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From Françafrique to Mafriafrique' by François Xavier Verschave

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Verschave is convinced that the inception of Françafrique calls into question the meaning of political independence granted to French colonies in Africa more than five decades ago.

In a 69-page well-researched book titled 'De la Françafrique à la Mafriafrique [From Françafrique to Mafriafrique], Francois Xavier Verschave exposes the underbelly of France and its covert activities in Africa. He contends that Françafrique has evolved from the status of a postcolonial contraption conceived by Charles de Gaulle more than five decades ago to keep French-speaking African countries in perpetual bondage to that of a global mafia organization masterminded by unscrupulous mercenaries like Bob Denard, Le Floch-Prigent, André Tarallo, and Benard Courcelle and ilk.

Verschave notes that the substance of his book grew out of testimonies given by Africans who want to tell the stories of their plight and wanton pillaging of their respective countries by France, the ex-colonizer:

“I have simply documented the testimonies of thousands of Africans who came to inform us of their experiences in their home countries. They observed that their countries have been torn apart and put asunder by colonial policies implemented by dictatorial governments.

“This Franco-African policy that I have christened Françafrique is a neocolonialist caricature that has extremely deleterious consequences.

“Françafrique is sustained by the French and Africans. Thus, Africans are certainly playing a crucial role in promoting the domination and pillaging of their continent...”(64)

Verschave does not mince words in his condemnation of the nefarious effects of Françafrique on the political economies of the entire African continent: “...”[6] The intriguing thing about this diabolical caricature is that both Africans and French are acting in collusion to sustain it, and therefore share collective blame for its existence. In Verschave’s words, “ ” (8). All Francophone African heads of state are painted with the same brush, however, Gnassingbé Ayadéma, Omar Bongo, Juvénal Habyarimana, and Denis Sassou Nguesso were seen as lynchpins of Françafrique until their demise. Denis Sassou Nguesso, who has outlived them, now coordinates the dirty job of France in Africa.

Verschave resorts to the analogy of the iceberg in a bid to accentuate the unfathomable dimensions of Françafrique. According to him, only the tip of the iceberg is visible to the rest of the world; the rest is a closely guarded secret known only to its perpetrators in very high positions of power in France and Africa:

“Françafrique is like an iceberg. It has a visible face, the part that is exposed to the world, portraying France as the best friend of Africa and bastion of human rights, etc. Then, there is the invisible part that amounts to 90% of France’s relations with African countries submerged: the network of mechanisms put in place to keep Africans in bondage with the complicity of African allies.” (10).

Needless to belabor the point that Verschave is being terribly sarcastic when he refers to France the best friend of Africa and the bastion of human rights. Even those who have never set foot on the soil of this European nation are aware of the fact that the French motto: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, or Liberty, equality, fraternity is a loud-sounding nothing.

Verschave adumbrates four main reasons that motivated Charles de Gaulle to put Françafrique in place to serve as a postcolonial control mechanism. The first reason is the leverage that France has at the United Nations, where allied nations back her up in the event of a vote. The second is France’s dire need for strategic raw materials (timber, cocoa, coffee, crude, etc). The third reason is the astronomical sums of money that African heads of state send to France each time presidential polls are conducted in France. The fourth reason is linked to the role France played as an ally of the United States of America during the Cold War era. Both countries were in alliance to keep the African continent out of the ambit of Communists. Verschave is convinced that the inception of Françafrique calls into question the signification of political independence granted to French colonies in Africa more than five decades ago. As he puts it, “For these four reasons, the French instituted a system that made the independence of African nations a non-starter.” (10)

To ensure the success of Françafrique, De Gaulle handpicked a fine strategist in the person of Jacques Foccart to implement his policies in Africa. Foccart’s starting point was to select a bunch of African lackeys nicknamed “*les amis de la France*” or “Friends of France.” Many of these so-called friends of France are francophone African presidents holding French nationality.

Notorious among them was Omar Bongo who passed away a few years ago and was succeeded by his son, Ali Bongo.

Of the several strings that France uses to tie up African nations in order to keep them in a vicious circle of dependency, Verschave singles out the Franc CFA as the most effective. He notes that the acronym “CFA” means “Colonies françaises d’Afrique”, which could be translated as “French colonies in Africa.” Insightful revelation! Who knew that more than five decades after gaining independence from France, francophone African countries remain French colonies?

As Verschave puts it, “This convertible CFA franc has facilitated capital flight from African nations to France for decades. During electoral campaigns in France, you would hear citizens in Cameroon or Togo complaining that the State has become broke and is unable to pay civil servants. The reason is that all the money has been sent from Yaoundé or Lomé, for example, to France to fund the political campaigns of presidential candidates.” (14)

The political implication of all these machinations is that Africa is now saddled with demodictators who were not elected by the populace. These unpopular leaders are constantly being propped up by France because they implement French hidden agenda on the African continent. Whether one is looking at the scenario in Cameroon, Togo, Gabon or Congo-Brazzaville, the rules of the game remain the same: dictators buy their tenure at the helm of their countries with astronomical sums of money sent to the Champs Elysée in briefcases. France then sends mercenaries and secrets agents to make sure that elections are rigged in favor of their henchmen in Africa.

In the words of Verschave, here is how the system works:

“Transparent ballot boxes and envelopes are sent to these countries; and then the French say: ‘you see, they are advancing toward t democratic governance; let’s help them get there; but at the same time, France sends experts particularly savvy in the art of election rigging to install vote-counting computers that are a little special: so, whereas the electorate has kept vigil day and night to ensure that their ballots are properly counted; whereas they have voted at 70% or 80% in order to chase the dictator awau from power, the tallies declared often sure that the dictator has been re-elected with 80% of the votes cast...” (20)

So much for electoral gerrymandering and fraud à la française in Africa! Little wonder the Biyas, Bongos, Nguessos, Derbys, Ayademas, Mobutus, Boignys and ilk are presidents for life! One take-away from a reading of this instructive book is that the brunt of the underdevelopment of Africa should be borne by France and Africans alike given that African leaders behave like frightened chicken and give the French free rein to manipulate them. Worse, Africa is blighted by two cankers: debilitating corruption and corrosive ethnocentrism.

To borrow words from Verschave, “In my opinion, there are two neo-colonial poisons: the so-called fatality of corruption and the institutionalization of tribalism.” (65).

In a nutshell, François Xavier Verschave’s ‘De la Françafrique à la Mafiafrique’ is a treasure trove of information. This masterpiece would serve as an eye-opener for those who are unaware of the strategies that France has used to under-develop Africa over the years. It is recommended

reading for students, professors and researchers in the domain of Francophone studies. Africans and friends of Africa should read it with an open mind.