

FRANCOPHONIE, WORLD BANK, AND THE  
COLLAPSE OF THE FRANCOPHONE AFRICA  
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM\*

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FRANCOPHONIE AND AFRICA, THE SO-CALLED FRANCOPHONE

In the aftermath of the independence of African countries, France could not tolerate the idea of losing territories and resources that were vital for its internal survival. Thus, it designed a more vicious but subtle policy in the name of *francophonie* that tightened more than ever before its political and economic control over the so-called francophone countries. The philosophical foundation of *francophonie* is the use of French as the major linguistic medium and the means by which France has achieved intellectual and cultural control and created economic dependency between her and the African countries (Bokamba and Tlou 1980; Bokamba 1984). In the name of technical assistance, France, through the terms of *francophonie*, controls even diplomatic cooperation between francophone African countries and their non-francophone partners.

Thus, *the francophonie* effect has several consequences for the educational system in Africa. First is its lack of adaptation to the real development needs of the countries. This emanates from the fact that its operational system lies on a backward system inherited from the old metropole which still persists in dictating to Africans what their school curricula and administration ought to be at all educational levels, from primary school to university. Agence Culturelle de Cooperation Technique (ACCT) represents the cul-

tural and technical agency of *francophonie*, that controls the implementation of reforms and the design of the school curriculum in Africa (Hutchison 1994; Alidou 1995). Within this context, the francophone African countries become the dumping market for French school manuals and technology that the French educational system itself has judged inadequate for learning and rejected for its own schools. One wonders what makes a bad manual in France good for Africa, especially if one has to consider the fact that the access to French universities by African graduates depends on whether they can compete with their French colleagues of the same level.

Another dimension of France's imperialist cooperation with the francophone countries as far as education is concerned is the flow to Africa of unqualified French educational experts whose mission is to train African educators—often more knowledgeable than the experts!—in how to use the useless materials dumped there. Thus, francophone Africa becomes the employment market for these unqualified experts who cannot be absorbed by a saturated and competitive employment market in France. The sad aspect of this cooperation is that the maintenance of these useless French expatriates is at the expense of the poor African countries which have to pay their salaries according to the scale dictated by the cost of living in France. Thus, in contrast to their African colleagues, who live a totally unenviable life, French expatriates come to have a standard of living far superior to the one they can afford in France. The maintenance of these communities of French expatriates in Africa, in the name of technical assistance to education, forces the francophone African countries to look for loans from agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at interest rates that are beyond the repayment capacity of these countries. The burden of this unnecessary foreign debt is what is weighing on many francophone African countries and this will continue for generations to come.

#### THE AFRICAN REFORM AND THE REACTION OF FRANCOPHONIE

In an attempt to limit the damage of French control over the African educational system, the francophone African countries, inspired by the educational reform of Anglophone countries such as Tanzania and Nigeria, opted in the late '70s to revise their curriculum ac-

ording to their developmental needs. Some dimensions of these reforms are the introduction of African languages asff

cultural agents, and nurses, not engineers, agronomists, and doctors. The latter category should be supplied to Africa by the West in the form of international bilateral or multilateral cooperation through institutions like the World Bank and IMF, that are supposedly better suited to identify the local African needs.

This racist and simplistic view of what type of education Africa ought to have is articulated by Christian Vandrendriessche, the French cultural attache in the Central African Republic who writes: "One could desire access to scientific knowledge for everybody in this planet. The educational manuals would then be more or less standardized. However, this is not desirable merely because if the world were only made up of pedagogy experts and doctors, it would lose its identity. One must by all means preserve its diversity and its inequality levels. This [diversity] is also a form of wealth. Personally, I do not believe that everybody should have access to the same education....The reform in Africa? One must make a distinction between African specificity and even national particularity and the need to open up to the world" (*AfriqueEducation, 1995:29-30*). In other words, educational underdevelopment is to be considered a worthy form of cultural diversity!

All over Africa this racist, unpopular, and exploitative reform recommended by the World Bank, the IMF and their allies faces the resistance of African educators, students at all levels, and informed citizens in the form of strikes and violent confrontations with African leaders who are puppets of these vessels of western imperialism. In francophone Africa, the crisis is made worse by the devaluation of the CFA franc, a development which, according to the terms of the independence agreement between France and its colonies, was never supposed to occur! In addition to this unforeseen devaluation, the World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs are forcing Francophone African countries to reduce the salary of the civil servants and to cut off student stipends, thus worsening the students' living conditions which were already unbearable. The irony is that the dependency of the francophone African students emanated from an administrative system inherited from the French, which prohibits full-time students from earning a living even when the government cannot provide their stipends.

These western institutions are thus pursuing a well calculated strategy whose main purpose is to bring down Africa to the limit of

its resilience and create the conditions for modelling the continent according to their imperialist agenda. This international conspiracy against the African educational system is already noticeable in the fact that the World Bank is dealing with French and French Canadian publishing companies for the supply of manuals and other educational materials intended for francophone African schools, while ignoring local African publishers. It is precisely this western monopoly in the production and publication of African educational manuals that a Togolese publisher tries to call the attention of both African governments and their bilateral and multilateral partners to, in the following words: "I am sorry to point out that World Bank policy of advertisement does not favor local African publishers. It sets conditions for the offering of contracts that cannot be met by local publishers who are limited in their capacities and cannot compete with western companies. I am not aware of the Canadian (Quebec) government's initiative to consolidate African countries publishing capacities. With regard to France, I have not seen an undertaking for strengthening the publishing capacities of the South. I do not believe it is in the interest of French publishers to help develop African publishers. In countries like Cameroon, 90% of the publishing market is controlled by French publishers" (*AfriqueEducation* 1995: 24). The same view was stressed by a publisher from Ivory Coast in the same interview: "I must say that we are hostile to the World Bank advertisement policy because it does not intend to help national publishers. We don't have any relationship with the World Bank. Having said this, it must be the responsibility of each country to determine its own priorities even if the World Bank is the loans provider. It gives loans, but it should not dictate what the publishing structures should be. In fact, its wish is to see African publishing companies destabilized" (*AfriqueEducation* 13, 1995: 24-25).

The questions that one ought to ask are: Why should the World Bank deal with French or French Canadian publishers such as Lavalin, Servedit, Haitier, and Edicef instead of African publishers, if its intent is really to revitalize African development? Isn't it counter-productive for poor countries, such as Niger, Togo, and Benin, which cannot even guarantee basic living conditions for their teachers and students, to undertake the purchasing of textbooks from western publishers who in deal in hard currency and impose high

prices while the local publishers can offer better deals and provide job opportunities to many unemployed young people? Whom does the cooperation between African countries and France, World Bank and IMF benefit the most?

The promotion of vocational training at the expense of higher education is merely a pretext for western institutions to restore their old control in Africa, and create a rationale for the return of western experts to implement their reform agenda.

Bringing the educational system to a halt, by means of students' and teachers' strikes is one way in which Africans are resisting this contemporary attack on their survival by western imperialism. For example, from 1987 to 1988, the University of Dakar was closed for a full academic year. In 1992, the University of Gabon experienced the same fate. In the Niger Republic, since 1989, the educational system has been in a state of chaos. This has been the way the educational constituency has shown its protest against the governments' intent to has