

The Representation of Cunning Strategies to Maximise the Political Personalisation: Machiavellian Approach to Holding and Retaining Power in Africa

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Abstract: *This study explores the representation of Machiavellian strategies by dictators in Francophone Africa, focusing on their use of cunning discourse to manipulate political actors and the public to consolidate and retain power. Despite extensive scholarship on political manipulation, limited attention has been given to the literary representation of such tactics in contemporary African narratives. By analysing Alimou Sinta's novel *Le sang pour l'alternance* (2021), the research examines how rhetoric, deception, and strategic manoeuvring shape authoritarian governance. Using Machiavellian theory and discourse analysis, this study highlights how political personalisation is reinforced through calculated rhetoric and performative governance. The findings contribute to discussions on authoritarian resilience, the instrumentalisation of discourse in power retention, and the intersection of literature and political strategy. By bridging political theory and literary analysis, this research enriches understandings of dictatorship in Francophone Africa and the broader implications of cunning discourse in governance.*

Keywords: Machiavellianism, political manipulation, authoritarianism, Francophone Africa, discourse analysis, power retention.

INTRODUCTION

In Francophone Africa, leaders who use Niccolò Machiavelli's strategies have profoundly shaped the political landscape. These leaders often use cunning discourse and manipulative tactics to consolidate and retain power, an approach reminiscent of Machiavellian principles that prioritise political expediency over moral considerations. While extensive scholarship has examined political manipulation in various contexts (Munyangeyo, 2010; Thomas, 2002), there remains a paucity of research focusing on the literary representation of such tactics in contemporary African narratives. This study seeks to bridge this gap by analysing Alimou

Sinta's novel, *Le sang pour l'alternance* (2021), to explore how rhetoric, deception, and strategic manoeuvring are examined as tools of authoritarian governance.

Machiavelli's political manipulation strategies displayed in *The Prince* offer a pragmatic approach to governance, advocating for the use of cunning, duplicity, and realpolitik to achieve and maintain political power. Machiavelli argues that rulers must be willing to act immorally when necessary because the ends should always justify the means in the pursuit of political stability and control. This perspective has been both influential and controversial, providing a framework for understanding the actions of leaders who prioritise power over ethical considerations.

Since literature serves as a mirror to society, it is common for novels to reflect critically the socio-political dynamics within which fictional narratives are created. In Francophone African literature, narratives often grapple with themes of power, corruption, and resistance, providing nuanced insights into the lived experiences of individuals under authoritarian regimes. In this regard, Thomas (2002) examines the role of literature in the political processes of nation-building and propaganda in Francophone Africa, analysing how authors engage with themes of power and governance. In African politics, Machiavellian strategies have been observed among various leaders who use manipulation, coercion, and patronage to maintain their regimes. Many literary representations of dictatorships in post-independent Francophone Africa have exemplified Machiavellian tactics by consolidating power through public executions of political rivals, pervasive corruption, and a cult of personality. Shotunde (2019) interrogates politics as an interest-driven game through the lens of Machiavelli's ideas on political power, analysing their contemporary relevance, especially in new states with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. In the last three decades, the theme of systematic elimination of opposition and the strategic use of state resources to reward loyalty, thereby entrenching their authoritarian rule has remained recurrent Munyangayo (2024a) examines how the discourse of manipulation is used for political and socio-economic gains, and its impact on sustainable development. Despite the rich tradition of political commentary in African literature, there is a relative dearth of novels explicitly making specifically references, in their representations, to Machiavellian strategies by dictators in contemporary works.

Alimou Sinta's *Le sang pour l'alternance* emerges as a critical text in this discourse. Set in the fictional nation of Guiny, the novel delves into the machinations of President Décon, a former law professor who ascends to power with promises of democratic reform. However, as his tenure progresses, Décon resorts to constitutional manipulation and rhetorical subterfuge to extend his rule indefinitely, embodying the very despotism he once decried. This narrative offers a fertile ground for examining how literary works depict the use of Machiavellian tactics in the African political milieu.

By applying Machiavellian theory to the analysis of *Le sang pour l'alternance*, this study aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which cunning discourse and strategic manipulation are discoursed by contemporary novelists to unveil strategies used to strengthen authoritarian governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE POWER OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

Discourse serves as a fundamental instrument in authoritarian governance, particularly in Francophone Africa, where manipulative communication strategies are meticulously employed to legitimise power, suppress dissent, and shape public perception. Authoritarian leaders design narratives that project an image of benevolence and inevitability, often masking oppressive practices behind a facade of progress and stability.

In authoritarian contexts, discourse is not merely a medium of communication, but a strategic tool wielded to construct and maintain power structures (Mbembe, 2001). This strategic use of language extends to the suppression of dissent. By controlling the narrative, authoritarian leaders can marginalise opposition voices, framing them as threats to national unity or progress. This manipulation creates and fosters a culture of fear and conformity, where alternative viewpoints are not only discouraged but actively persecuted.

Leaders such as Alpha Condé of Guinea, whose constitutional manoeuvres allowed him to extend his rule despite growing opposition, and Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaïre - now the Democratic Republic of Congo - mastered the art of using discourse as a political instrument. Mobutu promoted an ideology of "authenticity," a discourse he engineered to erase colonial influences and replace them with a state-sponsored cultural self-consciousness and nationalism (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). This rhetoric not only reinforced his personal rule but also delegitimised political opposition by branding dissenters as foreign agents or traitors to national identity.

A common feature of authoritarian discourse is the systematic portrayal of opposition figures and dissidents as threats to national cohesion (Munyangeyo, 2024b). This tactic was particularly evident in the discourse of former Burkina Faso leader Blaise Compaoré, whose government often depicted opposition movements as destabilising forces rather than legitimate political actors (Hagberg, 2002). By framing political challenges as existential threats, authoritarian leaders created a climate in which repression is justified as a necessary measure to protect the nation.

State-controlled media and government spokespersons play a crucial role in reinforcing these narratives. The press, often co-opted by authoritarian regimes, becomes an instrument of propaganda rather than a watchdog of power. Critical journalism is stifled through censorship, intimidation, and, in extreme cases, violence against journalists (Tshimanga, 2018). Even in the digital where access to information has been expanded in the scope and paradigm, many governments have increasingly deployed cyber surveillance and internet shutdowns to curb dissenting voices in online spaces (Feldstein, 2019).

Many authoritarian governments in Francophone Africa use Machiavellian strategies to design an illusion of democratic discourse. They maintain a semblance of democracy through

controlled political discourse by which electoral processes are often framed as democratic exercises, even when they are fundamentally flawed. Leaders such as Paul Biya of Cameroon, and Omar Bongo and his son Ali Bongo of Gabon have repeatedly invoked democratic rhetoric to legitimise their prolonged rule while simultaneously undermining genuine democratic institutions (Gardinier, 2016). Elections become a performative exercise reinforcing the leader's image rather than serving as mechanisms of political change. This performative authoritarianism is widely observable in the political landscapes of Francophone Africa, where leaders hold elections with predetermined outcomes and where opposition figures are often co-opted or silenced.

State-sponsored discourse also extends to civil society organisations, where governments co-opt opposition groups and NGOs to create the illusion of political pluralism. This tactic, described by Bayart (1993) as the "politics of the belly," enables authoritarian rulers to maintain control while appearing to accommodate democratic ideals. By strategically tolerating some level of dissent, these regimes manage to appease both domestic and international critics while ensuring that power remains firmly centralised.

The pervasive use of manipulative discourse in authoritarian regimes underpinned by Machiavellian strategies has profound psychological and sociocultural consequences. The construction of an official truth, disseminated through education systems, state media, and public discourse, conditions people to accept state narratives uncritically (Bourdieu, 1991). This indoctrination fosters a passive political culture where resistance is not only discouraged but also and mainly deemed futile.

Moreover, authoritarian discourse frequently employs historical revisionism to shape collective memory. According to Reyntjens (2016, even the discourse surrounding the genocide can be instrumentalised by people in power to control political expression and define the parameters of acceptable discourse. Similar patterns are observed in other Francophone African states, where ruling elites manipulate historical narratives to reinforce their legitimacy and suppress counter-narratives.

Nevertheless, despite the overwhelming influence of authoritarian discourse, resistance persists in various forms. Alternative media platforms, dissident intellectuals, and grassroots movements continuously challenge state narratives. The rise of digital activism has provided new avenues for counter-discourse, allowing opposition voices to reach wider audiences despite government restrictions (Howard & Hussain, 2013). Additionally, literature and music also remain potent tools of resistance. Writers such as Diarisso (2021), Kourouma (1998), Mbailao (2021), M'Fouillou (1977, 1995, 2000a, 2000b, 2006, 1979), Tansi, 1979), and Ouologuem (1968) have used fiction to critique authoritarianism, exposing the contradictions and absurdities of dictatorial regimes. Similarly, musicians like Tiken Jah Fakoly and Y'en a Marre have employed music as a medium for political activism, challenging state propaganda and mobilising public opinion (Konaté, 2011).

In social and political contexts, discourse in authoritarian governance serves as a shield protecting regimes from scrutiny. In Francophone Africa, the strategic use of language, symbolism, and media ensures the longevity of authoritarian rule by shaping public perception and legitimising state control.

Beyond social and political narratives, fictional literature in Francophone Africa has long served as a reflective medium, capturing and critiquing the dynamics of authoritarian discourse. Through literary works, authors articulate resistance, expose the complexities of governance, and provide alternative perspectives to dominant narratives.

The interplay between official discourse and literary counter-narratives creates a dynamic space where authority is both asserted and contested. This dialectic underscores the potency of language as a battleground for ideological supremacy in Francophone Africa. Government rhetoric, often steeped in nationalist sentiment and legalistic jargon, seeks to justify autocratic rule. Conversely, literature serves as an intellectual revolt against these discourses, offering a space where alternative truths are explored and where the voices of the oppressed are amplified. The convergence of political discourse and literary narratives offers a multidimensional approach to understanding the complexities of authoritarianism in Francophone Africa. Machiavellian concepts provide a theoretical lens through which the strategies of dictatorial figures can be dissected, while literary narratives contextualise portrayals that humanise and elucidate these abstract principles. In *Le Devoir de Violence* (1968) by Yambo Ouologuem, the despotic rule of the Saif dynasty mirrors real-world autocratic tendencies, illustrating the cyclical nature of tyranny and the role of historical narratives in shaping contemporary governance. Similarly, Ahmadou Kourouma's *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* (1998) offers a satirical dissection of African dictatorship, portraying a ruler who embodies the cunning, manipulative, and oppressive characteristics that Machiavelli describes in *The Prince*. Further exploring the themes of authoritarian rhetoric, Sony Labou Tansi's *La Vie et demie* (1979) presents a grotesque caricature of dictatorship, where language is perverted to serve the whims of an absolute ruler. The narrative demonstrates how control over discourse extends beyond mere governance and infiltrates the psychological and cultural fabric of society. The authoritarian leader in the novel, the Providential Guide, distorts truth and meaning to maintain an unassailable grip on power, exemplifying the dangers of unchecked rhetoric in governance.

Similarly, Henri Lopes' *Le Pleurer-Rire* (1982) uses irony and allegory to dismantle the performative nature of authoritarian rule. Lopes' work underscores how language is weaponised to create illusions of democracy, stability, and progress while fundamentally eroding civic freedoms.

Another critical aspect of authoritarian discourse is its intersection with colonial legacies. Postcolonial Francophone African states inherited structures of governance that were designed for control rather than democratic participation. Writers such as Mongo Beti in *Trop de soleil tue l'amour* critique how post-independence rulers, rather than dismantling colonial authoritarian mechanisms, repurpose them to consolidate their own power. This continuity

between colonial and postcolonial governance further complicates the struggle for genuine democracy, as authoritarianism is often framed as a necessary means of maintaining order amidst postcolonial instability.

In *Le sang pour l'alternance*, President Décon's use of discourse exemplifies Machiavellian philosophy. He uses populist rhetoric to justify constitutional amendments aimed at resetting presidential term limits, a manoeuvre designed to perpetuate his hold on power. By framing his actions as necessary for national stability and continuity, Décon manipulates both political actors and the general populace, undermining democratic institutions while maintaining an appearance of legitimacy.

This study aims to explore how political personalisation is strategically reinforced through calculated rhetoric, alliance-building, and performative governance by applying Machiavellian theory and discourse analysis. By examining these elements, the research seeks to understand the ways in which political leaders construct and sustain their public personas to secure power and influence. Political personalisation, which involves the concentration of political identity and authority in an individual rather than in institutions or ideologies, is increasingly shaped by persuasive language, the manipulation of narratives, and the careful orchestration of communication strategies. To investigate these dynamics, this study analyses Alimou Sinta's novel *Le sang pour l'alternance* (2021), a work that offers critical insights into the mechanisms of political power and leadership in a fictionalised yet reflective political landscape. The study will explore how language and interactions are used as strategic tools to shape public perception, control narratives, and reinforce political dominance. Furthermore, it will examine how leaders cultivate strategic alliances to legitimise their authority and neutralise opposition. Additionally, this study considers the concept of performative governance by analysing symbolic actions, orchestrated empathy, and public spectacle as tools of power consolidation. Public appearances, media manipulation, and the duty of care projected by political figures contribute to their perceived legitimacy and authority. By synthesising these elements, the study will offer a comprehensive understanding of how contemporary political leaders in pluralistic democracies employ Machiavellian tactics to maintain and reinforce their positions in an increasingly multimedia-driven political environment.

Theoretical frameworks

The use of theoretical frameworks in studying narratives is essential as it provides perspectives to analyse and interpret discourses. Theoretical frameworks offer conceptual tools that guide the examination of themes, structures, meanings, socio-cultural, and political contexts within narratives. These frameworks help in understanding how narratives function, how they influence audiences, and how they reflect or challenge social conventions and societal norms and values.

Theoretical frameworks also ensure relevance, consistency and depth in narrative analysis. They enable comparisons between different narratives or discursive dimensions, highlight underlying ideologies, and reveal pragmatic meanings. Without a theoretical framework,

narrative analysis may become subjective or superficial, lacking coherence and critical engagement.

Furthermore, theoretical perspectives provide interdisciplinary insights, allowing for the integration of disciplines, such as politics, psychology, sociology, linguistics, culture, and philosophy into narrative studies. This enriches the understanding of how narratives shape human experiences and cultural identities.

Machiavelli's theoretical framework

Machiavelli's political theories, particularly as articulated in *The Prince*, offer a pragmatic framework for understanding the mechanisms of power and leadership. His emphasis on strategic rhetoric, alliance-building, and performative governance provides valuable insights into the phenomenon of political personalisation, where authority is concentrated in an individual rather than institutions or ideologies. This study explores the relevance of Machiavellian theory to political personalisation, with a specific focus on Alimou Sinta's novel *Le sang pour l'alternance* (2021), which critically examines political power dynamics in a fictionalised yet reflective political landscape.

Machiavelli's theory is that effective leaders must master the art of persuasive language to shape public perception and maintain control. He argued that rulers should not shy away from deceit if it serves the state's stability and their authority. This perspective is evident in *The Prince*, where Machiavelli advises leaders to act like a fox to detect traps, and a lion to scare off wolves. This argument highlights the necessity of cunning and force in governance, and this duality underscores the importance of adaptable rhetoric in consolidating power.

In *Le sang pour l'alternance*, the protagonist Décon, a law professor who ascends to the presidency of Guiny, exemplifies the use of calculated rhetoric to entrench his rule. Décon's speeches are crafted to project an image of benevolence and reform, while subtly undermining opposition and dissent. This manipulation of narratives aligns with Machiavellian principles, demonstrating how language can be wielded to control public discourse and reinforce personal authority.

Furthermore, Machiavelli emphasised the strategic formation of alliances as a means to secure and sustain power. He suggested that prudent alliances could bolster a ruler's position and provide necessary support against adversaries. However, he also cautioned that such alliances should be approached with pragmatism, as political alliances are often fluid and driven by self-interest. In Sinta's narrative, Décon engages in alliance-building with influential figures and groups to legitimise his authority and neutralise potential threats. These alliances are depicted as transactional and opportunistic, reflecting Machiavelli's view that political relationships are tools to be used for maintaining power. The novel illustrates the precarious nature of such alliances, as shifts in loyalty and ambition can lead to instability, mirroring the realpolitik Machiavelli described.

Machiavelli also recognised the role of public perception in governance, advising leaders to engage in performative acts that project strength, compassion, or other desirable qualities to cultivate public favour. He understood that symbolic actions and orchestrated displays could enhance a ruler's image and deter dissent. As illustration, Décon's tenure in *Le sang pour l'alternance* is marked by performative governance, including public ceremonies, media appearances, and displays of empathy towards citizens. These actions are meticulously staged to create a narrative of a responsive and caring leader, even as underlying policies may contradict this image. This performative aspect of leadership serves to distract from authoritarian practices and placate the populace, embodying Machiavelli's counsel on the utility of appearances in ruling effectively.

Finally, Machiavelli's strategy related to the process of political personalisation is also explored in Sinta's novel and resonates with contemporary political landscapes, where personalisation of politics has become increasingly prevalent. Modern leaders often employ strategic rhetoric, form alliances, and engage in performative acts to construct and maintain their public personas. The rise of multimedia platforms has amplified these practices, allowing for more direct and pervasive influence over public perception. Machiavelli's insights into human nature and power dynamics remain pertinent, as they elucidate the tactics used by leaders to navigate complex political environments. His theories provide a lens through which to analyse the concentration of political identity in individuals and the methods used to sustain such personalisation.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis offers a robust framework for examining how language constructs and maintains power dynamics within political contexts. When combined with Machiavellian theory, which emphasises the strategic manoeuvres leaders use to acquire and retain power, this approach becomes particularly potent. This approach is invaluable for analysing political personalisation, which is the process by which political identity and authority become concentrated in an individual rather than in institutions or ideologies. By examining calculated rhetoric, alliance-building, and performative governance, researchers can uncover the deliberate strategies that leaders use to shape public perception and consolidate power.

In this regard, discourse analysis is a very relevant framework in the examination of strategies, processes, and dimensions of political personalisation in dictatorial regimes. Indeed, discourse analysis facilitates the analysis of the ways language shapes social and political realities. Discourse is not merely a reflection of realities but it actively constructs them. In relation to politics, discourse analysis reveals how language is used to frame issues, construct identities, and establish power relations. In *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*, Paul Chilton (2004), asserts that political discourse is a strategic tool used by actors to achieve specific objectives, including the consolidation of personal power

Political personalisation involves the elevation of individual leaders above collective entities such as parties or institutions. This shift is often facilitated through strategic discourse that highlights personal attributes, narratives, and direct communication with the public. By focusing on the individual, political actors can craft a relatable and authoritative persona,

thereby enhancing their influence and control. In this context, Machiavelli's *The Prince* provides a pragmatic analysis of political leadership, focusing on the acquisition and maintenance of power. Machiavelli advocates for a realistic approach to governance, where moral considerations are subordinate to political necessity. He emphasises the importance of adaptability, manipulation, and the strategic use of appearances to maintain authority.

In contemporary politics, Machiavellian principles manifest in various strategies leaders use to fortify their positions. These include the careful crafting of public personas, strategic alliances, and performative acts designed to project strength and benevolence. By analysing these tactics through the lens of discourse analysis, this study aims to gain insights into the mechanisms of political personalisation through *Le sang pour l'alternance* by Alimou Sinta.

Case study and analysis: *Le sang pour l'alternance* by Alimou Sinta

Alimou Sinta's novel, *Le sang pour l'alternance*, offers a fictional yet poignant exploration of political dynamics, with a plot mirroring real-world scenarios where leaders use Machiavellian tactics to entrench their power. The narrative centres on the key protagonist Décon, a law professor who ascends to the presidency with promises of democratic reform. However, as his tenure progresses, Décon seeks to amend the constitution to extend his rule, which constitutes a betrayal of his initial commitments.

Through calculated rhetoric, Décon portrays constitutional amendments as necessary for national stability, manipulating public discourse to justify his actions. On one hand, Décon forges alliances with influential figures, neutralising opposition and legitimising his extended rule. On the other hand, Décon engages in performative governance, orchestrating public events that display empathy and commitment to the populace, thereby enhancing his authoritative image.

The novel displays the complexities of power, ambition, and the corrupting influence of authority. Décon, once a symbol of hope for a new era of governance, gradually transforms into the very kind of leader he once opposed. His intellectual background and legal expertise, which should have served as a foundation for justice and democracy, instead become tools for manipulating the system in his favour. Through Décon's journey, Sinta critiques the cyclical nature of political leadership in many post-independent African states, where the promise of change is often overshadowed by the persistence of autocratic tendencies.

Throughout the novel, the quest for democratic change is led by a coalition of civil society groups, opposition politicians, and young activists who refuse to accept Décon's betrayal. Their struggle highlights the tensions between entrenched political elites and a populace yearning for genuine democratic change. Protests erupt across the nation, with slogans demanding respect for constitutional term limits. The response from the government is brutal, with security forces cracking down on demonstrators, leading to bloodshed and further disillusionment among the people.

Through vivid storytelling and deeply drawn characters, *Le sang pour l'alternance* serves as a stark warning about the dangers of unchecked power. It highlights the fragility of democratic institutions when leaders prioritise personal ambition over national interest. Sinta's narrative ultimately raises critical questions about governance, political accountability, and the sacrifices required to achieve true democracy in many Francophone African countries.

Machiavellian fox-and-lion metaphoric strategy as a duality of cunning and strength

When President Décon decided secure his grip on power indefinitely, he understood that brute force alone would not suffice. In a world where political survival demanded a mastery of deception, adaptability, and ruthless pragmatism, he sought the counsel of Blase, the autocratic ruler of a neighbouring country. Blase, whose reign echoed that of Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, had managed to rule with an iron fist for decades before his eventual fall. Yet, his art of political endurance remained a treasure trove for those ambitious enough to wield it properly. During a private meeting in the dimly lit halls of his palace, Décon listened intently as Blase shared the key to perpetual dominance. For Blase,

« Pour être un président à vie, il faut suivre entre autres les conseils de Machiavel. Il faut être un renard et un lion ! [...] Il faut que tu aies plusieurs visages, il faut que tu sois comme un renard c'est-à-dire un vrai malin qui observe tout autour de toi pour détecter les ennemis et les menaces que tu vas dévorer avec ton visage de lion. Il faut que tu regardes avec attention chaque homme surtout celui qui rôde autour de toi ; il faut avoir un véritable œil pour connaître au peigne fin toutes les organisations qui sont sur ton territoire, qu'elles soient publiques ou privées, il faut les observer dans l'ensemble sans en négliger aucune ; il faut aussi observer et analyser toute situation qui se présente pour comprendre tous ses contours, ne néglige aucun détail... » (Sang, p.12).

[To be a president for life, you must, among other things, follow Machiavelli's advice. You must be both a fox and a lion! (...) You must display multiple faces; you must be like a fox-which means being truly cunning, observing everything around you to detect enemies and threats, and then devour them as lion would do. You must carefully watch every man, especially those who linger around you; you must have an eagle eye to scan and thoroughly understand all the organisations within your territory, whether public or private, observing them as a whole without neglecting any spot. You must also observe and analyse every situation that arises in order to grasp all its intricacies without leaving any detail unnoticed...]

Blase's imagery is that the lion is powerful, feared, and capable of crushing opposition with brute strength. However, the lion is not always wise; it may be entrapped by the snares of hunters. That is where the fox comes in. The fox is cunning, elusive, and perceptive, capable of recognising the traps laid before it. To rule without end, you must embody both: strike like a lion when necessary but manoeuvre like a fox to evade danger before it arises.

Décon absorbed the words as if they were scripture. The notion of being both predator and tactician appealed to him, but he required practical strategies. Blase, having anticipated this, elaborated further by saying that by displaying multiple faces, a true ruler must act like a fox, wearing different masks for different audiences. To the people, you must appear as their protector and their provider, a benevolent father figure ensuring stability and growth. But to your political allies, you must be the indispensable leader whose downfall would bring chaos. As to the opposition, you must be an unpredictable shadow, watching and waiting for them to misstep.

During the assessment of the situation, a ruler must be careful. The fox that trusts too easily is doomed. You must scrutinise every person around you, particularly those closest to you. Many betrayals are hatched in the chambers of trusted advisors. Watch their movements, listen to their words, and anticipate their ambitions. If they grow too powerful, if they begin to dream beyond their station, act swiftly before they become a threat.

According to Blase, power is not merely about controlling people; it is about understanding the structures that shape society. Every organisation within your territory, whether public or private, must be observed carefully. The military, the intelligence agencies, the media, the business sector, religious institutions- all must be studied like a fox studies the landscape before venturing into the open. A true ruler does not merely react to events; he anticipates them. He foresees economic crises, social unrest, and external threats long before they manifest. To do this, you must have eyes and ears everywhere.

To succeed in cunning strategies, Blase advises not to leave any detail unnoticed. The greatest dangers often lurk in the smallest cracks. A whisper in a marketplace could signal the birth of dissent. A minor cleric speaking against your rule could be the seed of a rebellion. An unnoticed businessman funding opposition parties could be a catalyst for your downfall. You must cultivate a vast network of informants, loyal only to you. You must harness clientelist bond, pay allies well, ensure their secrecy, and, if necessary, instil in them the belief that their survival is tied to yours.

As a symbol of violence, the lion must emerge when the fox has done its work and identified threats. When an enemy is exposed, you must act decisively and without hesitation. The lion does not warn; it strikes. As Wole Soyinka said in 1962 critiquing the Negritude movement, particularly the way some African writers and politicians, such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, emphasised African identity through poetic proclamation rather than tangible action, “a tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, it pounces on its prey and devours it”. Soyinka argued that identity and essence should be demonstrated through deeds rather than mere declarations. For Blase, if the public organises rallies against your rule, act like a lion and crush them swiftly before they gain momentum.

« Si on veut la présidence à vie on ne doit pas avoir peur du chaos, car justement c'est le chaos que tu crées en confisquant le pouvoir. Il faut savoir que si tu veux la présidence à vie il y a trois scénarios : soit tu

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sèmes la terreur et tu réussis ton pari, soit tu sèmes la terreur et ça conduit au chaos c'est-à-dire à la guerre, espérons, soit tu sèmes la terreur et tu échoues et là c'est mort pour toi ! » (Sang, p.15).

[If you want a lifetime presidency, you must not be afraid of chaos, because it is precisely chaos that you create by holding onto power. You need to understand that if you want to stay in power for life, there are three possible scenarios: either you spread terror and succeed in your plan, or you spread terror and it leads to chaos, meaning war, hopefully, or you spread terror and fail, and then it is game over for you!]

For Blase, if rivals rise in popularity, discredit them, fabricate scandals; make sure their name are synonymous with treason or corruption. And if they persist, remove them entirely. Décon had always understood the necessity of intelligence, but Blase was inspiring, speaking of a level of control far beyond his current apparatus. He knew what needed to be done to act as both lion and fox. Blase tells him:

« Tu sais, avec la présidence à vie tu n'es pas légitime, tu gouvernes par la force, j'allais dire par la violence. Et c'est l'armée qui fait le sale boulot, c'est elle qui tue. Donc si tu ne la graisses pas tous les jours, elle risque de se retourner contre toi. Je sais que tu la graisses actuellement, mais avec la présidence à vie il va falloir multiplier cette générosité. Donc il y aura un budget pour le peuple et il y aura un gros budget pour l'armée. Si tu faillis à ça, t'es mort... » (Sang, p.14).

[Understand that with a lifelong presidency, you are not legitimate; you rule by force, I might even say by violence. And it is the army that does the dirty work; it is the one that kills. So, if you don't grease its palms every day, it might turn against you. I know you are bribing your army now, but with a lifelong presidency, you will have to multiply this generosity. So, there will be a budget for the people, and there will be a large budget for the army. If you fail at this, you are dead...]

The advice provided by Blase to President Décon is a powerful illustration of Machiavellian theory and the application of cunning strategies in political governance. In this advice, Blase highlights the importance of understanding the delicate balance between force, legitimacy, and manipulation, which aligns closely with Machiavellian principles. By examining the key aspects of Blase's counsel, we can uncover the ways in which it embodies Machiavellian strategies for political survival.

The opening statement, "with a lifelong presidency, you are not legitimate; you rule by force, I might even say by violence," is a direct reflection of Machiavelli's belief that the stability of a ruler's power often depends more on strength and control than on the ethical basis of their rule. Machiavelli argues that rulers often face challenges to their legitimacy, particularly when they hold power through force rather than inherited or established authority. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli asserts that it is better for a ruler to be feared than loved, as fear is a more reliable

motivator for maintaining control. Blase's advice to Décon acknowledges this reality, where violence and coercion are central to keeping power, particularly when the ruler's position lacks traditional legitimacy.

Machiavelli famously suggested that “the ends justify the means,” which supports the idea that rulers can justify violence if it secures their power and the state's stability. For Décon, Blase's advice reveals the harsh but necessary truths of maintaining a grip on power in a system where legitimacy is not derived from traditional means, such as nobility or popular consent, but instead from coercion and force. Blase emphasises the importance of the army in maintaining power, stating, “it is the army that does the dirty work; it is the one that kills.” Machiavelli often highlights the military as a crucial pillar of a ruler's authority. In *The Prince*, he advises rulers to have their own standing army rather than relying on mercenaries or auxiliaries, as loyalty is often fickle among those who are not personally invested in the ruler's success. Blase's advice is in line with this Machiavellian principle, pointing out that the army is the ultimate enforcer of the ruler's will and that the army's loyalty must be carefully managed.

The emphasis on the army's role as an instrument of force reflects Machiavelli's understanding of the need for a ruler to control or influence their military forces. A ruler's ability to command military loyalty is not just a matter of securing the state from external threats; it is also vital for quelling internal dissent. As Blase warns, if the president fails to keep the army satisfied, it could easily turn against him. This is a warning grounded in the reality that soldiers, like all people, act out of self-interest, and their loyalty can be bought, but it can just as easily be lost. Blase's advice to President Décon is deeply rooted in the concept of strategic generosity, which mirrors Machiavelli's advice to princes regarding the use of patronage and bribes to secure loyalty. Blase stresses the necessity of bribing the army and, in particular, the need to “multiply this generosity” in the case of a lifelong presidency. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli acknowledges the importance of maintaining the loyalty of one's subjects, and in this case, Blase extends that logic to the army. He advises that the ruler must continuously reward the military to prevent it from rebelling or undermining the president's rule.

Machiavelli suggests that a ruler should avoid over-exploitation of their subjects, particularly the military, and must instead ensure that the army feels adequately compensated for its service. Blase's advice reflects this, pointing out that as the length of the presidency extends, the president's reliance on the army will grow, necessitating ever greater expenditures on bribery and patronage. This strategy is an example of Machiavellian pragmatism by continuously rewarding the military, the ruler secures the loyalty of those who have the power to topple them.

Blase further mentions the necessity of a budget for “the people,” as well as a larger budget for the army. This division of resources reflects a Machiavellian strategy in which a ruler is tasked with balancing the interests of different factions within the state. While the military represents the direct means of enforcement, the people must also be kept satisfied, but with far less investment. Machiavelli argues that it is necessary for a ruler to maintain the appearance of benevolence and concern for the people, even if their rule relies on force. As such, allocating

resources to “the people” serves the dual purpose of preventing discontent and rebellion while ensuring that the ruler’s reign is not undermined by popular uprisings.

Machiavelli advises rulers to be cautious of public opinion, as dissatisfaction among the people can lead to instability. A ruler who does not attend to the needs of the people may find themselves facing insurrection, but by allocating resources judiciously, they can maintain the support of the masses. Blase’s advice to Décon is grounded in this notion: a ruler must appear generous, but it is the army that requires more attention and resources, as it holds the power to ensure the survival of the regime.

Blase’s final warning is that “If you fail at this, you are dead”. This is a stark reminder of the precariousness of political power, a theme that permeates Machiavellian theory. Machiavelli frequently stresses that a ruler must be vigilant in maintaining control, as political power is fragile and subject to the whims of fortune, personal ambition, and internal instability. The advice to President Décon highlights the high stakes involved in maintaining a presidency for life, with the constant threat of betrayal, rebellion, and assassination looming over the ruler. In this sense, the need for constant vigilance is quintessentially Machiavellian, as rulers must always be alert to the shifting dynamics of power.

In *Le Sang pour l’Alternance*, Blase’s advice to Décon encapsulates the core of Machiavellian ruling strategies, emphasising fear, terror, and absolute ruthlessness as the ultimate tools for maintaining power indefinitely. His insistence that a lifetime presidency is sustained through repression and barbarity resonates with Machiavelli’s political philosophy, particularly the assertion that “it is better to be feared than loved” if one cannot be both:

« Il faut savoir que la présidence à vie repose sur la répression et la barbarie. Tu ne survies que lorsque tu parviens à imposer la crainte. Dès que cette crainte disparaît, sache que t’es mort. Donc, amplifie la terreur, sème la crainte partout, sois un véritable sauvage, agis pour que les gens disent que tu es fou. Inculque dans leur tête que tu n’as pas de limites ! Il ne faut pas te limiter à tuer des jeunes, non ! Cela ne veut rien dire, il faut cibler les enfants, les filles, les fous, tu les colles des balles à la tête et tu craches sur eux... » (Sang, pp.14-15).

[You must understand that a presidency for life is built on repression and barbarity. You only survive when you manage to instil fear. The moment that fear disappears, know that you are as good as dead. So, amplify terror, spread fear everywhere, be truly ruthless, act in such a way that people say you are insane. Instil in their minds that you have no limits! You must not stop at killing young people, no! It means nothing. You must target children, girls, even the mentally ill, put bullets in their heads and spit on them...].

Blase’s strategic approach to governance is deeply rooted in the principles of repression and brutality, which align with Machiavelli’s notion that a ruler must prioritise power over

morality. By analysing Blase's perspective, we can see how *Le Sang pour l'Alternance* illustrates a Machiavellian ruling strategy through fear, deception, and calculated violence.

For Machiavellian, terror is a more reliable instrument than affection. He argues in *The Prince* that people are inherently selfish and untrustworthy, and a ruler who depends on their loyalty is bound to fail. Instead, instilling fear ensures obedience and discourages rebellion. In the novel, Blase's advice to "amplify terror, spread fear everywhere" reflects this belief, reinforcing the idea that the population must be in a constant state of anxiety to prevent any form of organised opposition:

« C'est avec le diable qu'il faut signer un pacte pour être président à vie, car le sang sera ton quotidien. Tu vas tuer assez d'innocents, tu répandras le sang partout, tu t'en laveras, tu en boiras en abondance. Donc, rassure-toi que si tu meurs tu vas directement en enfer. Moi c'est ce que j'ai choisi, c'est pourquoi plus de vingt-six ans je dirige seul. Il faut être un vrai homme, un homme satanique pour appartenir à ce club... » (Sang, p.15)

[To be a president for life, you must sign a pact with the devil because blood will become your daily reality. You will kill countless innocents, spill blood everywhere, wash your hands in it, and drink it in abundance. So, be assured that if you die, you will go straight to hell. As for me, that is the choice I made, that is why I have ruled alone for over twenty-six years. To belong to this club, you must be a real man, a satanic man ...]

By advocating for extreme acts of violence, such as targeting vulnerable groups like children and the mentally ill, Blase seeks to eliminate not only threats but also the very notion of resistance in its various forms. His emphasis on unpredictability and perceived insanity further aligns with Machiavelli's notion that a ruler must appear merciless when necessary, creating a reputation that discourages defiance.

The novel also highlights Machiavellian deception as a core ruling strategy. Blase instructs Décon to maintain a positive international image while secretly committing atrocities. This strategy mirrors Machiavelli's advice that a ruler must appear virtuous while engaging in morally questionable actions to maintain power.

Another striking parallel between Blase's strategy and Machiavellian doctrine is the exploitation of war and conflict as tools for maintaining power. Machiavelli advocates for rulers to create and control conflicts to justify their authority. Blase advises Décon to fabricate terrorist groups and then pretend to fight them, thereby legitimising the need for extended rule. This mirrors Machiavelli's belief that a ruler should engage in conflicts that serve to reinforce his dominance rather than threaten it. By manufacturing crises, Blase ensures that the public remains dependent on his leadership, fearful that without him, chaos will ensue. This manipulation of security threats allows the dictator to frame himself as the only viable protector, silencing opposition under the guise of national stability.

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Furthermore, Blase acknowledges the burden of absolute power, noting that leaders who step down after two terms often enjoy stability and international respect.

« Je t'ai largement expliqué la vie qui t'attend avec la présidence à vie et tous les sacrifices qu'il faut faire. En échange tu auras droit à certains privilèges. Mais ma foi, quand je pense à nos collègues qui ont fait leurs deux mandats et après qui ont préféré laisser la place à quelqu'un d'autres ; je les envie parfois, car ils donnent une belle leçon politique à toute la classe politique de leur pays qui connaissent généralement la stabilité et le progrès. Et puis c'est des collègues qui ont le cœur tranquille, ils voyagent partout, ils ont des privilèges et des honneurs partout où ils passent » (Sang, p.121).

[I have thoroughly explained to you the life that awaits you with a lifetime presidency and all the sacrifices it requires. In return, you will have some privileges. But honestly, when I think about our colleagues who served their two terms and then chose to step aside for someone else, I sometimes envy them. They set a great political example for their country's entire political class, which usually leads to stability and progress. And besides, these colleagues have peace of mind. They travel everywhere, enjoy privileges, and receive honours wherever they go.]

However, his envy does not deter him from advocating for lifelong rule, suggesting that Machiavellian rulers prioritise power over personal peace. This illustrates another key aspect of Machiavellianism: the pursuit of power is a lifelong endeavour that requires constant vigilance and sacrifice. Leaders who relinquish control voluntarily may gain moral admiration, but they lack the absolute authority that Machiavellian rulers covet. Blase's understanding of this trade-off highlights the internal conflict within despotic leadership, between the allure of peaceful retirement and the insatiable hunger for dominance.

Blase's advices in *Le Sang pour l'Alternance* encapsulate a critical dimension of Machiavellian political philosophy regarding the relationship between rulers and the ruled. He says to Décon:

« L'autre fois je t'avais parlé du peuple-âne qu'il faut violenter pour qu'il t'obéisse n'est-ce pas ! Mais j'avais oublié de te parler du peuple-dragon. Parfois le peuple-âne se mue en peuple dragon et quand ça arrive ce n'est vraiment pas bon. Ça arrive rarement, mais quand ça arrive c'est presque la chute assurée » (Sang, p.120).

[The other time, I told you about the donkey-people, who must be brutalised to make them obey you, didn't I? But I forgot to tell you about the dragon-people. Sometimes, the donkey-people transform into dragon-people, and when that happens, it's really not good. It happens rarely, but when it does, it almost always leads to downfall.]

The metaphor of the "donkey-people" and the "dragon-people" serves to illustrate the contrasting responses of people to authoritarian rule and the inherent risks of excessive brutality in governance. This duality mirrors Machiavelli's observations in *The Prince*, where he advises

rulers on the necessity of instilling fear while warning against actions that could incite rebellion.

Blase describes the “donkey-people” as those who can be subdued and controlled through fear and coercion. The underlying assumption is that the subjects remain passive and incapable of collective resistance, a belief that dictators and authoritarian rulers throughout history have often shared. However, Blase’s warns about the “dragon-people” as a significant caveat. He acknowledges that there exists a threshold beyond which oppression ceases to be effective and instead generates fierce opposition. This transformation, where submissive subjects - “donkey-people” - turn into active resisters - “dragon-people” - illustrates the limitations of Machiavellian fear tactics. While fear can be a tool of control, excessive brutality can provoke an insurrectionary spirit.

Blase’s distinction between the two types of people also speaks to the necessity of strategic governance. A Machiavellian leader, while ruthless, must be perceptive enough to recognise when force becomes counterproductive. He must not only instil fear but also maintain a balance that prevents the emergence of a unifying resistance. This reinforces the idea that effective rule is not merely about domination but about the calculated application of authority. A ruler who disregards this risk, who assumes that all people will forever remain donkeys, is bound to face the wrath of dragons when oppression reaches its breaking point.

Le Sang pour l’Alternance ultimately provides a nuanced portrayal of Machiavellian rule, where fear is a double-edged sword. While it can secure obedience, it can also breed resistance when taken to extremes. The transformation from “donkey-people” to “dragon-people” serves as a powerful allegory for political resistance, warning that no ruler is invincible when oppression turns submission into defiance.

To minimise the risks of turning “donkey-people” into “dragon-people”, a strategic cunning becomes important to balance fear with favours. Fear alone breeds rebellion; fear mixed with gratitude breeds dependence. Give people bread when they are hungry, distractions when they are restless, and a common enemy when they seek change. Let them believe you are the only force standing between them and chaos. Let them feel indebted to your rule. The best cages are those that people walk into willingly, believing they are safe.

In conclusion, the Machiavellian fox-and-lion metaphoric strategy serves as the foundation of Blase’s governance, shaping not only his rule but also the advice he imparts to Décon. Blase, a ruler who has mastered the duality of cunning and strength, embodies the essence of Niccolò Machiavelli’s ruling principles where a leader must possess both the shrewdness of the fox to recognise traps and the strength of the lion to instil fear. Through this delicate balance, Blase has solidified his power, manipulating both allies and adversaries while maintaining the illusion of benevolence. His rule is not solely based on brute force, nor is it entirely reliant on deception; rather, it is the seamless fusion of both that allows him to dominate his kingdom and keep his subjects in check.

Recognising the effectiveness of this approach, Blase urges Décon to adopt the same strategy as he seeks to cement his own authority. To truly govern and maintain control, Décon must navigate the political landscape with calculated precision, using intelligence and deceit when necessary while also demonstrating raw power to suppress opposition. The fox within him must enable him to design complex plots, foresee potential betrayals, and outmanoeuvre rivals who seek to unseat him. At the same time, the lion must roar when challenged, unleashing decisive and unrelenting force to crush dissent. This duality ensures not only survival but absolute dominance.

By following Blase's advice, Décon would project the image of a leader beloved by his people, a father figure whose reign brings stability and order. His public persona would exude wisdom and fairness, creating the illusion that his rule is one of justice and care. To the masses, he would appear as a guiding force, a protector of the nation, ensuring their safety and prosperity. However, behind the carefully portrayed façade lies the brutal reality: those who dare to oppose him would face an unforgiving fate. Anyone who misreads his benevolence as weakness would quickly learn a harsh truth that in his kingdom, power is not negotiated but seized, and mercy is reserved only for those who do not threaten his rule.

In this Machiavellian paradigm, the world would witness Décon's transformation into a ruler who commands both fear and respect. Those who remain loyal and obedient would bask in the stability of his leadership, while those who defy him would become prey in a kingdom ruled by a lion with the mind of a fox. This is the ultimate realisation of power where perception is controlled, loyalty is cultivated, and threats are swiftly eliminated. Just as Blase had done before him, Décon's legacy would be one of strategic dominance, ensuring his grip on power remains unshaken. In the end, the survival of his rule would depend not on righteousness or morality, but on his ability to master the cunning of the fox and the ferocity of the lion to bend the world to his will.

Machiavellian strategic rhetoric and narrative manipulation

Machiavellian strategy to maintain and consolidate power revolves around the calculated use of deceit, manipulation, and well-designed rhetoric. Machiavelli argues that a successful leader must possess the ability to control public perception, fabricate legitimacy, and suppress opposition through cunning communication. This strategy is exemplified in Blase's advice to Décon in *Le Sang pour l'Alternance*, where he outlines a precise formula for maintaining an autocratic rule under the guise of democratic legitimacy. By controlling media narratives, manipulating elections, leveraging international relationships through bribery, and even manufacturing crises to justify authoritarian measures, Blase's rhetoric embodies the quintessential Machiavellian approach to political power. His discourse reflects a highly strategic, manipulative form of communication that ensures the perpetuation of his regime while simultaneously deceiving both domestic and international audiences:

« il faut jouer dans la mesure du possible le jeu de la démocratie, organise des élections avec une petite dose de transparence et de liberté, sois à cheval sur la parité homme femme dans les instances

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étatiques, etc. Un autre aspect, il faut être très généreux, de temps en temps, il faut envoyer des cadeaux très chers aux présidents des grandes puissances et à leurs hommes influents, surtout les diamants ils raffolent ça ; il faut les accorder beaucoup de marchés juteux ! Il faut aussi être très actif dans le combat contre l'immigration clandestine. La dernière pilule, il faut créer des groupes terroristes que tu vas faire semblant de réprimer. Si tu fais ça, tu seras président à vie et aduler partout » (Sang, p.16).

[You must play the game of democracy as much as possible: organise elections with a small dose of transparency and freedom, be strict about gender parity in state institutions, and so on. Another aspect is that you must be very generous—every now and then, you must send very expensive gifts to the presidents of great powers and their influential men, especially diamonds, they love those! You must also grant them many lucrative contracts. You must also be very active in the fight against illegal immigration. The final pill: you must create terrorist groups that you will pretend to crack down on. If you do all this, you will be president for life and admired everywhere.]

At the core of Machiavellian communication is the use of rhetoric to shape public perception. This involves both persuasive and deceptive techniques that create an illusion of stability, legitimacy, and moral authority while concealing the true nature of the regime. In Blase's discourse, rhetoric is used strategically to convince various stakeholders - citizens, foreign powers, and political elites - of the government's credibility, even as it engages in oppressive and deceitful practices. The primary mechanisms through which Blase's rhetoric operates include media control, information suppression, manufactured legitimacy, and the manipulation of international relations.

A fundamental aspect of Machiavellian political survival is the control of information. Machiavelli warns that a ruler must ensure that truth is malleable and that public perception is shaped by the narratives propagated by the regime. Blase's recommendation to Décon reflects this principle by emphasising the importance of media control and suppression of internet access. By monopolising the flow of information, the leader dictates reality itself, determining what people perceive as truth and shaping the national discourse in a way that consolidates power.

Blase explicitly advises the control of media as a means of maintaining an illusion of cohesion and stability. By censoring dissenting voices and restricting access to independent sources of information, the regime ensures that its crimes remain hidden from both domestic opposition and international scrutiny:

« Même si tu fais toutes ces atrocités, tu feras tout ton possible pour avoir une bonne image à l'international. Tu chercheras à cacher chaque crime que tu commets et c'est toi qui sais comment tu vas te débrouiller pour ça : dérober les corps et les enterrer la nuit, museler

les médias. Bon y a un problème avec les réseaux sociaux c'est pourquoi il faut combattre l'internet, pas de fibre optique, plus le débit est mauvais plus c'est bon pour toi et mets la pression sur les opérateurs téléphoniques pour suspendre leurs services durant les jours de répression » (Sang, p.16).

[Even if you commit all these atrocities, you will do everything possible to maintain a good image internationally. You will try to hide every crime you commit, and it will be up to you to figure out how, secretly collecting bodies and burying them at night, silencing the media. But bear in mind that social media are always a big issue, which is why you must limit the internet access: do not provide fibre optics because the slower the connection, the better for you. Also, put pressure on telecommunication operators to suspend their services during days of your repression.]

This tactic of limiting media access is particularly effective in preventing political mobilisation, as opposition groups are unable to organise effectively in the absence of reliable information. Suppressing internet access and censoring digital communication creates an environment where misinformation and propaganda machines become the primary sources of knowledge, making it easier for the regime to create and sustain its narrative.

One of the most striking aspects of Blase's rhetoric is his emphasis on maintaining the illusion of democracy while ensuring the actual structure remains autocratic. This aligns perfectly with Machiavelli's assertion that rulers must sometimes adopt the outward appearance of virtue while acting in a completely different manner behind the scenes. According to Blase, playing the "game of democracy" is crucial for maintaining both internal and external legitimacy. He advises organising elections with a "small dose" of transparency and freedom, which is just enough to convince the public and international critics that democracy exists, while ensuring the results remain controlled. By conducting elections that offer a semblance of choice but remain fundamentally rigged, the regime maintains the illusion of popular consent. This not only prevents domestic unrest but also secures the endorsement of international actors who prefer the stability of a controlled democracy over the unpredictability of genuine political change.

Blase's rhetoric further emphasises symbolic gestures that reinforce this illusion, such as gender parity in state institutions, which serves as a cosmetic reform that creates the appearance of progressive governance without actually altering the power dynamics of the regime. Such measures placate international watchdogs and human rights organisations, while the core mechanisms of authoritarian control remain intact.

Furthermore, international manipulation through bribery and strategic alliances are presented as Machiavellian approach to alliances, not necessarily built on genuine partnership, but rather on manipulation and self-interest. Blase's advice on maintaining relationships with global powers aligns perfectly with this notion. He insists on the necessity of bribing influential

figures within powerful nations, offering them expensive gifts, particularly diamonds, and granting lucrative contracts to ensure their silence and continued support.

This method is deeply Machiavellian in its pragmatism. It acknowledges that international politics is not governed by ethical considerations but by economic and strategic interests. By securing the loyalty of foreign leaders through financial incentives, the regime effectively neutralises external pressure for democratic reforms or human rights accountability. Western powers, despite their professed commitment to democracy and human rights, are often willing to overlook autocratic practices in exchange for economic benefits and strategic cooperation. Additionally, this strategy ensures that the dictator is not only tolerated but also admired in certain circles. By positioning himself as a valuable ally, whether in terms of trade, resource extraction, or regional stability, the leader ensures that foreign governments have vested interests in maintaining his rule. This reflects Machiavelli's assertion that a ruler must be feared or respected, but above all, indispensable to those who might otherwise seek to remove him from power.

Finally, one of the most insidious aspects of Blase's rhetoric is his recommendation to create terrorist groups that the regime will then pretend to combat. This tactic is a textbook example of Machiavellian manipulation, where a ruler fabricates threats to justify authoritarian measures. By orchestrating the emergence of terrorist organisations, the regime manufactures a perpetual state of crisis that necessitates increased security measures, political crackdowns, and the erosion of civil liberties. This aligns with Machiavelli's belief that rulers should cultivate controlled conflicts to maintain their grip on power. By positioning himself as the sole protector against manufactured threats, the leader solidifies his role as indispensable. People who are fearful of instability become more willing to accept oppressive policies in exchange for security. Meanwhile, the international community is more likely to support the regime's counterterrorism efforts, further legitimising its authoritarian rule.

Blase's strategic manipulation of crises extends beyond terrorism to other fabricated threats, such as illegal migration. By emphasising the regime's role in combatting illegal immigration, a topic of significant concern for Western nations, the leader secures additional support and funding from foreign governments. This tactic not only strengthens his international standing but also provides a convenient pretext for domestic crackdowns on opposition groups, activists, and dissidents, all under the guise of maintaining national security.

In conclusion, Blase's advice to Décon encapsulates the very essence of Machiavellian strategic rhetoric and narrative manipulation. His recommendations are not merely tactics for maintaining power but a comprehensive blueprint for controlling perception, shaping discourse, and ensuring the longevity of an autocratic regime under the illusion of legitimacy. By monopolising information, staging democratic facades, manipulating international relations, and fabricating crises, Blase exemplifies the cunning communication that defines Machiavellian leadership.

Through his discourse, Blase demonstrates that power is not merely about force or coercion but about the ability to control narratives and influence belief systems. In the world of Machiavellian politics, reality is what the ruler makes it, and truth is a function of strategic deception. As Machiavelli himself advised, it is better to appear virtuous than to be virtuous, and through Blase's rhetoric, one can see the full realisation of this principle in action.

Intelligence gathering and strategic alliances as a Machiavellian tool for power consolidation

Le Sang pour l'Alternance is a compelling illustration of Machiavellian strategies for power consolidation, particularly through intelligence gathering, infiltration, and strategic alliances. The novel presents Blase's advice to Décon as a roadmap for securing political dominance, demonstrating how surveillance and calculated alliances are essential tools in maintaining control. The analysis of Blase's directives through a Machiavellian lens allows to uncover the underlying principles of political strategy that have been employed by rulers and leaders throughout history.

Blase's insistence on wiretapping and monitoring potential loyalists for at least a year before extending trust underscores the Machiavellian principle of vigilance against betrayal:

« Quand tu observes bien les gens tu cherteras quelques fidèles que tu soumettras à plusieurs tests, mais surtout avant qu'ils ne soient de véritables fidèles tu les mettras sur écoute pendant une année au moins et tu les feras également suivre partout pendant une année au moins. Je te dis ça puisque c'est le début de ton aventure, moi dans mon cas tous mes proches, tous mes collaborateurs sont sur écoute et ils sont en permanence suivis. On n'est jamais trop prudent avec l'homme, c'est le plus féroce des caméléons. Quand tu auras une petite confiance, tu les feras infiltrer partout pour qu'ils soient tes informateurs... » (Sang, pp.12-13).

[When you observe people closely, you will identify a few loyal followers. Put them through several tests. But before they become truly loyal, you must wiretap them for at least a year and have them followed everywhere for at least a year as well. I am telling you this because you are at the beginning of this journey. In my case, all my close associates and collaborators are under surveillance and are constantly monitored. You can never be too careful with people; humans are the most ruthless chameleons. Once you have even a little trust in them, you will infiltrate them everywhere so they can serve as your informants...]

Similarly, Machiavelli warns in *The Prince* that rulers must be wary of their closest allies because internal threats often prove more dangerous than external ones. His principle is that the first method for estimating the intelligence of rulers is to look at the people they have around them, which reinforces the idea that those in close proximity to power must be scrutinised.

Blase takes this concept to an extreme, ensuring that every associate is under surveillance to eliminate even the possibility of conspiracy before it materialises. His governance is marked

by a culture of distrust, where manipulation and paranoia act as safeguards against potential threats. His words, “humans are the most ruthless chameleons” highlights his cynical view of human nature, echoing Machiavelli’s belief that political actors are inherently self-serving and must be controlled through pre-emptive measures. By embedding informants into key positions, Blase extends his influence beyond his immediate circle, guaranteeing that dissent is neutralised before it gains traction.

The long-term surveillance Blase prescribes ensures that those who enter his inner circle are not just loyal in appearance but have been thoroughly tested for unwavering allegiance. This process, reminiscent of Machiavelli’s advocacy for calculated cruelty, demonstrates the necessity of gradual trust-building rather than blind reliance. By the time a potential ally is deemed trustworthy, they have already been deeply embedded within the system, making their defection both unlikely and dangerous to themselves.

Beyond infiltration, Blase advocates for forming alliances that transcend party lines, a strategy deeply rooted in Machiavellian political thought. *Le Sang pour l’Alternance* showcases how Décon forges partnerships with military leaders and influential politicians, ensuring their support for his constitutional changes. These alliances, however, are not founded on ideological commonalities but on calculated self-interest. This pragmatic approach mirrors Machiavelli’s advice that rulers should prioritise effectiveness over morality when securing power. Machiavelli emphasises that political relationships should be based on utility rather than sentimentality. He argues that rulers must adapt to circumstances and form temporary alliances when beneficial, dissolving them when they are no longer advantageous. Décon follows this principle by ensuring that his collaborators receive enough incentives to remain loyal while keeping them under constant observation to prevent betrayal. His alliances serve dual purposes: bolstering his legitimacy and suppressing opposition before it becomes a tangible threat.

The novel also highlights the effectiveness of the divide-and-rule strategy, another hallmark of Machiavellian statecraft. By creating factions against one another, Décon prevents any single group from amassing enough power to challenge his authority. This method ensures that his allies remain dependent on his leadership, as their individual survival is tied to the stability of his rule. Machiavelli discusses this tactic extensively, advising rulers to prevent the formation of unified opposition. Through calculated distribution of power and resources, Décon creates an environment where rival factions are more focused on undermining each other than challenging his authority.

Blase’s governance model illustrates that control over information is as crucial as control over military and economic resources. By maintaining a comprehensive surveillance system, he ensures that he remains several steps ahead of potential adversaries. This practice aligns with Machiavelli’s assertion that knowledge is a ruler’s greatest asset. In an era where power is increasingly tied to information, the novel portrays how constant observation and intelligence gathering function as mechanisms of absolute control.

Blase's recommendation that Décon wiretap and follow associates for at least a year before extending trust highlights the depth of strategic patience required for effective leadership. This prolonged period of observation allows for a thorough assessment of an individual's character, loyalty, and potential threats. By the time an associate is deemed trustworthy, their position within the regime is solidified, making rebellion against the leadership a costly and self-destructive endeavour. The psychological impact of knowing one is being watched further reinforces loyalty, as fear of exposure curtails any inclination towards dissent.

Furthermore, the novel illustrates how Blase's strategy extends beyond individuals to encompass broader societal control. By ensuring that key institutions and influential figures are under surveillance, he effectively neutralises opposition before it can manifest. This aligns with Machiavelli's belief that pre-emptive strikes against potential threats are more effective than reactive measures. The ability to foresee and suppress opposition is what differentiates a successful ruler from one who is eventually overthrown.

Nevertheless, while Blase's approach ensures short-term stability, *Le Sang pour l'Alternance* also subtly critiques the long-term sustainability of rule based on paranoia and repression. Machiavelli warns that excessive fear can lead to resentment among subjects and allies alike. If a ruler becomes too distrusting, they risk alienating even their most loyal supporters. Machiavelli acknowledges that while fear is an effective tool for control, a ruler must balance it with calculated generosity and strategic appeasement. A completely fear-driven regime risks implosion when a sufficiently motivated opposition forms. Décon's reliance on constant surveillance and strategic alliances raises questions about the durability of his power. *Le Sang pour l'Alternance* leaves readers contemplating whether Décon's governance will endure or if his overly cautious approach will eventually backfire. This tension underscores the paradox of Machiavellian rule: while manipulation, surveillance, and alliances are effective for power consolidation, they must be used with precision to avoid unintended consequences.

Le Sang pour l'Alternance illustrates Machiavellian power consolidation through systematic infiltration and surveillance. Blase's directive to wiretap and closely monitor potential loyalists for at least a year before trusting them reflects Machiavelli's caution against political betrayal. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli warns rulers to be wary of their closest allies, as internal threats often pose the greatest danger. By ensuring that all close associates are under constant surveillance, Blase eliminates the risk of conspiracy before it even emerges. This paranoid governance style, marked by distrust and manipulation, ensures that power remains centralised and unchallenged. Additionally, placing informants in key positions strengthens the regime's grip by controlling narratives and suppressing dissent before it gains traction.

Performative governance and public perception as Machiavellian strategy to retain power.

Performative governance involves symbolic actions designed to project an image of competence, empathy, and authority. These performances are meticulously designed to influence public perception and reinforce the leader's position. In *Le Sang pour l'Alternance*, Décon exemplifies this Machiavellian strategy through carefully staged public appearances and

rhetoric designed to construct an image of a strong yet generous and empathic ruler. His engagement with citizens through public ceremonies and speeches is not merely an act of governance but a calculated performance aimed at securing and maintaining his power:

« je me rappelle je vous jure hein c'était le bordel dans ce pays, quand je venais au pouvoir, y avait presque pas d'électricité. Courant, on ne connaissait pas du tout vraiment hein ; quand je venais d'arriver tout le monde, même les oiseaux, les chiens, les coqs, même ceux qui étaient dans les toilettes en train de faire caca criaient weee... » (Sang, p.21).

[I swear to you, I remember it how totally chaotic it was in this country. When I came to power, there was almost no electricity. Electricity? We did not even know what this really meant. When I first arrived, everyone - even the birds, the dogs, the roosters, even those in the toilets doing their business - was applauding ...]

Décon's use of public spectacles, such as large-scale gatherings where he interacts directly with citizens, serves as a means of demonstrating accessibility and concern for the populace. These events are heavily publicised, crafting a narrative that portrays him as a leader who understands and shares the struggles of his people. In the above quote, Décon dramatically recounts the state of the nation before his rise to power. This hyperbolic and theatrical delivery serves a dual purpose. First, it paints a dire picture of the past, reinforcing the notion that his leadership is responsible for progress and stability. Second, the exaggerated storytelling appeals to the emotions of the audience, fostering a sense of unity and dependence on his rule. Similarly, Machiavelli advocates for such controlled narratives, arguing that perception often outweighs reality in politics. A ruler must cultivate an image that reassures the public while subtly asserting dominance, ensuring that citizens remain loyal out of gratitude or fear of regression. Isabela and Norman Fairclough (2012) explore in their *Political Discourse Analysis* how political actors use performative acts to construct identities and legitimise their actions. They argue that discourse is not merely a medium of communication but a tool for shaping reality. Décon's speeches exemplify this principle by not only recounting past struggles but also positioning himself as the singular force behind national improvement. His political rhetoric transforms governance into a spectacle, where governance is secondary to the performance of governance. Blase's advice to Décon aligns perfectly with this approach. By ensuring that all acts of leadership are performed in a way that appears self-sacrificial and heroic, Décon consolidates his image as an indispensable figure. This mirrors Machiavelli's assertion that leaders must be both feared and loved, but if one must choose, it is safer to be feared. However, Décon cleverly blends both, appearing as a paternalistic figure who rescues the nation from chaos while maintaining an underlying assertion of authority.

Beyond rhetoric, Décon uses symbolism and socio-political ritual to reinforce his power. Public ceremonies, national celebrations, and meticulously orchestrated acts of generosity, such as distributing food aid or publicly pardoning political opponents, create a spectacle that diverts attention from the realities of governance. These acts serve as visual and emotional

reinforcements of his leadership, ensuring that dissent is overshadowed by a carefully curated image of benevolence. This is a socio-political strategy that deeply mirrors Machiavellian, as it aligns with the idea that the masses are often swayed more by appearances than by actual policy. For Machiavelli, a ruler who controls the narrative can shape reality itself. By constantly performing acts of governance rather than governing through substantive change, Décon ensures that his rule is perceived as effective even when little structural progress is made.

Furthermore, Blase's guidance to Décon also extends to controlling how citizens perceive governance through selective engagement. Instead of allowing free discourse or open criticism, Décon ensures that all interactions with the public are controlled and carefully framed. His public appearances are not spontaneous but meticulously planned to elicit specific reactions. He appears in moments of crisis not as an administrator but as a saviour, which emphasises that only his leadership can navigate the nation through adversity. This tactic echoes Machiavelli's recommendation that rulers should appear to be virtuous and generous without necessarily being so in practice. By manipulating public sentiment through controlled displays of compassion, Décon maintains his grip on power without having to address deeper societal issues. This performative approach distracts from genuine governance failures and instead shifts focus to his persona as a leader.

Nevertheless, while performative governance is a powerful tool for consolidating power, Machiavelli warns that deception and spectacle can only sustain a ruler for so long before the underlying realities of governance catch up. If citizens begin to see through the façade, the very mechanisms that once ensured control can become sources of discontent. It seems clear that in *Le Sang pour l'Alternance*, the novel subtly critiques this approach by hinting at the fragility of Décon's rule. The reliance on public spectacles suggests an underlying insecurity, where power is maintained not through genuine stability but through constant reaffirmation of legitimacy. If the performances were to falter or public sentiment were to shift, the illusion of control could collapse, revealing the weaknesses within the regime. In this regard, Machiavellian fox-and-lion metaphor must be underpinned by a well-designed ruling strategy where cunning and force in governance intersect as a dynamic duality.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN POST-INDEPENDENT FRANCOPHONE AFRICA.

This study focusing on *Le Sang pour l'Alternance* serves as a valuable illustration of how cunning political discourse is used to maximise political personalisation. It highlights how Machiavellian strategies are used to secure and retain power in Francophone Africa, shedding light on the mechanisms through which dictatorial leaders manipulate public perception to consolidate authority. By integrating discourse analysis with Machiavellian theory, this research has provided a nuanced understanding of how modern political figures construct and sustain their personas, particularly in regions where institutional checks and balances are often fragile.

One of the key findings of this study is the extent to which political leaders use performative governance as a tool for maintaining power. In an era where media-driven political strategies have amplified the impact of rhetoric and spectacle, the ability to shape public perception has become more critical than ever. Many political leaders no longer rely solely on tangible policy outcomes to secure legitimacy; instead, they skilfully elaborate narratives that position them as indispensable figures. This phenomenon, as seen in *Le Sang pour l'Alternance*, illustrates how political authority is often centred on individuals rather than democratic institutions.

This study has also demonstrated that performative governance is not merely a by-product of political ambition but a calculated strategy designed to achieve specific objectives. By analysing both the language and the performative acts of political leaders, it becomes clear that these strategies serve to strengthen personal rule while systematically weakening democratic structures. In many cases, the deliberate personalisation of political power leads to a concentration of authority that undermines institutional governance, leaving citizens with little recourse beyond the leader's projected image of benevolence or strength.

Another critical implication of this study is the role of media in shaping political narratives. The integration of mass communication tools with Machiavellian strategies has allowed leaders to amplify their influence beyond traditional political arenas. Through the carefully staged public appearances, speeches, and symbolic gestures, politicians create an illusion of responsiveness and engagement with the public. However, as this study has shown, such performances often mask deeper structural issues, diverting attention from governance failures and consolidating power through controlled narratives.

Media, both state-controlled and independent, plays a crucial role in either reinforcing or challenging these performative acts. In authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states, media is often co-opted to broadcast favourable narratives of the leader, ensuring that political performances reach a wide audience and generate the desired effect. In more pluralistic societies, alternative media sources can challenge the performative nature of governance by offering counter-narratives. However, as seen in *Le Sang pour l'Alternance*, leaders who excel in performative governance also invest in controlling media landscapes, ensuring that dissenting voices are either suppressed or marginalised.

In this regard, one of the most concerning implications of the findings is the impact of performative governance on democratic institutions. While some leaders may engage in symbolic acts of governance to project an image of competence and empathy, these performances often come at the expense of institutional integrity. When governance becomes more about spectacle than substance, critical institutions such as the judiciary, legislature, and electoral bodies are often in favour of personal rule. This study has highlighted how such a shift not only weakens democratic norms but also fosters a political culture where leaders are perceived as irreplaceable.

Another significant implication of this study is its contribution to understanding how political discourse and performative governance affect public psychology. The constant reinforcement

of a leader's indispensability creates a dependency where citizens begin to view the state as inseparable from its ruler. This not only discourages political participation but also fosters a sense of resignation among the populace, reducing demands for accountability and transparency. The strategic use of populist rhetoric and dramatised governance, as illustrated in *Le Sang pour l'Alternance*, ensures that the public remains emotionally invested in the leader. This emotional connection often blinds citizens to governance deficiencies, making them more susceptible to manipulation. The study has revealed how leaders exploit crises, whether real or manufactured, to reinforce their centrality in national discourse, positioning themselves as the only viable solution to the country's problems.

In collusion, the study calls for a re-evaluation of how governance is assessed because traditional measures of governance often focus on economic and policy outcomes. But as *Le Sang pour l'Alternance* illustrates, these factors alone do not capture the full picture. Understanding the performative aspects of governance is crucial in assessing whether power is being used for the benefit of the state or merely to entrench personal rule.

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