Chapter I

INTRODUCTION
POLITICAL MAP OF FRENCH WEST AFRICA
Among the European countries France enjoyed the privilege of governing a far flung empire in Africa. France entered Africa in the nineteenth century and gradually extended its control in North Africa, West Africa, Equatorial Africa, Somaliland and Madagascar. By the beginning of the twentieth century France had firmly established its hold in these parts of Africa.

**Physical Features**

The area of French West Africa was roughly eight times bigger than that of France. This vast area stretched from the Sahara of Algeria and Libya to the Gulf of Guinea where it met Equatorial Africa. It comprised the territories of Senegal, Ivory Coast, Soudan, Upper Volta, Niger, Guinea, and Mauritania. It had a common frontier with the British colonies like the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Gambia. Portuguese possession of Guinea and Spanish Sahara also shared common frontier with it.

The French West Africa was not densely populated. According to the census of 1961 the population was approximately

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16,700,000. It comprised different sects of Islam and Christianity. There was a great variety of ethnic and tribal groups. The frontiers of French West Africa were drawn by colonial powers which cut across ethnic boundaries. Thus the frontiers had separated ethnic groups such as Hausa, Ewe and Malinke. The peoples of French West Africa spoke 120 dialects.

The area grew agrarian products like coffee, cocoa, groundnuts and banana. It also had mineral resources like diamond and manganese. Markets of these products were widened with the betterment of transport facilities. The transport system of French West Africa was improved by France by building rail routes and roads. The rail routes were divided into four broad regions. They were Dakar-Niger, Conakry-Niger, Abidjan-Niger and Benin-Niger. Since the territory of Niger shared a common frontier with seven other territories it became a common factor in the entire system. The rail-routes were roughly 3,878 kilometres. The network of roads was roughly 7,500 kilometres. In addition to rail routes and roads, airports were built in Dakar, Abidjan and Conakry by 1951.

Among the French West African territories the conquest of the Ivory Coast took place relatively late. It was organized as a colony with the present frontiers in 1904 with an area of roughly 124,504 square miles.

3 Ibid., p. 9.
Ivory Coast is situated on the coast of Atlantic Ocean in the south with Upper Volta and Soudan (Mali) in the North, Ghana in the East and Liberia and Guinea in the West. The territory is sparsely populated. The population rose from 1,540,000 in 1920 to 2,170,000 in 1950 and 3,880,000 in 1965.

Ivory Coast has been a meeting ground of two religions namely Islam and Christianity. Its six principal ethnic groups are Akan, Krou, Lagunes, Malinke and Votaiques. Over sixty dialects are spoken in the Ivory Coast.

Ivory Coast is one of the richest territories of French West Africa. Its main products are coffee, cocoa and banana. The plantation economy of the country has attracted a sizable number of immigrants. The deepwater port at Abidjan which was built in 1950, and the terminal of the Abidjan-Ouagadougou railway contributed to the economic development of the Ivory Coast.

Political Evolution of French West Africa

French West Africa came into being as a legal entity in 1904. The colonialists adopted the policy of centralization in their colonies. There were three broad levels, viz, central, federal and territorial, through which the policies

6 Samir Amin, Neo-Colonialism in West Africa (Aylesbury, Bucks, 1973) translated from French by Francis McDonagh, p. 52.


8 For example, they were 950,000 in 1965 as against 100,000 in 1950.

were executed. The French Minister of Colonies was at the apex of the entire administrative system, with his headquarters in Paris. Below him, there were two Governor-Generals for the two federations, French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. As representatives of the Minister of Colonies, they were stationed at Dakar and Brazzaville, the respective capitals of the two federations. Below the Governor-Generals, there was a Governor in each territory who was entrusted to run the administration at the territorial level.

Political integration of Africans with France was one aspect of the French policy of integration. The other aspect was, France, by spreading French culture in its overseas territories wanted to absorb the colonies into the French system. The expression 'France Outre Mer' or 'Overseas France' conveyed the same desire. The policy of assimilation gave theoretical justification to the integrationist approach of France.

According to Remond F. Betts, assimilation in essence meant that the colony was to become integral, if non-contiguous, part of the mother country. Betts wrote that assimilation was a form of cultural imperialism. It appealed to French love of order, belief in man's equality and desire to spread French

10 The Federation of Equatorial Africa comprised territories such as Gabon, French Congo, Oubanguï-Chari, and Tchad.
11 Among the West African territories, Upper Volta had been divided among Soudan, Ivory Coast and Niger in 1932 but in 1948 it became a separate French colony.
culture in different parts of the world.

The policy of assimilation acquired a paramount importance during the early years of the Third Republic (1871-1910). African colonies were denied a separate identity and efforts were made to integrate them as part of French Republic. To implement this, the French educational system was imposed on the Africans.

Political participation of Africans in the functioning of the Republic was negligible. The French rulers had divided Africans into two groups viz, citizens and subjects. Only four communes of Senegal (Dakar, Rufisque, Goree and Saint-Louis) enjoyed citizenship of France. The four communes sent one representative in the Chamber of Deputies since 1875. The citizens of Senegal were electing representatives to govern four communes of Senegal since 1872. Citizenship also gave them the right to form political parties and other voluntary associations.

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13 Ibid. The policy of assimilation evolved through different stages of French colonial history. Before eighteenth century the French speaking Africans living in Saint Louis and Goree (Senegal) were describing themselves as Frenchmen and acting in that capacity. Napoleon the First did not follow this policy. His policies were dictated by practical concerns rather than doctrines like assimilation. With the advent of Napoleon III assimilation began to take roots. While defending the Algerian conquest he announced that France desired to bring the Algerians the benefits of French civilization.

14 As Morgenthau has observed, "Assimilation and French education have always been interwined. French colonisers in Africa did not produce an obvious 'colour line', as did the British. Instead, Frenchmen drew a 'culture line' not very different in practice from 'colour line'." See R.S. Morgenthau, Political Parties in French West Africa (London, 1964), p. 33.

15 Ibid.
In contrast to the four communes of Senegal, the rest of the people in West Africa were subjects. They had no right to send representatives to the metropolitan institutions. They were subject to the system of forced labour and indigenat. The forced labour system comprised legal categories of compulsory work. According to Morgenthalau, "The most severe system of forced labour existed where Europeans required the largest labour force, particularly, in the fertile forest zone of the Ivory Coast, where European planters and timber merchants had settled." Indigenat was another oppressive method. The indigenat referred to the special provisions in the penal code which permitted administrators to take speedy punitive actions against African subjects.

During the later stages of the Third Republic the policy of assimilation could not cope up with the increasing problems posed by the rapid expansion of the French empire. By the end of the First World War sizable land came under French control. It is during this period that the policy of assimilation became

16 Morgenthalau, n. 14, p. 3.

The northern chiefs of the Ivory Coast served as the main supplying agents of labour force. The decree of 25 October 1925 regulated the flow of labour from Savannah regions to the fertile South. It also fixed conditions for the recruitment and employment of African labour.

controversial.

Due to its impracticability, the French rulers strove to replace the policy of assimilation by 'association'. According to Betts, the great virtue of the policy of association was its simplicity, flexibility and practicality as against the rigidity and universalism in the doctrine of assimilation. It emphasized the need for variation in colonial practice and evolution of natives along their own lines.

After 1935, the policy of association became acceptable to most political parties of France. The supporters of the French right regarded it as an instrument to dominate inferior people. On the other hand, the supporters of the French left accepted it as a concession to the existing conditions.

In 1936, the popular front government comprising parties ranging from the radicals to the communists assumed power. The government liberalized the conditions for access to French citizenship and allowed a small number of educated Africans to become French citizens. It extended the right to form trade unions in Africa. It is also during this period that the French socialists and communists went to Africa and took up assignments as teachers, civil servants and doctors. They

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18 Jules Harmond, a well-known French intellectual, opposed the policy of assimilation. He condemned it as a foolish endeavour or a bankrupt attempt. He became a champion of 'association'. To him association was synonymous with co-operation. He listed tolerance, respect for native customs and laws and co-operation as salient features of association. See Jules Harmond, Domination et Colonisation (Paris, 1910).

19 Betts, n. 12, p. 106.
propagated that the emancipation of Africa would not take place without the French left.

During the Second World War (1939–1945) many educated natives allied themselves with the Free French movement. Thousands of Africans joined French army. It was in recognition of their service that De Gaulle, then leader of the anti-Fascist forces, saw the need for a revision of relationship between France and its colonies. He called a conference at Brazzaville from 30 January to 8 February 1944. Forty-four French colonial administrators and political leaders participated in the conference.

A controversy arose among the delegates relating to the post-war constitutional connections between France and the colonies. Governor General Eboue and Governor Latrille of the Ivory Coast stood for the establishment of federal institutions which could harmonise the social, economic and cultural differences between the French and the Africans. On the other hand, the colonial commissioner, Rene Pleven preferred centralized institutions under French control. According to Michel Crowder, "French policy was then a constant search for a compromise

20 Under popular front government, Governor General Eboue and Governor-General Coppet were appointed. Both of them were known colonial reformers. They looked at colonial subjects with a sympathetic angle. They tried to create feeling of friendship between France and Africans. The popular front regime came to an end with the fall of France in 1940.

21 Excepting Felix Eboue, there was no other African delegate.

22 The idea of forming self-government was dismissed. See, La Conference Africaine Francaise, Brazzaville Commissariat aux Colonies (Alger, 1944), p. 19.
between two extremes, for a formula that would conserve the unity of Greater France by retaining ultimate political control in Paris and yet allow a degree of local autonomy both compatible with this thesis of unity and yet sufficient to turn African politicians' attention away from the ideas of independence.

The Brazzaville delegates also discussed certain important social and economic problems. They stood for the abolition of the system of forced labour and replacement of the system of indigenat by a unified penal code independent of administrative system as well as native customs. They also agreed to promote developmental programmes in the colonies.

After the conference, Africans were given representation in the First Constituent Assembly (1945) on the basis of a double college system. This meant that the French citizens in Africa voted on a separate roll called the first college and the African subjects voted in the second electoral college. In the 1945 Constituent Assembly there were 67 representatives from the colonies. Out of them 36 were French citizens from the first electoral college, 24 from the second electoral college and 4 on the common rolls. Of these French West Africa sent five representatives from the first college and five from the second college.


The Fourth French Republic came into being in 1946. It established the French Union comprising metropolitan France, its overseas territories, departments and associated states. Article 81 of the Constitution stated: "All French nationals and subjects of the French Union are citizens of French Union, a title which ensures for them the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Preamble". The right of the Union improved African position. The Union's Assembly was formed in 1947 with 240 members.

The Fourth Republic gave representation to the overseas territories of West Africa in the metropolitan parliament. In the National Assembly there were twenty-seven deputies (out of 627), elected on the common roll, and in the Council of Republic there were twenty-seven senators (out of 320).

Introduction of these political bodies encouraged the formation of political parties and associations in Africa. Thus the post-war period witnessed the rise of leaders like Senghor and Houphouet Boigny.

Senghor completed his 'Agrege De Grammaire' and became professor in France in 1935. He entered the National Assembly


26 Ibid., pp. 384-5.

27 After 1953, it had only 204 members as a result of the withdrawal of North African territories from participation in Union affairs.

28 The senators were elected by the territorial assemblies which were instituted in each territory from 1947. Neres, n. 17, p. 47.
as a deputy of Senegal in 1945. He was elected from the second college. He was one of the founder members of the Senegalese party called Bloc Démocratique Senégalaise (B.D.S.) which came into being in 1946. B.D.S. under his leadership became successful in the 1951 elections. He championed the idea of federal state for French West Africa. In 1958, he found Union Progressiste Senégaloise (U.P.S.) which became the single dominant party in Senegal. After 1960, he became the first president of Senegal.

Houphouet Boigny of the Ivory Coast belonged to the family of traditional rulers. He learned in Ecole de Medicine of Dakar and became a doctor. In 1939 he became the chieftain of the Akoue group. In 1932, he organized the African farmers of Abengourou against the forced labour system. He found the Syndicat Agricole Africain in 1944. He was also the founder member of Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (P.D.C.I. 1946) of the Ivory Coast. He played a very important role in the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (R.D.A.) which was one of the dominant interterritorial parties. He stood for the territorial autonomy of African territories. After 1960, he became the first president of the Ivory Coast.


Economic Relations

The economic relationship between France and its West African colonies was based on import of agricultural products and export of manufactured goods from France. France continued to be the most important market as well as provisioner for its West African colonies. Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff observed that the form of exchange between France and its colonies was non-competitive and complimentary and to such relationship was given the name 'colonial pact', "although it involved no element of agreement on the part of dependencies". The colonial pact subordinated the interests of colonies to the mother country. Also the colonies had to finance the developmental projects through their own resources. France offered only minimal aid to them.

Under the French rule the economic service departments, such as public works, agriculture and stock raising forests began to expand after 1925. According to Hubert Deschamps, "The administration played a vital part in the organization of agricultural production. It forced the African to abandon his traditional economy which had been limited to his own village and his own needs". Introduction of money and the development of communications along the coast led to the creation of exchange economy based on export crops. From

32 'Head tax' supplied the maximum revenue to the local budgets of the territories.
33 Deschamps, n. 4, p. 239.
1920 to 1939 cash crop exports increased considerably. With the increase of cash crop exports trading companies became an important feature of the West African economy. The Campagne Francaise de l'Afrique Occidentale (C.F.A.O.), associated with six banks, steamship lines and industry in Marseille and Bordeaux, built up its business around the export of French West African products and imported manufactured goods from France. By 1948, it increased its capital from 800/metroplitan francs to 1,200 million francs. The Societe Commerciale de l'Ouest Africaine (S.C.O.A.), associated with Banque de l'Union Parisionne, formed the Societe Agricole Africaine for the development of palm oil, and banana plantations in the Ivory Coast. In 1953, it nearly doubled its capital and a year later announced that it would decentralize and set up subsidiary companies. Finally, another important company, Unilever's UAC, in conjunction with its interests in Metropolitan France, formed Compagnie Francaise de la Cote D'Ivoire.

34 From 1920-39 Senegal's export of groundnuts rose from 220,000 metric tons to 600,000 metric tons. Ivory Coast's coffee export rose from 2,000 metric tons to 53,000 metric tons.


36 While commenting on the role of great trading companies in the West African economies Reginald Green and Ann Seidman observed:

They generally fail to invest in the economy outside of the export oriented enclave - they are primarily concerned to encourage cash-crop production for sale overseas - and import consumer goods for a sale at high prices to those who can afford them. Until recently, they received government aid in the form of preferential prices for African crops that...

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In terms of trade the French West Africa was closely integrated with France. Roughly seventy per cent of its imports came from France and about the same proportion of its exports were sold in France. French West Africa was a high price area due to restrictions on purchases from non-franc areas. Africans paid higher than the world prices for the goods they imported. In turn French West African exporters sold their goods at higher than the world prices in French market. The market was protected by tariffs, quotas and exchange controls. During the post-war period peanuts from French West Africa were sold at 15 to 20 per cent above world prices; also coffee, a main product of the Ivory Coast, enjoyed twenty per cent reduction in tariff from France.

France also gave considerable aid to her colonies for economic and social development. Fonds d'Investissement Sociale Pour Le developpement Economique et Sociale de territoires outre mer (F.I.D.E.S. established in 1946) was a major agency that distributed aid. It was administered by the Caisse Centrale de la France d'Outre Mer. The fund was

they sold in France; and of restrictions on the importation of manufactured goods from outside France into French-speaking Africa. They send the major share of their profits back to France.

Ibid.

Also see Haut Commissariat de la Republique en Afrique Occidentale Francaise, A.O.F., Tableaux Economique (Dakar, 1958).

appropriated by the French parliament. From 1947 to 1958 it appropriated and spent the total sum of £2,146,000,000 of which 46 per cent went to French West Africa.

A by-product of the aid given to African states for economic and social development was proliferation of French administrators and technicians. In 1954, French West Africa had 42,500 civil servants. Out of them 5,300 were Europeans.

The political leaders in French West Africa were, however, critical of French aid and personnel. They argued that they were not consulted during the planning of the utilization of aid. It was also believed that the big French firms drew disproportionate profits from aid. Large and visible public works which bolstered the prestige of France and French industry were given priority over smaller and more useful schemes. Further, too much money was disbursed for transport and

38 Since 1951, the Ivory Coast was especially favoured by the F.I.D.E.S. From 1947 to 1957 it got £109 million. During the same period, among West African states, only Senegal received an amount that was higher than the Ivory Coast. Stewart Easton, Twilight of European Colonialism (New York, 1960), p. 348. Also see the table of the distribution of F.I.D.E.S. in Appendix V.

39 The situation in the Ivory Coast was illustrative for the Africans. In 1958, only twenty high level officials were Ivorian Africans.

40 The grand council building of Dakar and Abidjan bridge were well known examples. Also the Bouake airport in the Ivory Coast was luxuriously built; it serviced about two local flights a week while Lagos (Nigeria) airport was much less luxuriously built but it had twenty times more traffic than the former.
communication facilities. It was argued that money went in paying higher salaries of the expatriates and as such was not reinvested in Africa. African states either had to hire or purchase machines and technical skills in order to promote production.

Thus, the territories of French West Africa evolved politically and economically under the federation of French West Africa. With this background in mind, it would be easier to analyse the circumstances that led to the beginning of interdependence between France and the Ivory Coast.