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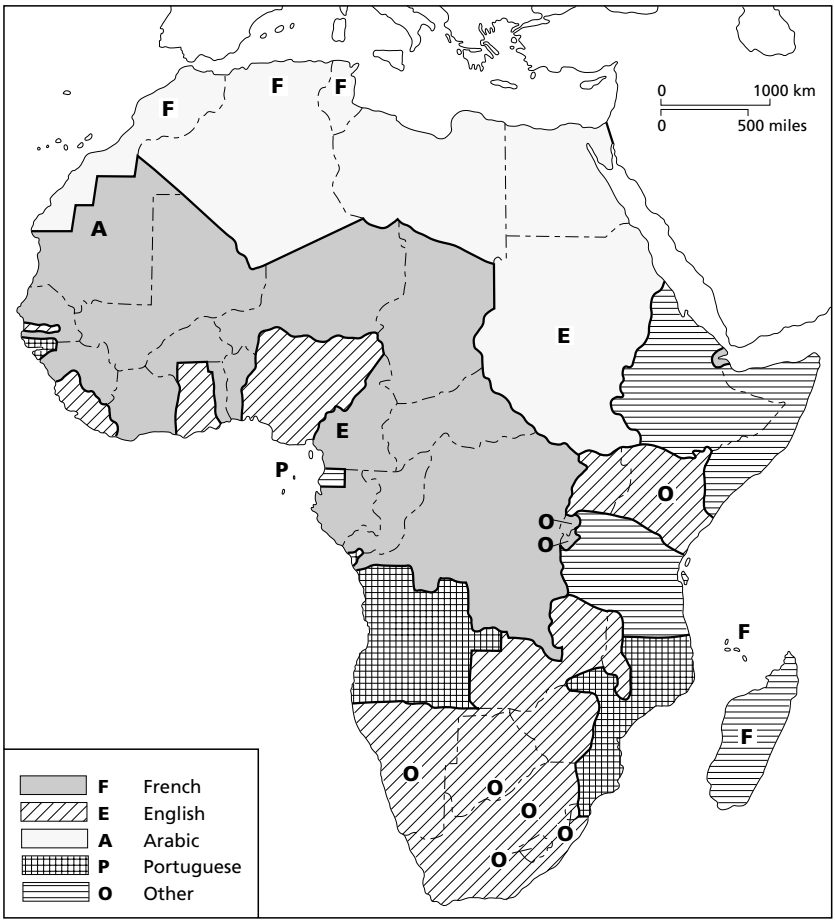
Prologue

Francophone sub-Saharan Africa consists today of 17 countries of West and Central Africa in which French is the language of government. These 17 nations range in a contiguous semicircle from Mauritania in the west to Chad in the east and to Zaire in the south. They were colonies of France and Belgium from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century. (Other former French territories outside of West and Central Africa are not included in this book.) Francophone sub-Saharan Africa, defined in these terms, has existed for just over a century; it was brought into existence with the European conquest of Africa which reached its height in the 1880s.

Francophone sub-Saharan Africa covers an area of ten million square kilometers, which is 40% of the area of sub-Saharan Africa, or 35% of the area of the entire African continent. The 1995 population of the 17 countries was estimated at over 100 million, or one-fifth of the entire African population. The area of francophone sub-Saharan Africa is 17 times that of France and Belgium combined, and its population is today almost twice that of France and Belgium combined. Zaire is the largest of the francophone African countries – it is the second largest African nation in area, and third largest in population. Rwanda is the smallest and most densely populated country in francophone sub-Saharan Africa. It is equal in area to Belgium, and had a 1995 population two-thirds that of Belgium. France is slightly larger in area than Cameroon, while the 1995 population of Zaire, Cameroon and Ivory Coast taken together were nearly equal to that of France.

French, English, and Arabic are the main languages of government in Africa today. Map 2, which shows African countries according to their main language of government, provides a simplified portrait of the colonial history of the continent. The English-speaking (or *anglophone*) countries include the former British colonies plus Liberia, and accounted for 40% of Africa's population in 1995. Anglophone Africa includes Africa's largest country (Sudan), its most populous nation (Nigeria), and its wealthiest nation (South Africa), as well as most of East Africa. Arabic-speaking Africa includes the nations of North Africa plus the sub-Saharan countries of Sudan and Mauritania; these countries had 20% of the African population in 1995. The Portuguese-speaking (or *lusophone*) nations, all of which are former colonies of Portugal, accounted in 1995 for another 4% of the African population.



Map 2 Official languages in Africa, 1995

Two types of exceptions are governed in yet other languages: Ethiopia is governed in Amharic, Tanzania is governed in Swahili, Somalia is governed in Somali, and Equatorial Guinea is governed in Spanish. These nations accounted for 13% of the African population in 1995. Secondly, in a number of cases, nations have more than one official language: Arabic and English in Sudan, Arabic and French in Mauritania, Kirundi and French in Burundi, French and English in Cameroon, English and Afrikaans and others in South Africa.

This book concentrates on one area of the continent for a century in time. It includes all of the former Belgian colonies and most of the former French colonies in Africa. Excluded from the book are eight former French colonies (Djibouti on the Red Sea, the North African nations of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, and, in the Indian Ocean, the nations of the Comoros and the

Malagasay Republic, and the island of Reunion, now a department within the French Republic). This is because their histories, while important, are quite different from those of the 17 nations on which we shall focus.

What is unique and characteristic about francophone sub-Saharan Africa? Partly it is the common ancestral heritage of West and Central Africa – the centuries of development and interaction in the valleys of the Senegal, the Niger, the Shari, the Ogowe and the Zaire. Partly it is the French and Belgian imprint on this immense region – the French language and the accompanying traditions of law, administration, and education. It is true that these territories were French-speaking only at the elite and administrative levels during much of the past century, because the colonial regimes kept education and political participation at a minimum. But in the era of decolonization, since World War II, the French language has come to be spoken very widely.

The third set of links among these 17 nations is that, in the years since independence, they have chosen to draw on and to develop a broad cultural unity which is worthy of the term "francophone African culture." Francophone African culture emerged from a fusion of French culture with African culture. At the elite level, African poets, political figures, and philosophers carried out this fusion. Their achievement is mirrored, for instance, in the pages of the literary and scholarly journal *Présence africaine*. At the popular level, an equally important cultural fusion was carried out by village school teachers, musicians, merchants, and preachers. The songs of the Zairian musicians Franco and Rochereau (or Luambo Makiadi and Tabu Ley, as they are now known) provide examples of the strength of this popular culture.

In contrast with anglophone Africa, the francophone countries use the metric system and drive on the right; they also have more centralized administrations. In contrast with Arab Africa, francophone sub-Saharan African countries emphasize their recent history rather than the glories of their medieval histories. In contrast with lusophone Africa, the francophone countries gained independence without having to go to war for it, and are left with a tradition giving relative emphasis to moderation and compromise. In contrast with the nations of eastern Africa, where Amharic, Somali, and Swahili define specifically African linguistic communities, the francophone nations emphasize their participation in a world linguistic community.

The experience of francophone sub-Saharan Africa in the century from 1880 to 1985, while unique in these and other respects, also has important parallels with the experience of English-, Portuguese-, and Arabic-speaking Africa. As a result, while the story to be told in these pages is primarily about the specific experience of francophone sub-Saharan Africa, it illustrates many of the issues and the trends which have been important throughout Africa. In some cases, as with the Great Depression of the 1930s or the influenza pandemic in 1918, the history of francophone Africa can scarcely be separated from that of the rest of Africa. In other cases, as with language policy or political rights, the history of francophone Africa is unique and distinct.

The colonial experience and decolonization brought changing identities for Africans at both individual and collective levels. This is reflected particularly in

changing names of countries and colonies in francophone Africa. Thus, the nation known today as Mali was known as French Sudan from 1922 to 1959, as Upper-Senegal-Niger from 1900 to 1922, and by other names in earlier periods. The nation known today as Zaire was given its boundaries as the Congo Independent State in 1885. It became the Belgian Congo in 1908, then became the Republic of Congo in 1960, the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1965, and became Zaire in 1971. Across the Zaire River (also known as the Congo) lies the People's Republic of Congo (or Congo-Brazzaville, after its capital), as it has been known since 1963. This territory was known as French Congo beginning in 1885 and as Middle Congo from 1910 to 1958, when it became the Republic of Congo. In the text we shall refer to these countries by their modern names as frequently as possible, but it will often be necessary to use their earlier names. Four maps in this chapter should help to clarify the changing names of African political units: map 1 (1995), map 3 (1880), map 4 (1900), and map 5 (1940).

The book traces three types of influences over the course of a century. First, it presents African society, its history and its changes. Secondly, it describes colonial rule in Africa, and the French and Belgian nations which were behind the colonial administrations. Thirdly, it discusses African consequences of the industrial transformation of the modern world. This industrial revolution goes beyond the influence of any European or African nation, and has led to the internationalization of the economy, of politics and of culture.

The objective of this history is, first, to present the main facts of the historical development of francophone sub-Saharan Africa. A second objective, perhaps equally important, is to convey the outlook and the identity of the peoples of francophone Africa. In the pages below, the reader (with the assistance of a little imagination) may re-enact the historical experience of the peoples of francophone Africa. Through participating indirectly in that experience, one may seek to understand and articulate the viewpoints, hopes, and fears of those who actually lived it and who live it today.

THE AFRICAN LANDSCAPE

The landscape of francophone sub-Saharan Africa stretches in three broad belts from west to east. The *northern savanna* or the *sudan* is the largest and most populous of these belts. The *equatorial forest* lies astride the equator in the Zaire River basin, and smaller patches of forest stretch along the West African coast to Bénin, Togo, Ivory Coast, and Guinea. The *southern savanna* covers the southern half of Congo and Zaire and extends into neighboring Angola and Zambia. In addition, the *highlands* of Rwanda, Burundi, and the Kivu region of Zaire are a small but densely populated region of open grassland and regular rains. In 1880 the lands of francophone Africa supported roughly 30 million people, almost all of them in rural settlements. About 15 million lived in the northern savanna, some 6 million lived in forest zones, about 4 million lived in the southern savanna, and about 3 million lived in the highlands. These great landscapes, and the many variations within them, reflected and in turn conditioned the rainfall, the temperature, the

vegetation, the animal life, and above all the forms of human habitation of each. Since much of the story to follow will be told in terms of these landscapes, we shall begin with a more detailed description of each, as they appeared a century ago.

The northern savanna, a great expanse of grassland with trees dotting the river valleys and the wetter lands, is bounded to the north by the Sahara Desert and to the south by dense forest hugging the coast. This broad savanna, known as "the bright country" by the Mandingo people of Mali, is covered with fertile soil, but most crops must be grown during the short summer rainy season. The savanna stretches 3,000 kilometers from the coast of Senegal to Lake Chad in the center of the continent and another 3,000 kilometers to the Red Sea. The desert edge of the savanna, known as the *sahel* (Arabic for "coast," since the Sahara can be seen as a sea of sand), has short grass and fluctuating rains. Some years it could be farmed, other years it was grazed, and some years it had to be abandoned.

The northern savanna is often called the *sudan*, from the Arabic term for "the land of the blacks." The sudan is divided into three sections: the Western Sudan (the Senegal and upper Niger valleys), the Central Sudan (the lower Niger valley and the basin of Lake Chad), and the Eastern Sudan (the Nile valley). We shall be concerned with the Western and Central Sudan. Only a small portion of this vast area is drained by the westward-flowing Senegal and Gambia rivers. Most of it is drained by the mighty Niger, which rises in the mountains of Futa Jallon in Guinea, flows northeast to the desert edge at Timbuktu, and then curves in a great bend to flow southeast. From its bend the Niger flows across the savanna toward the coast where, after passing under the forest, it finally discharges its waters through a maze of creeks into the Bights of Benin and Biafra. Further east, in the very center of the continent, the Shari River rises just beyond the northern fringe of the forest and flows gently northward into the landlocked basin of Lake Chad. The lake, salty and shallow after millions of years of receiving the Shari, still supports a large fish population.

Each year, summer rains brought the savanna to life. Intense labors of the farmers, working with hoes, resulted in preparation of fields and planting of millet and sorghum, the main grain crops. Within two months of sprouting, millet stalks reached heights of two meters. These and other crops covered the landscape with a carpet of green. But after the millet harvest in September and the end of the rains in October, the savanna turned back to the brown, grey, and gold which dominated its colors for most of the year. In one sense the farmers of Senegal and the savanna stretching to the east were repeating an annual cycle that had been carried on for the thousands of years since millet had been domesticated. But the rains were not always regular, and in too many years they did not come at all. Farmers planned accordingly, and built the granaries whose conical forms became a dominant feature of savanna architecture. In another sense, the basic patterns of savanna agriculture and life generally had changed from generation to generation in response to the many movements, innovations, and reverses of Africa's long history.

The forest, which skips along the West African coast from Guinea to Cameroon, with a breadth of 100 kilometers at most, expands to nearly 1,000 kilometers in breadth in Central Africa, and extends eastward over 2,000 kilometers from the Atlantic to the highlands of Kivu and Uganda. The western portion of the equatorial forest is drained by the Ogowe River. The great majority of the equatorial forest is drained by the Zaire River and its tributaries: the Ubangi in the north and the Lualaba and the Lomami in the east. The Zaire flows in a great semicircle through the forest and emerges into the southern savanna before flowing to the sea. Its level rises and falls in a complicated pattern in response to rains north and south of the equator. Forested areas have two rainy seasons each year, with the heavy rains in late spring and lighter rains in late summer. For the forest south of the equator, the spring rains begin in October, and the summer rains begin in February. Despite the luxurious and dense foliage of the rain forests, the underlying soils were poor and weak in nutrients. Winning a livelihood from this land required farmers to plan and to work energetically.

Crops varied significantly among regions of the forest. In the most westerly regions, from Guinea to Ivory Coast, the main crop was rice. This was not the paddy rice of Asian origin (which is today a favorite staple in most African cities), but the dry rice native to Western Africa. Further east, along the coast from Ivory Coast to Cameroon, the main crops were yams and maize. Finally, the peoples of the Zaire and Ogowe basin forest lived primarily on plantain and bananas. Aside from these basic crops, the farmers of the forest region grew a variety of other crops (farmers in the Zaire basin grew as many as 30 different crops at once), and they also raised poultry and small domestic animals such as goats and sheep.

The mouth of the Zaire River lies in the southern savanna, an expanse of grassland extending from the southern fringes of the equatorial forest, at some five degrees latitude south, to the Namib Desert in modern Namibia, and ranging eastward to the great lakes. In the west, the lower Zaire is fed by the Kasai and Kwango rivers. To the east, the Luapula River flows north across the savanna and feeds ultimately into the upper Zaire.

The millet-growing peoples of this savanna had formed themselves into states much larger than those of the forest region to the north. But they had also been involved deeply in slave trade during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a result, many people had begun to grow manioc as well as millet, since they found this tuber easy to grow and productive. In addition, it could be left in the ground for over a year before harvesting.

The highland areas of Rwanda, Burundi, and Kivu, in the midst of Africa's Great Lakes region, form quite a different ecology. This area averages 1,500 meters in elevation and towers above the Zaire basin, 1,000 meters below and to the west. The region's ample rains drain into Lake Kivu and Lake Tanganyika, and then flow down to the savanna and the Lualaba River. The main crops in the highland savanna were several varieties of beans, and they permitted the growth of francophone Africa's densest populations.

The labels on map 3 indicate the main geographical regions within franco-

Map 3 Africa in 1880

phone sub-Saharan Africa. First, it is divided into its West African and Central African halves. West Africa includes all the countries from Senegal to Niger. Central Africa includes all the countries from Chad and Cameroon to Zaire. Secondly, each of these great regions is divided into three (or four) large ecological zones reflected in the crops, the peoples, and in socio-economic patterns. In the more populous West Africa, the zones are the sahel, the savanna, and the coast (where the coast includes the forest and the adjoining wet savanna). In Central Africa, the four zones are the northern savanna, the forest, and the southern savanna, and, to the east, the densely populated highlands.

THE ANCESTRY OF FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

Francophone sub-Saharan Africa was born of an African mother and a European father; from the union of two old civilizations emerged a new civilization. This new civilization matured under the influence of both parents, and it is marked by the characteristics of each parent (although, as with all offspring, it developed its own unique characteristics). To understand fully the nascent francophone African civilization, one must know something of the background of the parents. In this section (and in other sections later in the book) the reader will find summaries of some key aspects of earlier African and European history. For more background on earlier African life, and also on European history, the reader should consult the guide to further reading at the end of this book, which lists a number of excellent introductions to precolonial African society, as well as surveys of French and Belgian history.

The distant histories of peoples serve to establish their ethnic identity and their national character. The French honor the emperor Charlemagne (who died in 814) as an early hero, and they still chant the *Song of Roland*, an epic history of France focused partly on the influence of its Catholic church. Even more important was the rise and expansion of the French monarchy, which conquered and assimilated a large area of Western Europe. With time, the rise in France of a strong intellectual and literary tradition served to reinforce the strength of the monarchy. Under François I, French (rather than Latin) became the official language of government in 1515. Louis XIV (1643–1715) was France's most powerful and brilliant king; he and his ministers did much to make the French monarchy the dominant power in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During these centuries, France established colonies in the Americas, Asia, and Africa, which set precedents for later African colonization.

The Belgian tradition looks back not only to monarchs such as Charlemagne (his capital was at the edge of Belgium), but also to *Everyman*, the anonymous hero of the great medieval Flemish morality play. The Belgian inheritance from the ages is not one of such unity and central power as the French, but is rather one of continuing economic leadership and regional identity despite social conflict. Since early medieval times, the lands of Belgium have been shared by people speaking French and Dutch languages, peoples

now known as Walloons and Flemings. Late in the Middle Ages, the communes or towns of Belgium were centers of commerce and industry, whose leaders prized their independence from the feudal lords who remained on country estates. For a brief time in the fifteenth century, all of the French- and Dutch-speaking areas of the Netherlands were united under the leadership of the dukes of Burgundy. Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy from 1419 to 1467, maintained his court in Brussels and made his realm one of the powers of Europe. The Low Countries, as they are also known, boasted Europe's most prosperous economy and a brilliant cultural life. But the perils of royal marriage soon awarded the Netherlands to Spain, and the great conflicts of the Reformation split the area in half. The northern half became the independent Republic of the Netherlands, a Protestant area. The southern half remained staunchly Catholic and remained under Spanish (and later Austrian) rule; thus did Belgium gain its identity.

African traditions are equally deep and far more numerous. In the Western Sudan, for example, the thirteenth-century epic of *Sundiata* (who died in about 1250), the conquering founder of the empire of Mali in the Western Sudan, is still recounted today. The Guinean scholar D. T. Niane recorded it and translated it into French, so that this epic has now become part of the heritage of all Africa. It tells of Sundiata's youth in exile, his devotion to his mother, the wars in which he matched battlefield skills and supernatural powers against the tyrant Soumaoro, and his establishment of a greatly expanded Mali empire. Quite a different epic is from the forest: that of *Mwindo*, the hero of the Nyanga people of northeastern Zaire. Mwindo, a small man with great powers, was born miraculously (through his mother's side) to a chief. The chief rejected his son, and Mwindo escaped to the safety provided by a paternal aunt. Through adventures under water, underground, and in the skies (where lightning became his protector) Mwindo made his way back to his birthplace. There he settled accounts with his father, and accepted half the state as his compensation.

Another measure of African tradition is the list of kings of Rwanda in the highlands at the eastern fringe of Central Africa; a list remembered in precise detail for a period of over three centuries, and including all major personages of the court. In the southern savanna the Lunda kings imposed their influence over a wide region beginning in the sixteenth century, with bracelets made of human nerves as a key symbol of royalty. The rise of the Lunda empire, in the southern savanna, is recounted through the story of Chibinda Ilunga, who immigrated to the Lunda homeland, married queen Rweej, became king, and began a tradition of sending emissaries to found subject kingdoms in nearby areas.

These stories of ancient origin establish the ethnic identity of African and European peoples. More important in determining their outlooks and actions as they came into close contact with each other, however, were the experiences of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. France and Belgium each experienced revolutions and a strengthening of national identity. Germany emerged as a European power and established African colonies which later

became part of francophone Africa. The African territories experienced change as revolutionary as that in Europe. Strong states emerged, new directions of commerce developed, religions gained new converts, economic life was reorganized, and new family structures and social classes formed. In sum the French, the Belgians, and the African peoples collided with each other in the 1880s, but they all were undergoing great internal changes even as they encountered each other.

In France, the Revolution of 1789–99 overthrew the monarchy, wrote a charter for the universal rights of man, and gave birth to the first French republic, to modern nationalism, and to a new sort of empire under Napoleon Bonaparte. With this, France began the oscillation between revolution and autocracy which has characterized its politics ever since. French domination of Europe ended with the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. In political and economic affairs, France lived thereafter in the shadow of Britain and later of Germany.

By the time of the revolution, France had lost most of its old colonies to Britain. France also lost its valuable sugar colony in Haiti. There the ex-slaves who had gained their freedom in 1794 threw out Napoleon's troops and proclaimed the independent nation of Haiti on New Year's Day, 1804. But a quarter-century later, France began a new venture in African colonization with the 1830 invasion of Algiers. After taking over this port town, the French military soon found itself involved in a long struggle with the brilliant Arab general Abd al-Qadir. After 15 years the French emerged supreme and began sending settlers to take over the best land.

France's second revolution and Second Republic came in 1848. French slaves were freed a second time, and this time for good. But in 1852 the republic gave way to the Second Empire, under Emperor Napoleon III. The emperor, Louis Bonaparte (a nephew of the earlier Napoleon), had served as president of the republic until he seized complete power. Napoleon III built a strong and reforming administration within France. His colonial ventures included some expansion in Africa, and support for the conquest of Mexico by the Austrian prince Maximilian.

Meanwhile the Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck led in consolidating dozens of small German states. To complete this process, Bismarch provoked war with France in 1870, and the combined German armies won easily. At a victory celebration in Paris, Bismarck proclaimed the united German Empire, and annexed to it the industrial French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. In an instant, Germany had become the predominant economic and military power in Europe. Meanwhile, the Second French Empire collapsed and was followed by the revolutionary upheaval of the Paris Commune. The Commune was suppressed by French and German soldiers, and in 1871 the Third French Republic was formed. The French, humiliated in war and riven by social conflict, thirsted for revenge and for glory. Some sought to quench this thirst through African conquest; Jules Ferry and Leon Gambetta became the leading parliamentary spokesmen for French imperialism.

The Third Republic lasted until the next German conquest of France in 1940. The republic was dominated by a coalition of republican parties, though