first consists of showing France as an important geopolitical player in the sense of traditional geopolitics. Such a construction of France will allow me to state that France is retreating from this position later in the article. Therefore, the traditional geopolitics between France and Africa from decolonization until the era of the neoliberal changes brought about by the Bretton Woods institutions will be the first topic to be dealt with. The second section will try to show how important Africa is for France as a source of the French identity. The third part should return to the traditional geopolitics and deal with the neoliberal changes in the relation between France and Africa. There, I will analyse the decline from the position presented in the first part. The fourth part should then analyse the era of Chirac and the short period of Sarkozy's presidency and show which notion of geopolitics seems to matter more and what the current trends in the French geopolitics in Africa are. I hope to prove the hypothesis that even though the French influence is declining, this decline does not have much influence on the French identity.

FRENCH GEOPOLITICS IN AFRICA – STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES

'The security of France does not depend, of course, solely on the security of Africa but it is, it seems to me strongly associated with it... because the maritime routes around Africa carry the greater part of the oil and raw materials upon which we depend' (General Méry, 1978, quoted in Luckham, 1984: 69).

French interests in Africa have always followed three main goals. The first is to have a strategic advantage from the relations with African states. The second is to have an economic advantage from these relations. The third, the identity 'advantage', will be considered in the following chapters.

Africa holds 42% of the world's share of bauxite, 38% of the world's uranium, 42% of the world's reserves of gold, and 73% of its platinum. These are the most important geopolitical data for western powers, and France is no exception. Africa is the most important source of raw materials for France, and France has secured privileged access to these resources through several means. For example, the French atomic project would have had been unthinkable without the uranium from Nigeria and Gabon. Nkrumah noted that in 1957, France imported from Africa 100% of

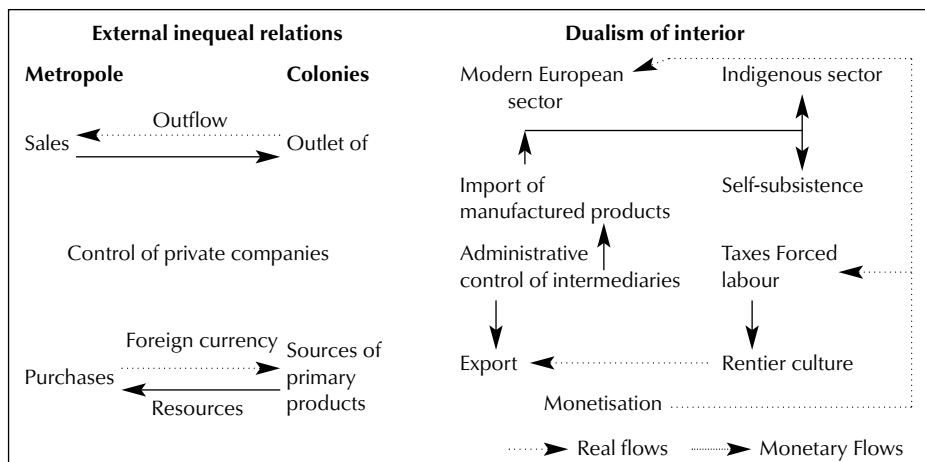
its phosphates, 85% of its lead, and 51% of its zinc (Nkrumah 1984[1966]: 2). Thus the economic aim of securing the raw materials has also been strategic for their vital importance for the French industry.

Just as France has been importing all these necessary inputs for its manufacturing producers, Africa has been an important importer of the French exports. Togo is a perfect example. The income gained from the sales of the phosphates has been used to build cement factories, hotels, oil refineries, textile factories and infrastructure. The companies that were paid to do the job were of western, mostly French, origin.

Of course the African resources have been used to produce manufactured products and for exporting to other countries than Africa, because African people simply do not have enough purchasing power. But according to Luckham (1984)², the African market for French products has not been negligible at the time of decolonization.

Another important factor in the economic interest was the penetration of African resources (and products) to the European market. The policy of France after the Second World War was to secure for its former colonies privileged access to the European Economic Community through the Yaoundé convention.³ This way the French capital, which was, of course, present in many African companies, has been gaining profits through these preferential agreements. This policy changed after the United Kingdom entered the EEC.

These two economic interests, being, in my opinion, the most important part of geopolitics and even creating their own field of geo-economics, are nicely summarized in a figure created by Philippe Hugon in his textbook on African geopolitics. The figure shows the functioning of the economic relation between a colonizer and its colony. The colonizer buys primary products from the colony and sells its manufactured products there. The sector which is most negatively affected is at the right end of the figure – the indigenous sector.



Source: Hugon (2007: 40).

Before proceeding to the strategic interest, it is necessary to analyse the way this geopolitical power has been exerted upon African countries. In general, this system has been called *neo-colonialism*. According to Nkrumah:

'...imperialism... claims, that it is "giving" independence to its former subjects, to be followed by "aid" for their development. Under cover of such phrases, however, it devises innumerable ways to accomplish objectives formerly achieved by naked colonialism. It is this sum total of these modern attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about "freedom", which has come to be known as *neo-colonialism*' (Nkrumah, 1984: 239).

The methods and forms of neo-colonialism are various. In an extreme case, the imperial power may send troops to the neo-colonial state to control that country. This was the case of some of the French interventions in African countries. Interestingly this was not happening, according to Luckham, in the core of the former French empire, but rather in those African states that were less bound.⁴

Most of the time, the control of a country happens through economic and monetary means. Nkrumah's analysis is very useful in this case as well:

'The neocolonial state may be obliged to take the manufactured products of the imperialist power to the exclusion of competing products elsewhere. Control over government policy in the neo-colonial state may be secured by payment towards the cost of running the State, by the provision of civil servants in positions where they can dictate policy, and by monetary control over foreign exchange through the imposition of a banking system controlled by the imperial power' (Nkrumah, 1984: ix-x).

In the *Lexikon Dritte Welt* one can read that *neo-colonialism* sets itself up through an elite that is ready to lead its country according to the demands of the world market (Sturm, 1991: 485).

Walsch lists different forms through which the imperial power secures its control over the neo-colonial state. In the military field, the control is assured through educating military officials, police and the army and the supply of weapons; in the political field, through building influence zones and international organizations which work in the interest of the Western nations; in the cultural field, through missions, involvement with the local media and building local schooling; in the communication field, the control is exerted through building posts and telecommunications and through establishing airlines; in the technical field, through creating dependency on the imperial power's technological know-how; in the social field, through the so-called 'brain drain' of scholars and research workers and through support of local

elites in their effort to change local traditions and lifestyles to make them more similar to modern western non-traditional lifestyles; in the financial field, through granting, controlling and conditioning loans from the World Bank and the IMF; and in the economic field, through exploitation via transnational corporations (Walsch, 2003: 39).

This taxonomy of the means through which the neo-colonial dominance is being exerted sketches only very briefly what is actually going on in the relationship between France and its former colonies.

The case of the arms business sheds light on how the actual dependence is happening and how France is maintaining its influence in African countries while making money from it. The most important point of the export of French weapons is the fact that France needs to keep producing more weapons than she actually uses in order to pay for the research and be prepared to start making more weapons for herself if necessary. These strategic imperatives are of vital importance and are the main argument for keeping the business going no matter what the consequences for other nations might be.

Since the decolonization, the French army has exerted influence upon the armies of African states. This has been done mainly through Defense and Military Assistance Agreements and Military Technical Agreements. African officers have been trained in France and French advisors have served in African armies. The close cooperation assured French influence in case of crisis but served also as a reason to import French weapons and technology for local armies. Luckham notices a chain of events in this 'cooperation' through the example of a technological safari in Zaire in the mid-1970s during which France sold weapons, especially Mirages, to the government. The transaction was paid for by money that came from a loan guaranteed by the French government, but this added to the indebtedness of Zaire, which almost led to its fall during the Shaba uprisings and consequently led to French intervention. The French intervention is even more important than the export of arms to Africa since it allows France to use African soil as a testing ground for its newest weapons (Luckham, 1984: 71–73).

The strategic interest in intervening is connected to the economic interest of serving the provision of raw materials. As Luckham states, 'France's military interventions and her economic interests have been imperfectly correlated' (Luckham, 1984: 70).

But geopolitics can be viewed from a different angle. One might see it as an important aspect of identity as well.

FRENCH GEOPOLITICS IN AFRICA – THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Studying language, Ferdinand de Saussure claimed that the most important feature of language is its arbitrariness. Saussure saw the binary opposition as being the most

natural and efficient code. As binary oppositions are the codes that are the easiest to learn and to produce, they are the common denominator of all our thinking.

Saussure's structuralist approach would be later overcome by post-structuralists, who perceived the arbitrary relations between signs not as given, but as ever changing.

One of the authors emanating from this tradition is Edward Said, who analysed probably the oldest binary opposition: that between 'us' and 'them', between one group of people and another group of people, between 'we' and the 'others'. In his famous book *Orientalism*, he deals with the social construction of two groups: the so-called 'Occident', representing *the We*, and the so-called 'Orient', representing *the Other*. Orientalism for Said is a certain way of 'coping with Orient... *Orient is not just a neighbor to Europe..., it represents one of the deepest and most common European images of a different world, different culture as well. This way, Orient helped to negatively define Europe or the West – it was its opposite image, thought, personality and experience*' (Said, 2008: 11).

Such a view is not new to geopolitics. Several authors have dealt with post-modern issues within what Ó Tuathail calls 'critical geopolitics'. For the purpose of this article, I would like to build upon the post-colonial notion within geopolitics. One could find this in, e.g., Agnew and Crobridge (1995), who claim that 'the singular trait of modern geopolitical discourse' is its representation of 'others as backward or permanently disadvantaged if they remained as they are' (Ibid.: 49). Slater (2004) specifies three constituting elements of what he calls 'Euro-Americanism'⁵: (1) The Euro-Americanist interpretations emphasize the leading civilizational role of the West through referring to some '*special or primary*' feature of its inner socio-economic, political and cultural life (Ibid.: 10). (2) This special or primary feature is regarded as '*being internal or intrinsic to European and American development*' (Ibid.: 10–11). Here the importance lies in the self-affirmation of the West as well as in the denial of a potentially beneficial association with the non-Western other. (3) The Western development is then considered to be the '*universal step forward for humanity as a whole*' (Ibid.: 11). Slater proves this third statement by analysing modernization and Marxist and neo-liberal theories, doing so in a similar vein as post-development scholars (see, e.g., Ziai, 2004; Rist, 2008; or Lummis, 1991). He differs from Ó Tuathail's approach by giving much less importance to the changes from modernity to post-modernity brought about by new technologies as well as new societal dynamics. Slater's analysis remains focused on the one aspect that does not change, and this aspect is something that actually bridges modernity with the post-modern times. No matter how 'liquid' and 'uncertain' (Bauman, 2007) our time is, the colonial distinction between 'us' and 'them' remains stable and is gaining on importance as the other features of geopolitics are rapidly changing. I hope to show that such a view is relevant to the analysis of the French-African relations.

The direct colonization since the 1870s started to define Africa politically and geopolitically and transformed the purely geographical view of African land into a political one. While the French national identity has always been defined by France's relation to other nations and people, since the time of colonization the relation between France and Africa started to have much more influence on the French national identity. As France lost Alsace-Lorraine to Germany in 1871, the colonial expansion was a way to keep the national ethos of being a decisive power in the world.

Later on, during the Second World War, Africa and its land to a certain extent saved France by giving more legitimacy to de Gaulle's call for unity. In 1940, after the Nazis invaded France and created the Vichy Regime, de Gaulle was backed by French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. Walsch states that two traditional French claims have been confirmed by the act of solidarity coming from the French colonies. They recognized the universality of French values – a claim that was in the centre of the French Revolution in 1789 and has been in the French identity ever since – and they recognized the territorial principle that considers every part of the French Empire, no matter how far away from the Hexagon, to actually be a part of France (Walsch, 2003: 52). This universal France that consisted of much more than just the European land in contrast to the Vichy Regime is what gave de Gaulle legitimacy and power to negotiate, to speak for a united area with one single French identity. It is this territory that was independent of Europe and was therefore a potential source of resistance against the Nazis. Africa thus saved France not through its incontestable resources of men and raw materials but through the French identity that it helped to sustain. The identity proved to be an important factor of geopolitics.

The identity factor did not cease to play its role in the French and African geopolitics. However, the scene changed considerably. The French identity in international relations still depends on France's former colonies, but these are no longer perceived as being only a part of France in its universal ideology. They are also perceived as being the Other that gives France an opposition against which it can define itself and keep its power status.

As Luckham states, the reason why France intervened in Africa was not always purely material: '*...France's joint military maneuvers with the Francophone countries have not just provided training but have also constituted a symbolic affirmation of France's ability to project its power in foreign parts*' (Luckham, 1984: 60). De Gaulle expressed it plainly: '*France... because she is France, must carry out a truly global policy*' (de Gaulle, 1964 in Luckham, 1984: 75).

It is in the French identity to be a world power. Just as one of the reasons for France trying to obtain an atomic bomb after the Second World War was to sustain its power status (in addition to protecting itself), a reason for its military policy of in-

terventions in Africa was to prove to the rest of the world that France is still a world power (in addition to protecting its capital investments and vital raw materials).

As Luckham argues, during the Cold War, France sought to present itself as the third pole in the bi-polar world. As such it needed to be really independent – to have its own atomic weapons but also to have its own sphere of influence that would allow it to speak for more than just itself. Naturally France chose its former colonies for this sphere of influence, but one can hardly imagine that France would have been capable of subordinating any area of the world with more powerful nations, such as those in Indochina.

A very important part of the French identity stems from another side of the Franco-African relation. Not only has France gained her power-status as an actor that can and may interfere in the affairs of other states. She also has the status of a developed nation in the (binary) opposition between herself and the developing African nations whom she is trying to help.

The question of development is often connected to geopolitics only as a hidden means to reach geopolitical and geo-economical material gains. Mostly it concerns development projects that led to purchases of sophisticated manufactured goods or machinery from companies from a country pursuing its geopolitical aims or that led to an engagement of such companies in building local dams, power plants or anything of high value.

As, for example, Slater (2004) shows, the identity is being formed by the very existence of the thinking in developmental terms. Just as the former French colonies help to create France as a powerful state by being its weaker counterpart (the weaker Other), they help to create it as the helping, modern, developed state to whom they are the traditional underdeveloped counterpart (again, the Other that needs France).

This line of thought is much older than the power-status identity relation to Africa. The colonial discourse was based upon the perception of France as being the nodal point of this discourse, to which everything else was related. Colonial areas were related to it in a subordinate position by requesting help which France should provide under its ideology of human rights. France saw herself as the civilization and her colonies as the barbarians that needed to be civilized.⁶

In the post-Second World War era, France would voluntarily offer her own achievements to the service of humanity to help the underdeveloped nations to become developed (*mettre en valeur*). This way she kept the identity of the 'more' (developed) in opposition to the 'less' (developed) and also gained a label necessary for a country with a power status of helping other countries that are in need of help.

Again the geopolitical game of securing influence in Africa, this time through development, helped France to define its identity. Without African states as the Other, France would not be able to keep its status as a high-ranking power. Thus as a sort of bonus to natural resources, France also found in Africa a support for its identity.

Although this scheme seemed to work very well during the Glorious Thirty Years, the 1980s brought significant changes. While the erosion of the French influence in Africa and the weakening of the traditional geopolitical aspect will be treated in the next section, the question of identity and the most recent events in relation to it will be dealt with afterwards.

THE NEOLIBERAL ORDER – THE WEAKENING OF THE FRENCH GEOPOLITICAL POSITION IN AFRICA

Since the 1980s, it is possible to speak of France's retreat from Africa. The French geopolitical influence is losing against the multilateral Bretton Woods organizations. François Mitterrand became president during the time of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. These two conservative politicians represented a new era of rolling back the state later to be known as neoliberalism. While at home the two heads of states were cutting the social obligations of the state, abroad they were requiring the same (and much more of the same nature) to be done through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Even though Mitterrand promised before 1981 to break up with capitalism (see, e.g., Blažek–Profant, 2009), his real policy was different. B. Hibou sees several continuities during the 14 years of his presidency. The main feature of the French-African politics that did not change was the persistence of personal relations between high-ranking state officials. It is also possible to identify the preference of short-term politics to the detriment of long-term strategies, and the support of rent-seeking economical behavior rather than of productive behavior. The last feature of Mitterrand's presidency, according to Hibou, was its bad use of the development aid (Hibou, 1995: 25).

What could be seen as the most important continuity of the French politics towards Africa is that of the incoherencies that characterized it. Instead of following some kind of clear policy, in the economic area, the French treasury was usually just helping out African governments so that their deficits would not be too high and their civil servants would not go unpaid for too long.

French neocolonialism seemed to change with the new neoliberal order of the IMF and the WB. In reality, however, the French treasury was allowing African governments to break the monetary rules of the CFA franc zone by offering them a possibility of immediate loans to cover their deficits. This money was very often stolen by incumbent governments, and France was incapable of preventing it if it did not actually tolerate it as an expression of its personal friendship with the heads of state.

Eventually such policy was unsustainable and France was forced to obey the IMF rules. Not only did the French government wish to lower its aid to its African partners, but it was also incapable of following its traditional policy. It could not main-

tain its autonomy vis-à-vis the IMF and the WB in relation to its former colonies and was forced to start demanding the same structural adjustments as the multilateral organizations did. Simply put, France started to lose its influence in its *pré carré*⁷.

These adjustments meant especially liberalization and privatization. Hugon (2003) analyses the dismantling of the cotton industry in Africa and points at the negative consequences of these policies for the local industry. From a geopolitical point of view, however, the less cotton was coming from the West African countries, the greater the market share for American subsidized cotton. As Hugon states, '[b]ehind the dismantling of the industries, geopolitical stakes aim to break the post-colonial links between national cotton companies and the FTU (French trade union), French public company' (Hugon, 2003: 139). The argument of the World Bank was that bringing competition to the cotton sector would disintegrate the industry. This industry, however, was a French colonial heritage. It inhibited competition, and the WB policy hurt the producers not capable of adjustment to the free market prices. Such policy was, of course, against the French interest in the cotton industry. France was losing its position because of this liberalization.

A clear sign of subordination to the Bretton-Woods organizations and their policy was the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994. France was unable to change this decision and had to follow the monetary rules of the neoliberal order. Since then African countries lost their privilege to automatically borrow money from the French treasury, and France has become a credit provider of lesser importance than the multilateral organizations or China. The relation has thus been normalized to a certain extent, and France is obliged to demand the same conditions as the IMF and the WB.

Another sign of France losing its grip on its former empire was the speech that François Mitterrand made in La Baule in 1990. He conditioned French aid on the democratization process. However, as, for example, the case of Togo in the 1990s has proved, this has been a mere cover for a continuity of the old personal network between Elysée and its African counterparts. The old way of neo-colonial cooperation with local elites continued without changes, but only to the extent allowed by the neo-liberal order.

Nonetheless, the liberalization and privatization has also helped the French capital. It made many local (and French) small and medium enterprises go bankrupt, but large groups such as Bolloré or Bouygues kept their advantage and gained from the liberalization. More important was the disengagement of the French companies Total and Elf from the *pré carré*. They are now increasingly less connected to the aid politics of the French state (Hugon, 2007: 65).

The retreat from Africa culminated during the years of Lionel Jospin's government. It seemed that France had decided to stop being the '*gendarme de l'Afrique*'. The new doctrine called '*ni l'ingérance, ni l'indifférence*' has been proved in the Ivory

Coast when France decided not to intervene on behalf of President Henri Konan Bédié. Similar non-action on the part of France had appeared already in 1996 in Central Africa, and afterwards France closed its bases in Bouar and Bangui (Bané-gas–Marchal–Meimon, 2007: 15–18).

This evolution, which led to decreases in the French influence in Africa, has been accompanied by decreases in the importance of Africa for France. According to John Chipman, already during the colonial age, '*African possessions did not contribute to French economic strength*' (Chipman, 1989: 3). And '*after the Second World War it was clear that because of the low degree of industrialization of the colonies, they could not buy what many industrialists needed to sell*' (Chipman, 1989: 188). The years that led to decolonization made it obvious that withdrawal from overseas outposts would not seriously damage the French economy. Actually it has been argued that the colonial market was slowing the French economy. Simply put, West Africa was (and is) so poor that it was, according to Chipman, of '*no real direct economic benefit to France*' (Chipman, 1989: 189).

Such a view has been supported also by Hugon's account of the 12 years of Chirac's presidency. Africa as an economic partner has been losing its importance for France not only during this time, but even earlier. The CFA franc zone import from France fell to 1% of all French exports in 2006, while France imported around one quarter of the zone's exports (Hugon, 2007: 56).

France is therefore not only losing its influence in Africa as a neo-colonial power, but the importance of Africa for France is declining as well. The flows, as shown by Figure 1, have been modified, and the export of manufactured goods has lost its importance.

Jacques Lévy also asserts that 'the playtime is over' for France in Africa (Lévy, 2000: 103), but he does so for different reasons. The French state, some French firms and the French-speaking African states worked well together, being financed by the French national budget and corrupting each actor by its counterparts. Such *Franceafrique* (Verschave, 1998) has continued through the Mitterrand era, but according to Lévy, three major events seem to profoundly change this deal. First, as the Cold War ended, the classical argument that 'if we go, they will take our place' is invalidated (Lévy, 2000: 105). With the end of the Cold War, 'they' have disappeared. Second, humanitarian NGOs and mass media nowadays cover not only the French scene but also more distant places, bringing home the French moral issues from abroad. And third, French courts also started to deal with cases which involve foreign leaders and big corporations working together with French politicians.

However, as Lévy states and as I will show in the next section as well, the time of the French involvement in Africa is not over yet, even if it changes profoundly. He mentions the cases from the turn of the century – the Omar Bongo reelection in 1998, the support of the rebellion against the pro-Libyan government in Chad in

2000 and the bloody presidential election in the Ivory Coast in 2000. They all seem to give the impression that France does not want to let go of its *pré carré*.

As I have shown the French retreat from Africa, thus proving the first part of the hypothesis, let me now turn to the latest changes in Franco-African relations and to the question of identity within these relations.

NEW INTERVENTIONISM AND MULTILATERALIZATION – THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY REAPPEARING

Already during the cohabitation with Jospin's government, Chirac's presidency has been marked by a new wave of interventionism. Chirac ignored the '*ni ni*' strategy, and his visits to Togo, Guinea and Cameroon in 1999, which were supposed to reassure France's allies of her support, were in a clear contradiction to it. After 2002 the interventionist trend became obvious. There is, however, a new element in this strategy that had not been present before – multilateralism.

According to Banégas, Marchal and Meimon, France started to act multilaterally in opposition to the US unilateral approach in Iraq. In 2003 Chirac announced that the French aid should rise up to 0,7% of the GDP again and that Jospin's '*ni-ni*' strategy is over. The aim was not to exclude an intervention *a priori*, since that could encourage violations of human rights based on the expectation that France would not punish them.

The first case of this new approach was that of Côte d'Ivoire. France sent in 5000 men to suppress the rebels who were revolting against the incumbent government. Later this trend was confirmed in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central Africa. In Congo, however, a new trend came into play. With the French interventionism, we are witnessing the multilateralization of this interventionism as well. No matter how multilateral Operation Artemis actually is, the change of the French attitude is clear. France cannot, at least on the surface, show her old neo-colonial face and is forced to include more nations to legitimize her interventions.

As Banégas, Marchal and Meimon state:

'It is not about a return to the *status quo ante*, haunted by the old demons of *France-Afrique*, but a post-9/11 phase, during which France, like (and against) the US, assumes its international domain through a neo-interventionism freed of the old colonial facade and decorated by virtues of a multilateral framework' (Banégas–Marchal–Meimon, 2007: 21).

Even if the same authors later refute such an interpretation of Operation Artemis on the ground that in reality this operation has been to such a great extent a French operation that it is not possible to call it 'European', the change in direction is obvious. Neither can the idea of multilateralism be undermined by Chirac's visits to Africa

assuring his African counterparts of his support and his referring to Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadema as his '*personal friend*'.

The authors conclude that the next president will have to choose between the trends towards multilateralization and Europeanization and an attempt to keep the policy of bilateral influence, between a retreat and a will to keep the privileged connection with the continent, between a support of democracy and a support of dictatorships led by old friends. This is the choice Nicolas Sarkozy had to make.

How are these changes to be interpreted from the point of view of identity in geopolitics? France has been losing her capacity to intervene but, of course, she has not lost it completely and is capable of a military intervention to protect African leaders with close ties to the Elysée. France needs to intervene to support these autocrats in order to maintain her power status. Only in this way can she be seen as an important nation capable of forming the direction of global trends.

But the actual declining relative French power has two consequences. First, France has to focus on the weakest states, where she actually still can exert her influence, and, second, she needs to be joined by other countries in her neo-colonial endeavor. Such an alignment, even though it might seem to support the aspirations of French power, paradoxically only shows its weakness. It is not possible anymore for France to lead her interventions alone. She needs at least moral support from other nations to make them look legal. The Europeanization in this case is not so much a sign of a stronger Europe as of a weaker France. In her attempt to keep her identity as a power influencing the course of events, she is showing that she actually is not capable of doing it alone and that she herself needs help.

The divergence between the interests of the French capital and the French armed backing of incumbent governments is showing that France is not so much interested in preserving the material part of the French geopolitics in Africa. In reality it does not need to do this, as has been proven by the statistics. What France is desperately trying to preserve are the ties to its African ex-colonies that give it a leverage in the world stage decision-making process.

Since the local rulers also need backing from a powerful state, they do not wish to let go of the mutually reinforcing relationship either. For France, material factors are not at stake to the extent that they are for the local leaders, but more importantly, what is really at stake for France is her national pride and identity. Without someone to whom France can disseminate her universal human rights and her other norms, the universality of the French ways of thinking would be contested. There would be no other *particular* nation to prove the *universality* of French particular values and, correspondingly, of France's identity as a source of humanity.

Therefore, France needs to keep on proving that she is a powerful country to show that her values are indeed universal and thus maintain her identity. With the strengthening of other nations in other parts of the world, the relative decline of France

makes it impossible for her to go on this way unilaterally, and thus she needs support from other nations, even if only non-material support.

This unfortunately does not change the status of Africa in the world geopolitics. It remains to be an object and is not in any position to influence its geopolitical relationships with other countries. With the rise of China and India, Africa seems to be one of the last battlefields in geoeconomical terms. France, represented by Europe and vice versa, is trying to secure her access to natural resources just as China and India are. The conflict is inevitable and different strategies come into play. I will now proceed to the 'strategy' chosen by Nicolas Sarkozy at the University of Dakar.⁸ What changes in identity is he preparing for his own country in relation to Africa, and how is he going to preserve her geopolitical interests in Africa?

There is one change that Sarkozy did bring to the relation between France and Europe. It is the new language. Sarkozy, known for the direct form he uses when addressing his audience, was frank as usual in his speech in Dakar. But his alleged openness seemed to be rather a 'thank you' to the electorate of Lionel Jospin that decided to vote for Sarkozy. His direct language has been understood as an insult among the audience in Dakar and also among the audience throughout the African continent. It brought so much outrage among intellectuals that there is actually a collection of reactions from well known African scholars who have decided to reply to Sarkozy, *L'Afrique répond á Sarkozy*, edited by Makhily Gassama.

The authors of the collection have criticized Sarkozy mainly for his neo-colonialism and racism. Gassama, professor of literature and Minister of Culture of Senegal under the president Léopold Sédar Senghor, reminds Sarkozy of the African past, that is, in terms of human freedoms (Charter of the Mandé - 1222), comparable with those of the United Kingdom (Magna Carta - 1215), which far surpass those of France (Declaration of Human Rights - 1789).

But the point is not to show that African culture or history of thought is well developed and comparable to the allegedly superior culture or history of thought in Europe. African intellectuals are forced to reply by their need to defend millions of humiliated people. In a brilliantly elaborated analysis of Sarkozy's speech, Mwatha Musanji Ngalasso, professor of linguistics, criticizes the way Sarkozy treats his hosts. He comes to talk to them as if they were grown children. Ngalasso states that it is really unimaginable that any president or prime minister would come to a foreign country and tell its people about themselves, about what their problems are, about what they need to do to solve them, about their past and about their possible future. But this is precisely what Sarkozy did and what actually seems to be normal in the Franco-African or Eur-African relations. The colonial tutelage seems to remain the determining factor of this relationship.

Even if the main 'material' message of this discourse is that African states should keep their young people at home and prevent them from trying to emigrate to Eu-

rope (Ngalasso, 2008: 278–279), the most important message is that the relationship will remain the same. Sarkozy will continue on the colonial path, which has been confirmed by de Gaulle and modernized by his successors to be known under the name of neo-colonialism. Just as Sarkozy does seem to give some credit to the African continent by accepting the view that colonialization was a crime and honoring the specificity of African culture, he nonetheless keeps on telling his African audience how Africa has not sufficiently entered history or how its villagers live in harmony with nature instead of following the idea of progress and mastering it.

Guaino, the author of the text, in his reply to the critiques, asks where the scandal is. Why can Aimé Césaire speak of *homme noir* while Sarkozy cannot speak of *homme africain*? Ngalasso replies:

‘The scandal is to affirm in the year 2007, as it has been affirmed by the ideologues of super-ordination and theorists of colonization, that if all the people have known “the time of eternity to be present”, Africa still has not... If the colonization consists of a material occupation of the territory of the other, and of exploitation to one’s advantage, colonialism is a state of mind that consists of a symbolic occupation of the space and time of the other while preventing him from mastering his own territory and history and imposing on him one’s own mode of thinking, speaking and doing, which is considered to be superior...’ (Ngalasso, 2008: 289).

This is precisely what Sarkozy did, or more precisely, what he continues in doing, what he inherited from Chirac, Mitterrand or de Gaulle.

What are the implications for the French geopolitics in Africa? By confirming the policy of his predecessors, and actually by using such frank and direct language, Sarkozy told us that the policy will not change and that France will try to preserve its influence in its *pré carré*. The reasons, however, may not be material anymore. The main point in his speech being the prevention of immigration to France seems to be in accordance with Chipman’s conclusion.⁹ The problem in the Franco-African relation that seems to be passed on to the Euro-African relation is the state of mind of the wealthier partner. France, as personalized by Sarkozy, needs someone or something to define her, to be her Other. And if Africa is the last actor on which France is capable of imposing such a role, she will keep it in this position, no matter how racist and old the idea might seem. The national pride is more important than post-modern ideas of cultural relativism that give the same value to each culture. As such, it gives an imperative to the policy and to the geopolitical direction in the French leadership.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper was to analyse the French geopolitics in Africa in relation to the hypothesis stated in the introduction: ‘France’s declining influence in material

terms (traditional geopolitics) has not had much influence on its colonial identity constructs (post-colonial geopolitics).' Concerning the traditional geopolitics in this relationship, Africa has, to a certain extent, lost its importance for France, especially in terms of exports. But Africa remains important as a source of mineral resources for the EU, and with the entry of China into the scene of world geopolitics, Africa has become a battlefield where some actors (France and the EU) are retreating from their positions and others (China and India) are gaining loyal partners.

The loss of the French influence has been clear since France's subordination to the policies of international financial organizations. France had to stop lending money to its former colonies without their structural adjustments, and it has become a lender of secondary importance to them. Together with the WB and the IMF, China took over the French role.

These changes in the world of traditional geopolitics did not have much influence on the French national identity. Throughout the 20th century, France based its identity on its colonies, and since the process of decolonization, it based its identity on its former colonies. The colonies helped France to appear as a world power on the world stage – first as an important partner in the fight against Hitler and then during the Cold War as a possible third pole with some political power.

Jospin as prime minister seemed to begin the retreat from Africa, but the rest of Chirac's presidency has been characterized by a new wave of interventionism. Since then, however, France has been forced to multilateralize and Europeanize its interventions. Franco-African relations are becoming Euro-African. As France is losing its power, Europe is taking over its role of a world power.

Sarkozy, in his speech in Dakar, has shown very openly that he has no intentions of changing his attitude towards Africa, or of changing the relationship between France and Africa. Africa is to remain the object in geopolitics, which helps to define the role of France as a world power. Sarkozy came to Dakar to assure anyone who had doubts that he is not going to change the direction of the neo-colonial path of his predecessors. Now, when it is maybe the last chance for France to actually break the ties to its colonial past and start perceiving its former colonies as equal partners, Sarkozy demonstrated that he will be fighting for the French world power identity until the very last moment, when the African peoples themselves decide to stand up against the masters of their identity. The findings of this article confirm the hypothesis, but there is a need for further research that would take into account a broader range of empirical material.

One last point that I would like to make regarding identity in geopolitics is that Europe is taking over the French role. It is to be seen whether the EU will be using the African soil as a playground for its intervention in the future, but what is clear is that the European (or western) identity is also defined by the Other. Here the definition

of the European identity is in the relation of developed and under-developed nations. African countries help the European countries to keep their identity of being better than the rest by accepting their role of under-developed nations who need to be helped. Just as France is holding onto its power status identity in relation to Africa, so is Europe always highlighting its status of a developed entity that is in a position to help. This part of its identity gives Europe its self-confidence.

There is not much new in the French geopolitics from the point of view of the influence of geopolitics on the identity of the actors. France and her successor Europe are gaining their self esteem from the policy they are leading on the African continent.

ENDNOTES

¹ The actor-oriented sociology of development descends within development studies from the (inter)national level to the 'actors' level – that is, to the level of the target population – and finds out how insufficient the Marxist or liberal theories of development are (Long, 1992). An analysis on such a micro level should help the policy-makers to adjust their policies in a way that would suit the receivers of the development aid better. The novelty of this approach, which could be also beneficial to geopolitics, is that it shows the relevance of the micro-analysis and the unsatisfactory results brought about by the macro-theories. For the level of the analysis problem in IR, see, e.g., Hollis-Smith (2000).

² This article from Luckham reflects the era during which it was written, when the neo-colonial Franco-African relations were about to change but were not changing yet. At the time the functioning of neo-colonialism seemed clearer than it does today, as today many more factors come into play. These factors are, for example, the growing influence of the World Bank (WB) or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and, more recently, of China and India in Africa. They both lower the French capacity to 'do politics' in Africa.

³ The first Yaoundé convention (1964–1969) was the first association agreement between eighteen francophone African states, Madagascar and the EEC. At this time the French goal was to adjust the economic relations with former colonies of France and Belgium.

⁴ Luckham, in his article from 1984, differentiates between several different groups of African countries. The first group is made up of the core neo-colonies – the Ivory Coast, Gabon, Senegal, Cameroon and Togo, in which the French and especially their capital have the greatest interest. The second is the group of countries in which France has an interest because of their natural resources (Niger, Mauritania, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso (which was still Upper Volta at the time of the publication of the article), and Mauritania) or because of their strategic position (Chad – until 1980). All of the countries in this group have suffered French military interventions but have not been tied to France as closely as the core group. The third is the group of countries that tried to set themselves apart from the French military system (Guinea, Mali, Benin, Congo and Madagascar). Except for Guinea all of these countries kept some military ties with France (Luckham, 1984: 64–65).

⁵ Salter addresses what is usually called 'Eurocentrism'. But Wallerstein (2008), for example, uses the term 'European universalism'.

⁶ This is well documented in *The History of Development* from Gilbert Rist, an author not alienated from the post-development thinking. He quotes, for example, Victor Hugo: 'To fashion a new Africa, to make the old Africa amenable to civilization – that is the problem. And Europe will solve it' (quoted in Rist, 2008: 51). This vein of thought has also been present among the most important philosophers. Makhily Gassama, a professor of literature, when criticizing Sarkozy for his speech in Senegal, traces Sarkozy's thoughts in this matter back to Herodote, Montesquieu, Hume, Kant, Voltaire, Rousseau and Hegel (Gassama, 2008).

⁷ 'Pré carré' is a French expression for a territorial domain within an administration, which is to be protected against those who seek to usurp this domain. It used to mean a double line of fortified towns which was supposed to protect the French Kingdom's border against the Spanish in the 17th century. Nowadays it is very often used in relation to Western Africa.

⁸ Only one speech by the head of state is, of course, insufficient for making any ultimate claims about the French society as a whole. Following the typology of geopolitics created by Ó Tuathail and Dalby (1998), which divides geopolitics into the *practical geopolitics* of state leaders and the foreign policy bureaucracy, the *formal geopolitics* of the strategic community and the *popular geopolitics* that is found within the artifacts of transnational popular culture (mass-market magazines, novels, movies, etc.), Sarkozy's speech represents an important part of the practical geopolitics, and one could add that it represents an important part of the formal geopolitics as well.

⁹ That is, with the conclusion that Africa has lost its importance for France in the traditional geopolitical sense as a recipient of French manufactured goods.

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