

## Doubts and certainties in vexillology

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### Abstract

*The exact reproduction of a flag is a perilous exercise. Despite exchanges between vexillologists, some flags remain uncertain or even erroneous because we lack reliable references. The most reliable information comes from primary sources such as national constitutions, photography and to a lesser extent philately. These sources are objective but the evidence they provide may be partial and occasionally inconsistent. Secondary sources such as vexillological works and to a lesser degree dictionaries, press, testimonials and books provide clues that must be verified and may prove to be true or false.*

*Among the primary sources we should recognise that constitutions do not always give precise dimensions, construction or colours. For photography, accuracy can be limited by the fluttering of the flag, while monochrome images present us with black and white but otherwise only with shades of grey. For philately, which is relevant to the state domain, the flag shown on a postage stamp more often reflects art than exactitude. The manufacture of postage stamps is also often outsourced to another country, so blunders do occur. But the stamp has the merit of a physical existence and remains a historical indicator.*

*The secondary sources listed above are all potentially subjective and questionable. Critical sense and rigour must then prevail. When sources are few or old, this can sometimes lead to approximation or worse to erroneous interpretation. The development of the internet and a general tendency to copy-paste online information perpetuates errors to the point that they become references at the expense of truth. Fortunately, the internet now also allows access to many primary sources.*

### Introduction

It is not always easy to establish full and accurate details of a flag specification. Despite the exchange of information between vexillologists, some flags – especially historical flags – remain unclear or even incorrect because reliable references are lacking. References that we can a priori judge reliable are primary sources such as national constitutions or laws, archives, museums, photography, video and, to a lesser degree, philately and flag manufacturers. These are direct or objective sources, frequently official in nature, which generally furnish proof, sometimes incomplete and occasionally inconsistent.

A second category of indirect or subjective references is associated with unofficial forms of human intervention, including vexillological works and, to a lesser degree, dictionaries, books, press and personal testimony. These secondary sources provide clues that must be verified and may prove true or false. An example would be the generalised use in old dictionaries of a single (2:3) format for flags.

*Table of vexillological sources*

<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>
Constitution or law	Vexillological works
Archives	Dictionaries
Photo or video	Books, press
Philately	Testimonials

The imprecision of some primary sources can relegate them to the status of a simple clue and lead to unfounded claims. Sometimes constitutions are imprecise regarding dimensions, construction or colours (shades). The precision of photographs is often limited by the way a flag is flying, while colours are absent in monochrome, excepting white and black.

In philately, which is controlled by the state, the design of a flag often owes more to art than to accuracy. Moreover, the manufacture of stamps is often outsourced to another country, hence the occasional blunder. Yet the stamp has the merit of existing and remains a good historical indicator of date, sometimes demonstrating the inconsistency of certain claims.

The secondary sources listed above are potentially subject to caution. A critical approach and humility are vital. The goal of vexillology must be the search for truth; its method must be rigour. Sources that are rare or old can produce approximations or worse still incorrect interpretations. The development of the internet and the generalised use of copy-paste has perpetuated errors that progressively have become references at the expense of the truth. Fortunately, the internet now also permits access to numerous primary sources worldwide. In this presentation we will examine some typical examples.

### **French Community (20 December 1958)**

On 28 September 1958 a referendum was held across France and the Territories of the former French empire to approve the constitution of the Fifth Republic. The new constitution<sup>1</sup> established a *Communauté française* (French Community) comprising all the former colonial Territories.<sup>2</sup> An ordinance of 6 October<sup>3</sup> invited them to choose their preferred status within four months. With the exception of Guinea, all the Territories of *Afrique-Occidentale Française* (AOF) (French West Africa) and *Afrique-Équatoriale Française* (AEF) (French Equatorial Africa), as well as Madagascar, chose the status of autonomous republic. The autonomous republics were proclaimed over a period of two months from 14 October 1958 (Madagascar) to 18 December 1958 (Niger). However, it took over a year for new flags to be adopted, from 21 October 1958 (Madagascar)<sup>4</sup> to 9 December 1959 (Upper Volta).

On 9 February 1959, de Gaulle, as President of the French Community, signed a decision<sup>5</sup> specifying its hymn, motto and flag. The flag was the tricolour,<sup>6</sup> its flagpole to bear a distinctive symbol of the President's choice. This distinctive

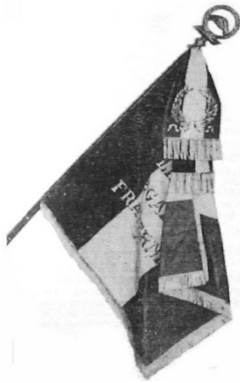
<sup>1</sup> Promulgated, 4 October 1958; published in the *Journal officiel* (JO) [French Republic], 5 October 1958.

<sup>2</sup> General de Gaulle was elected President of the French Republic and the French Community, 21 December 1958.

<sup>3</sup> Published in JO [French Republic], 7 October 1958.

<sup>4</sup> Madagascar was the first state to adopt a flag and the only one that had constituted a state before colonisation.

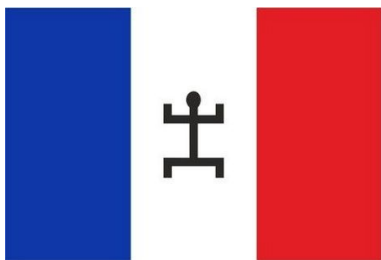
golden symbol took the form of a finial consisting of two clasped hands (faith), surrounded by a wreath, half laurel and half oak.<sup>7</sup> A flag unique to each country was to be presented to its head of state during the Bastille Day parade in Paris on 14 July 1959. Note that the distinctive symbol is also present on the tricolour cravat associated with the flag.



*French Community:  
left, flag, 1959; right, distinctive badge, 11 April 1959*

### Soudan

A flag was reportedly proposed by the provisional government of Soudan (French Sudan, now Mali), chaired by Jean-Marie Koné: a blue-white-red tricolour, adorned with a *Kanaga* (Dogon mask). Although de Gaulle rejected this flag,<sup>8</sup> it is shown online as the first official flag of the new République soudanaise (1958). It is also described as such in an official booklet written in 2011 by a Frenchman resident in Bamako, and a new copy of the flag is even to be displayed in the National Archives.



*Senegal: rejected design, 1958*

On 29 September 1958, the day after the referendum, several political leaders had met in Bamako to explore the idea of a limited federation comprising the southern states of Afrique-Occidentale Française (AOF). At the subsequent Bamako Conference of 29/30 December 1958, the leaders of Senegal, Soudan, Dahomey and Upper Volta agreed in principle to form a federation, quickly named the Fédération du Mali (Mali Federation), after the eponymous African empire. On 31 December 1958, Soudan passed a law accepting the principle of membership, which specified that the flag of the Mali Federation would also be

<sup>5</sup> Published in JO [AOF], 11 February 1959; JO [French Community], 15 February 1959; JO [French Republic], 17 February 1959.

<sup>6</sup> Bearing the words 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité' on three separate lines.

<sup>7</sup> JO [French Community], 11 April 1959, p. 37.

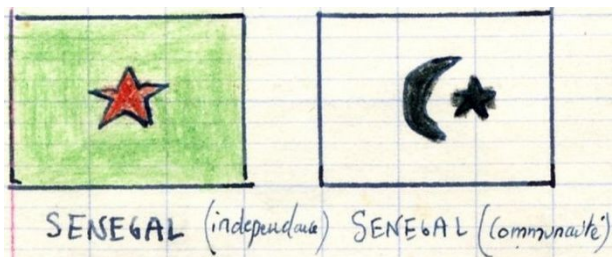
<sup>8</sup> According to the aide-de-camp of former president Abdou Diouf; also archives of Lucien Philippe.

the flag of each member state.

Despite a reluctant de Gaulle, the constitution and flag of the Mali Federation were adopted on 17 January 1959 by acclamation of its Assemblée fédérale (Federal Assembly) representing Senegal, Soudan, Dahomey and Upper Volta.

### Senegal (1)

Having experienced the events of late 1958 as a 14-year-old, I recorded in a notebook all the new flags that flourished at the time. During the referendum of 28 September 1958, I heard two options mentioned in a radio report from Dakar: 'Community', green with a red star; or 'Independence', white with a crescent and a black star. This anecdotal information is very uncertain. There may be inversion and the colours are not necessarily correct, but the first flag is troubling.



*Senegal: flags from the referendum ballot papers, Dakar, 28 September 1958(?). Author's reconstruction*

In line with the French order of 6 October 1958, Senegal's Assemblée territoriale (Territorial Assembly) decided met on 25 November 1958 to declare an autonomous republic and to join any possible federation. On 31 December 1958, the Senegalese voted in principle to join the Mali Federation and on 4 January 1959 the project was approved.

Shortly afterwards, probably during the legislative elections of March 1959, I saw, on black and white television the flag of the political party, the Union Progressif Sénégalais (UPS) (Senegalese Progressive Union). I wrongly interpreted it as green with a yellow star, when in fact it was green with a red star. The UPS was founded by Léopold Sedar Senghor on 4 April 1958, i.e. before the referendum. Yet several publications and websites state that, after the founding of the République du Sénégal on 25 November 1958, the first flag of the new state was plain green with a yellow star in the centre. My research has produced no reliable or official document to support this claim. I contacted former president Abdou Diouf in Senegal but his office replied that local investigations were unable to confirm that the flag had ever existed.

It is scarcely credible that the would-be members of the Mali Federation adopted a new flag while negotiations were ongoing. After withdrawing from the embryonic federation in January 1959, Dahomey and Upper Volta took almost a year to adopt a new flag: Dahomey on 16 November 1959; Upper Volta on 9 December 1959. Additionally, an early priority for most of the newly independent states was to issue postage stamps showing the flag, yet the Senegalese did not do so until the creation of the Mali Federation.



*Senegal: flag of the UPS, c.1959.  
As recorded incorrectly by author*



*Senegal: actual flag of the UPS,  
4 April 1958*



*Flag attributed to Senegal (1958).  
Online (incorrect)*

In light of the above, and the absence of primary references, neither Soudan nor Senegal is likely to have adopted its own flag in the pre-Mali Federation period. The quantity of copied-and-pasted online sources that state otherwise does not necessarily equal quality. It is impossible to be absolutely certain, but while these flags may have existed as projects, they were probably never hoisted.<sup>9</sup>

### **Mali Federation**

The constitution and flag of the Mali Federation were ratified by the legislative assemblies of the two remaining member states on 21 January 1959 (Soudan) and 22 January 1959 (Senegal).<sup>10</sup> The flag (adopted on 14 January) consisted of three vertical green-yellow-red bands, charged in the centre with the *Kanaga*. Senegal joined the federation on 3 April 1959, followed by Soudan on 4 April 1959. By law 59-2 of 4 April 1959,<sup>11</sup> the Assemblée fédérale (Federal Assembly) of the Mali Federation stated that the federation should join the French Community as a member state, marking the effective transfer of power. On 6 April 1959, law 59-3, signed by Léopold Senghor, stated that from 4 April 1959 the flag of the Mali Federation was to fly in front of monuments and public buildings throughout federation territory. The Mali Federation was recognised by de Gaulle on 15 May 1959 and officially joined the French Community on 26 June 1959.

<sup>9</sup> Whitney Smith, 'La Communauté and its symbols' in *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of Vexillology, Barcelona, Spain (Catalonia), 30 June-5 July 1991*, published as *Barcelona Vexil-lologica: Comunicacions* (Barcelona: Associació Catalana de Vexil·lologia, 2001). Smith indicated that, before Mali, only the Central African Republic had adopted a flag, on 1 December 1958 (confirmed by the constitution of 16 February 1959). The other autonomous republics deployed a tricolor B-W-R.

<sup>10</sup> It became the constitution of Soudan by law 59-2, 23 January 1959, published in JO [Soudan], 27 January 1959. It became the constitution of Senegal by law 59-003, 24 January 1959, published in JO [Senegal], 30 January 1959.

<sup>11</sup> Note its promulgation just before the 5 April 1959 deadline set by the Constitution of the Fifth Republic.

No example of the flag exists, but an official flag with fringes can be seen flying in an archive video.<sup>12</sup> The *Kanaga* was not standardised and manufacturers had to do their best.



*Mali Federation: flag,  
17 January 1959*



*Mali Federation: official flag, 1959*



*Mali Federation: official flag flying,  
4 April 1959. INA*

The Mali Federation's request for independence was approved by de Gaulle on 13 December 1959. An agreement to transfer power from the French Community was signed on 4 April 1960, and independence (the first of the autonomous republics to achieve this) was proclaimed at midnight on 20 June 1960.<sup>13</sup> However, disagreements soon broke out between the two member states and Senegal seceded on 20 August 1960.

A month later, on 22 September 1960, the République soudanaise became the République du Mali,<sup>14</sup> retaining the flag of the Mali Federation as its own. Disputed by Mali's Muslim population, the *Kanaga* was removed by the law of 20 January 1961.<sup>15</sup>

## Senegal (2)

Local press reports dated 24 August 1960 state that on 23 August, three days after secession, Senegalese ministers were proposing a flag in green, the colour of the UPS, with a yellow star on the side[!].<sup>16</sup> However, it was not retained.

Karl Fachinger's archive shows the star in the centre.

<sup>12</sup> Archives de l'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtSCvmXE5pE>

<sup>13</sup> Law 60-14, promulgated by decree 60-130.

<sup>14</sup> Commemorating the battle of Sabouciré (capital of the Kingdom of Logo), near Kayes, 2 September 1878. Law 60-35: promulgated, 28 September 1960; published in JO [Mali], 29 September 1960.

<sup>15</sup> Modifying Law 61-26, subject to approval by the deputies, and if necessary by the people; published in JO [Mali], 1 March 1961.

<sup>16</sup> Archives of Lucien Philippe.

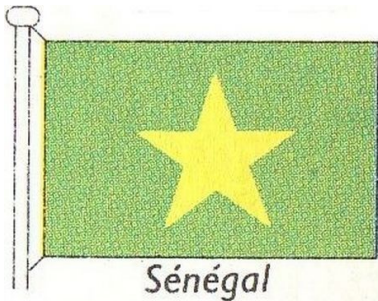
The existence of a plain green flag with a yellow star in the centre is also mentioned in a few secondary sources postdating the adoption of the current Senegalese flag, including a Flemish newspaper (October 1960) and the *Encyclopedia Elsevier* (1962). Was this the so-called 1958 flag? If so, it would logically have required re-adoption.



*Senegal: flag according to local press report, 23 August 1960*



*Senegal: flag according to a Flemish press report, October 1960*



*Senegal: flag according to the Encyclopedia Elsevier (1962)*

These flags never existed as more than projects. On 25 August 1960, the current Senegalese flag was adopted, a green-yellow-red tricolour, charged in the centre with a green star. It was formalised by the constitutional law of 29 August 1960, which revised the constitution.<sup>17</sup>



*Senegal: current flag, 25 August 1960*

### **Togo**

The UN Trust Territory of Togoland was divided between French and British administration. On 24 August 1956, the territory under French trusteeship became the République togolaise, with membership of the Union française (French Union).<sup>18</sup> Its new status was proclaimed on 30 August 1956 and approved by referendum on 28 October 1956. Shortly before the referendum, the law of 18 September 1956<sup>19</sup> had specified a national emblem: a green flag

<sup>17</sup> Law 60-045 (article 1): promulgated, 60-295, 29 August 1960; published, JO [Senegal], 31 August 1960.

<sup>18</sup> Decree 56-847, published in JO [French Republic], 26 August 1956; promulgated in Togo, decree 745-56/C, 29 August 1956.

<sup>19</sup> Law 56-1, published 16 October 1956.

with two gold stars<sup>20</sup> placed on a diagonal starting from the upper right corner, and with the French flag in the upper left corner.

This description is incomplete and unsatisfactory. Film footage shot outside the Ministry of Finance in Lomé on 13 February 1957 shows a flag in the ratio of c.1:2, with a star strangely placed towards the centre.

This flag seems inconsistent with all other sources.



*Togo: flag captured on film,  
Lomé, 13 February 1957*

A first day cover of the first Togolese postage stamp, issued on 8 June 1957, shows an artistic drawing of the flag, with the stars symmetrical with respect to the centre of the flag and a rather small tricolour. The 15-franc stamp indicates a format close to 1:2 (artistic?), with a tricolour equal in width to one third of the height of the flag, and the stars depicted in white (by the artist? or a printing error?) on an approximate diagonal. The postmark shows a badly drawn flag with the reduced tricolour but the stars remain symmetrical, although off-diagonal.



*Togo: first day cover with 15-franc  
postage stamp, 8 June 1957*

An anniversary envelope of 28 October 1957 shows a drawing with two gold stars, not placed on the diagonal, a tricolour half the height of the flag, in an almost square format.



*Togo: anniversary envelope,  
28 October 1957*

<sup>20</sup> The two gold stars symbolised the Kabye people of the north and the Ewe people of the south, each represented by 15 deputies in the Togolese National Assembly.



A 200-franc stamp issued on the same day shows a flag, still with white stars.

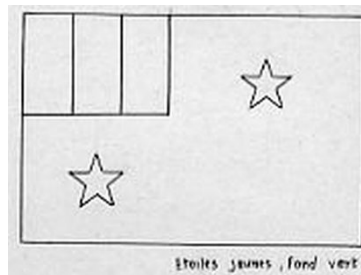


*Togo: 200-franc postage stamp,  
28 October 1957*

Around 1958(?) I drew the first flag of Togo, perhaps from a postage stamp or black and white TV, reflecting misinterpreted colours of the field and stars. The late Lucien Philippe drew a similar flag, but with a larger tricolour and a ratio of 2:3 (source: SHOM).



*Togo: flag according to author's notes,  
c.1958 (incorrect)*



*Togo: flag c.1958 according to  
Lucien Philippe*

Under pressure from the United Nations, France organised a referendum on membership of the French Union. After Togo voted to reject this, France granted full internal autonomy by the decree of 22 February 1958,<sup>21</sup> and appointed a High Commissioner. The République autonome togolaise was renamed the République togolaise, still under French trusteeship, but the decree does not mention the flag, suggesting that it did not change.

Indeed, the first stamp that mentions the République togolaise, issued on 10 December 1958, was identical to that of 1957. On 15 January 1959, a 25-franc stamp showed the same initial flag (with a reduced tricolour a third the height of the flag).



*Togo: 25-franc postage stamp,  
'Republic of Togo', 15 January 1959*

<sup>21</sup> Decree 58-187, promulgated 22 February 1958; published in JO [French Republic], 23 February 1958. Promulgated in Togo, decree 23-58C, 27 February 1958; published in JO [Togo], 5 March 1958.

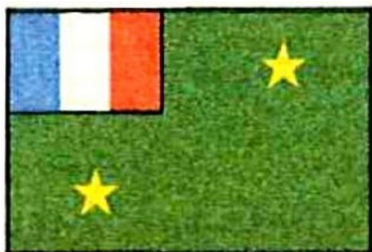
On the same day, a 200-franc stamp (red background) again reused the 1957 design, only modifying the wording.



*Togo: 200-franc postage stamp, 'Republic of Togo', 15 January 1959*

A first day cover<sup>22</sup> dated 24 October 1959 shows a drawing of the flag almost identical to that shown on an envelope dated 28 October 1957.

In 1961, Larousse published a very interesting Togolese flag (format 2:3), showing gold stars on the diagonal and a French tricolour whose width is about two-fifths the height of the flag.



*Togo: flag, Larousse, 1961*

The flag probably did not alter when Togo changed its status.

The author has tried to reconstruct the flag of 18 September 1956, according to the documents which seem to him most relevant, the only information being that the two gold stars are placed on a diagonal. In addition, the construction had to be simple.

The first is a reconstruction based on the 1957 video: 1:2 format with a tricolour estimated at two-fifths the height of the flag, one star in the centre and the other on the diagonal measured at two-fifths bottom corner to the centre, one-fifth of the bottom edge. The diameter of the circle circumscribing to the stars is measured at a quarter of the height.

The second reconstruction retains the 1:2 format and is based on the 15-franc postage stamp, with a tricolour occupying a third of the height. It presents symmetrical stars with respect to the centre, the low star being located at a quarter of the lower edge. The stars are included in a circle of a fifth of the height. The design on the 200-franc stamp was too artistic to serve as the basis for any conclusions.

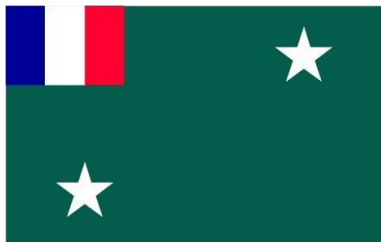
The third, in the standard 2:3 format, is based on the *Larousse* drawing with a tricolour at two-fifths of the height and the star low at a quarter of the lower edge and of diameter equal to a fifth from the height. This 2:3 format with its simple construction seems the most attractive and perhaps the most logical, a

<sup>22</sup> Most first day covers are sourced from the website Drapeaux d'Origine et d'Inspiration Françaises, <https://d-o-i-f.blogspot.fr/>

majority of republics having chosen this format. But how should we interpret the curious flag seen in the 1957 video?



*Togo: flag in 1:2 ratio, as depicted in 1957 film. Author's reconstruction*



*Togo: flag in 1:2 ratio, as depicted on postage stamps. Author's reconstruction*



*Togo: flag in 2:3 ratio, as depicted by Larousse. Author's reconstruction*

If the basic drawing seems acceptable, the format, the exact construction and the size of the stars remain unknown. Lacking a reliable source, all these flags are clearly assumptions.

Several websites state that the tricolour disappeared from the flag after the decree of 22 February 1958, but offer no source or further details. If this flag existed, why change it on independence? As we have seen postage stamps show the opposite. In addition, the stars are white, which is incorrect.

This flag, even corrected with yellow stars, probably never existed.



*Togo: flag without tricolour (incorrect)*

After the legislative elections of 27 April 1958, the separatist Sylvanus Olympio replaced Nicolas Grunitzky. Olympio immediately launched a competition for a new flag, won by artist Paul Ahyi (d. 2010). As a UN Trust Territory, Togo did not participate in the referendum of 28 October 1958. After the UN Trusteeship Council pronounced in favour, the UN General Assembly decided on 14 November 1958 that the trusteeship would cease with the proclamation of independence.

The date fixed was 27 April 1960, and the flag that flew then and continues to fly today, was issued from 23 April 1960. Like its predecessor, it was dark green, but with two yellow horizontal bands, replacing the two stars, forming five

bands of equal width; in the canton, a red square of sides equal to three-fifths the width of the flag, bearing a white star (included in a circle of three-fifths the side of the square). Designer Paul Ahyi would have suggested that the format be a golden rectangle (1: 1.618034) close to 3: 5 (1: 1.66), but the 5: 8 format (1: 1.60) is closer. Ratio = 3: 5 or 5: 8?



*Togo: current flag, in 3:5 ratio*

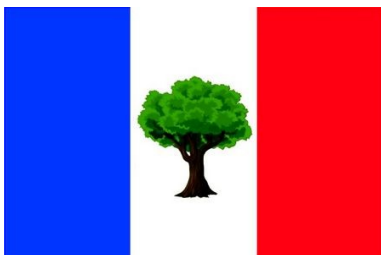
Finally, even the flags on Togolese postage stamps are incorrect. On a stamp issued in 1964 to mark the launch of Air Togo, the green is too light, and the red square covers only two bands, which is obviously wrong.



*Togo: postage stamp (incorrect)*

### Gabon

The République gabonaise was proclaimed on 28 November 1958. Prime Minister Léon M'Ba had wanted the country to become a French *département* but was dissuaded by Jacques Foccart, de Gaulle's Secretary-General for African and Malagasy Affairs. M'Ba also wanted to adopt the French tricolour, with the national tree, *Aucoumea klaineana* (okoumé), in the centre, but Foccart vetoed this proposal too.<sup>23</sup>



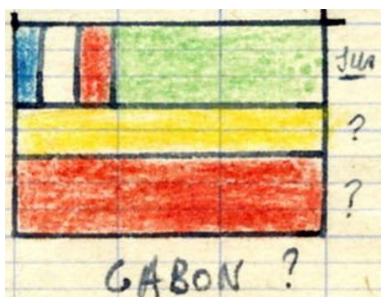
*Gabon: project of Léon M'Ba, 1959 (rejected)*

This flag was never hoisted.

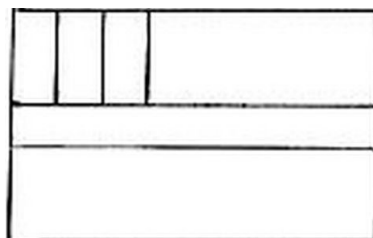
Having lived through these events, I drew the flag I saw on black and white TV in 1959(?). The colours are presumed but the drawing is assumed to be faithful (2:3 format).

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Pesnot, *Les dessous de la Françafrique* (Paris: New World, 2008), p. 76.

Lucien Philippe drew a similar design but the flag is longer.



*Gabon: flag as recorded by author, c.1959*



*Gabon: flag c.1959, as described by Lucien Philippe (both incorrect)*

But both these flags are in fact incorrect.

The law of 19 February 1959<sup>24</sup> specifies that the flag will be defined by law. The law of 29 June 1959<sup>25</sup> defines a flag with three bands V-Y-B arranged 5-2-5, with a French tricolour in the canton, occupying half of the green band. There is only one possible construction, which gives a 4:5 format (and not 3:4 as is often found).<sup>26</sup>

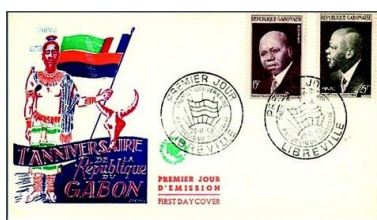
A first day cover dated 28 November 1959 shows a flag drawn with almost equal bands (including the central, orange, band), an incorrect ratio and a small tricolour. The detail of the postmark shows the tricolour correctly, but the ratio is incorrect.

A flag with the correct drawing appears in the *Dictionnaire Larousse* (1961). However, like all dictionaries of the period, it distorts the flag by showing it in a 2:3 ration, so the flag is incorrect.

In its 1962 edition, *Larousse* omits the tricolour, since Gabon had become independent in 1960.



*Gabon: official flag in ratio 4:5, 19 February 1959*

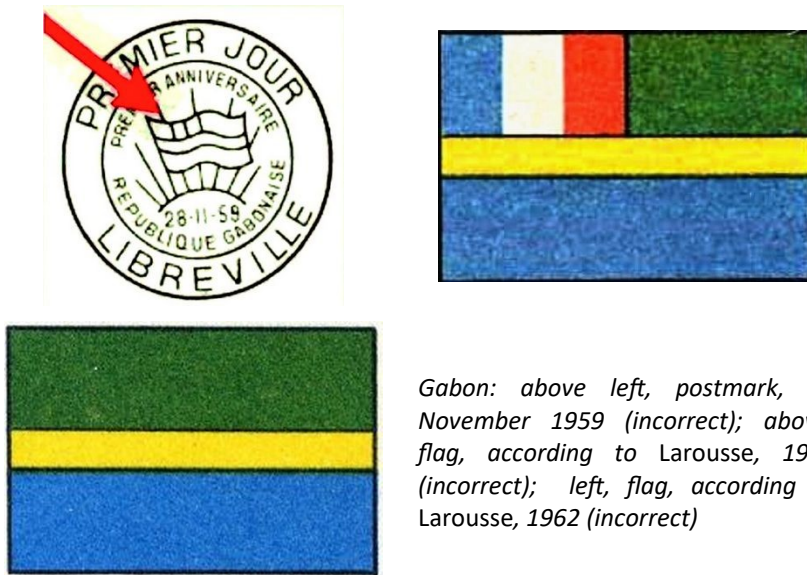


*Gabon: first day cover, 28 November 1959 (incorrect)*

<sup>24</sup> Constitutional Law 4/59.

<sup>25</sup> Law 36/59, published in JO [Gabon], 1 July 1959.

<sup>26</sup> *Vexilologia*, 1-2 and 3; <https://flagspot.net/flags/ga-hist.html>



*Gabon: above left, postmark, 28 November 1959 (incorrect); above, flag, according to Larousse, 1961 (incorrect); left, flag, according to Larousse, 1962 (incorrect)*

According to Otfried Neubecker, the archives of Lucien Philippe indicate that on 28 August 1960 Gabon's Assemblée nationale (National Assembly) decided to abolish the French tricolour. This seems inconsistent with the adoption of the flag on 9 August 1960, a date that recently became the Gabonese flag day.

This flag, with the tricolour omitted, never existed.

The law of 9 August 1960<sup>27</sup> states that the Gabonese flag consists of three equal bands: an upper band of a clear 'Irish green', of a length equal to four times the height of the first band; a central band of a golden yellow, of the same length; and a lower band of a 'royal blue', of the same length. The green symbolises the equatorial forest; the yellow, the sun; and the blue, the sea. The format is therefore 3:4.

Gabon became independent on 17 August 1960. The constitutional law of 14 November 1960<sup>28</sup> describes the flag as a tricolour of green, yellow, blue, with three horizontal bands of equal dimensions (with no further precision regarding format). This is more intelligible than its predecessor but still does not indicate a ratio.<sup>29</sup> This constitution was never implemented. It was suspended two days later and replaced on 17 February 1961.



*Gabon: official flag in ratio 3:4, 9 August 1960*

<sup>27</sup> Law 54/60, published in JO [Gabon], 1 September 1960.

<sup>28</sup> Law 68/60, article 2, published in JO [Gabon], 25 November 1960.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.cour-constitutionnelle.ga/sites/all/themes/gti/docs/constit-1960.pdf>

A stamp issued on 9 February 1961, following admission to the United Nations on 20 September 1960, shows a flag in a format closer to 1:2 than 3:4.

A first day cover of 8 September 1962, issued for the first birthday of the Organisation of African Unity, shows a ratio of about 6:10.



*Gabon: above left, postage stamp, 9 February 1961 (incorrect); above, first day cover, 8 September 1962 (incorrect); left, flag, photographed 9 August 2015 (non-compliant)*

A photo of 9 August 2015, taken on the Gabonese flag day, shows the true colours of the flag and an approximate ratio of 7:10 (or 6:10). This is a de facto flag, since the ratio is not specified in any text. In addition, the colour 'royal blue' is not always applied.

Having noted the imprecision around his country's flag and its colours, a young Gabonese, Frank Makosso, proposed an official flag code to President Ali Bongo, and on 2 December 2009, 9 August was declared the Gabonese flag day.

### West Indies Federation

The West Indies Federation was founded on 3 January 1958,<sup>30</sup> after the United Kingdom decided to group its former Caribbean colonies (Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat, Dominica, St Lucia, St Vincent, Grenada and Barbados) into an economically viable unit, but the withdrawal of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago in May 1962 caused the federation's demise.

A flag was created and, after receiving royal assent, was announced in the *West Indies Gazette* on 21 February 1958.<sup>31</sup> This official notice specifies that the flag, at a ratio of 3:5, comprises four wavy bands parallel two by two, with an orange sun in the centre. The construction is not indicated but a precise drawing is provided.<sup>32</sup> It represents the ten island territories, with colours that evoke the

<sup>30</sup> The Federation's official day is 23 February 1958.

<sup>31</sup> Federal Archives, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill (Barbados).

<sup>32</sup> It would have been necessary to indicate that the two pairs of corrugated bars are symmetrical with respect to the horizontal median axis of the flag, and that the distance between the four horizontal median axes of the

sun and the sea.



*West Indies Federation: flag.*  
Official Gazette, 21 February 1958

Unfortunately, this flag is seldom portrayed correctly. Wikipedia, Larousse (1961), local websites<sup>33</sup> and even well known vexillological websites show a variety of disks in light blue, red or yellow, and wavy bands drawn in innumerable ways.

All these flags are incorrect.



*West Indies Federation, incorrect flags: left, Wikipedia; right, Larousse, 1961*



*West Indies Federation, incorrect flags: left, local vexillological site; right, known vexillological site*

The actual flag is visible in a photograph of 1958 (colours slightly faded) and also appears in a second photograph taken during the visit of Princess Margaret that same year. The ratio seems to be the usual British format of 1:2.

corrugated bars is equal to one quarter of the width of the flag. The measured diameter of the sun is about nine-twentieths of the width.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.caribbeanelections.com/education/integration/federation.asp>



Another photo taken in 2012 at the National Gallery, Kingston (Jamaica) also shows a flag in a 1:2 ratio.



*West Indies Federation: flag, 1958*

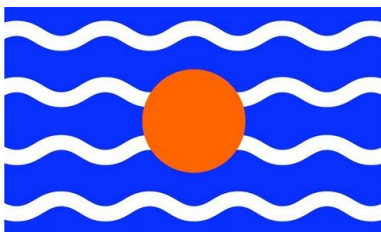


*West Indies Federation: flag, 1958  
(non-compliant)*



*West Indies Federation: flag, 1958  
(non-compliant). National Gallery,  
Kingston (Jamaica), 2012*

We therefore have two different versions of the flag: the legal ratio (3:5)<sup>34</sup> and the de facto ratio (1:2).



*West Indies Federation: legal flag*



*West Indies Federation: de facto flag*

### **Cochinchina<sup>35</sup>**

The République de Cochinchine was created on 1 June 1946 and recognised by France subject to a referendum. Most websites, including Wikipedia, show the flag in golden yellow, crossed by three horizontal blue stripes. It is inspired by the flag of the Vietnam Empire which had three red stripes. Unfortunately, this flag is incorrect.

The archives of Karl Fachinger confirm that the actual flag is golden yellow with three blue stripes, but separated by two white bands. No text could be found,

<sup>34</sup> <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:West-indies.png>

<sup>35</sup> The Territorial Assemblée (Assemblée territoriale) of Cochinchina voted to join the Provisional Central Government (GCP) (Gouvernement central provisoire) of Vietnam on 23 April 1949 – a decision ratified by the French Parliament, 19 May 1949. The law of 4 June officially tied Cochinchina to the GCP. The state of Vietnam was created with Bao Dai at its head, 2 July 1949.

but vintage photos exist as shown below.



*Vietnam, Cochinchina: official flag*



*Vietnam, Cochinchina: official flag*



*Vietnam, Cochinchina: the Vietminh attack a convoy, 1947*



*Vietnam, Cochinchina: pennant of the Garde Républicaine*

### Îles Sous-le-Vent

The Îles Sous-le-Vent (Leeward, or Society, Islands) form one of the six archipelagos of French Polynesia, all of which have adopted a local flag. For a long time, vexillological sites have included a flag consisting of three green-yellow-green horizontal stripes, the central band being twice as wide, and struck at the centre of the ISLV acronym.

This flag attributed to the archipelago is probably the flag of a sports federation (?), displayed during sporting events, and not a territorial flag.



*French Polynesia, Îles Sous-le-Vent: flag attributed to the archipelago (incorrect)*

Indeed the actual flag flies alongside the flags of France, French Polynesia, and the other archipelagos.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Asserted by local inhabitants.



*French Polynesia, Îles Sous-le-Vent: left, display of the islands' flags; right, the flag of the Îles Sous-le-Vent. Photos: Michel Lupant, Place des Archipels, Papeete, 2005*



*French Polynesia, Îles Sous-le-Vent: flag of Bora Bora*



*French Polynesia, Îles Sous-le-Vent: flag of Raiatea*

It combines the flags of the three ancient kingdoms of Bora Bora, Raiatea and Huahiné, all composed of red and white stripes. The resulting flag is composed of seven alternating red and white bands, which symbolise the seven communes of the archipelago.



*French Polynesia, Îles Sous-le-Vent: flag of Huahiné*



*French Polynesia, Îles Sous-le-Vent: official flag*

### Conclusion

We have seen that sometimes some features of a flag are correct while others are not. Sometimes the colours are indicated but without a specific shade. In the absence of formal evidence, a cluster of clues may nonetheless be the beginning of truth but incorrect assertions harm the credibility of our discipline. Extreme caution should be exercised when drawing or publishing a flag, especially historical flags. A reconstructed flag must be specified as such, to ensure it is not taken as an original. Copying and pasting is not a scientific process unless verified and cross-checked with official sources. So let us be

rigorous and stay alert to online sources.

Why not then use a specific code to inform the reader on the reliability of the depicted flag, in a way similar to the FIAV flag code? Five levels of reliability are proposed, with the choice of three coding modes, two in monochrome and one in colour. For this last coding, the more dubious the flag, the closer we get to the red. The four main criteria would be source (S), drawing (D), ratio (R) and colour (C), or SDRC in English and French, producing the mnemonic 'Some Details of the Reliability Code'.

4	T	True
3	xxx	High
2	xx	Medium
1	x	Low
0	F	False

Below we can see its application to the example of France, showing the three methods of coding.

Source	Drawing	Ratio	Colours
4	4	3	2
T	T	xxx	xx